

~ Mary Katherine ~

by Alex Tryst

Copyright May 2007

Dedication: This is for everyone that had a first love. Remember how being near them was wonderfully terrifying, the excitement, the awkwardness of young love as your innocence faded into sexual awakening? How you longed to be close to them, to hold them, to love them, to please them. You would have done anything for them. This piece aims to capture that special moment in a young person's life when they feel alive in a way they never knew possible for the first time. Reminisce about your first love and enjoy!

Also, to two special people, Amy T. (my resident religious scholar), and Kate D. (my NYC/Univ. of Montana fan), thanks for being my first readers on this.

The walk home from school was as it has been for years now. A group of my buddies that live on my block and I go the long route, taking us by the private Catholic girl's school in the middle-class neighborhood. They get out just a little bit later than we do, allowing for opportunities for us to subtly watch as all the girls ages middle school to high school parade out the doors in their uniforms. My teenage friends like to gawk at the high-schoolers, and so do I for that matter, not that I would ever let one of those religious girls know it. After all, the Catholics think I'm going to hell, and I don't need one of them coming after me, because they think I locked eyes with one of their precious children of God a little too long. My friends, though, the hunks of strapping young men they've become, are a welcomed sight around the grounds of the Catholic school. I can see it in the eyes of the teenage girls when we walk by. Oh, the hormones of youth!

You may wonder how I came to have all male friends. It's simple really. I grew up on a street with only boys my age. My parents have lived in the same house since my older brother was born. All the kids our age were boys. I had always been one of them since we ended up in pre-school together, and now in my senior year of high school, nothing has changed. Since age five the boys of my street have treated me as one of their own, even changing my name to sound more like theirs. Sydney Benson metamorphosed from little tomboy to Ben, who wore her brother's old hand-me downs, and it suited all of us perfectly. I was just one of the guys, having never succumbed to the need to be something other than what I was, even in the cesspool of high school gossip and drama. Of course, it didn't hurt that my best friends included some of the most popular boys in the school. Even though my body betrayed my real gender of course as high school began, my friends never once surrendered to the pressures of being my friend. They accepted me for who I truly was and even gave me daily ribbing about my own secret crush over at the Catholic school.

She was an absolute vision from the moment I laid eyes on her. I remember that first day. It was the beginning of ninth grade, and as was our routine we walked home after school. As we passed the girls' school, we slowed to watch the parade of pretty girls in their uniforms go by, and that's when I saw her. She was standing at the top of the stairs at the front door, books clutched to her

chest. Her long red hair blew slightly in the breeze. She had to have been my age, around fifteen. At least she looked it. The sleeves of her white button down were rolled up to her elbows, and her plaid skirt was knee length, showing off fair-skinned calves. On her feet she wore a pair of white tennis shoes with little white ankle socks. We were too far away for me to see what color her eyes were, but when she smiled and laughed at something someone standing next to her was saying, I knew I had it bad. For the rest of the entire school year, I eagerly anticipated the sight of her on the way home from school and would imagine what color her eyes were. My pals caught on quickly and never failed to make jokes at my expense in good fun.

It took me two years to even learn her name, Mary Katherine, and the color of her eyes, blue. It was a name I whispered many, many times in the darkness of my room while exploring my own growing sexual desires. Then over the course of our high school years I was able to see her transform before my eyes. Her skirts became shorter and shirts became tighter just like all the others as prepubescent girls grew into bewitching women. The tennis shoes were discarded for stylish sandals, flats, boots, or heels, whatever the season of fashion dictated. The natural look became enhanced with makeup, but through it all my devotion to my crush never ceased. During that time the notice my friends paid them as we passed the school began to be returned, and soon our after-school activities included an actual stop at the school, so my buddies could talk and flirt with the girls. I was always there hanging around in the background, never really daring to speak to one of the private school girls, even though I wanted to, and it seemed Mary Katherine was the same way. I would always see her, but she never spoke to my friends or me. However, the glances we shared over our junior year had started to get longer during that spring semester. Seeing her blue eyes on me made my heart race and my sexual longings increase, but I knew I had to accept Mary Katherine as my fantasy girl in my mind and leave it at that. However, I made the most of it, keeping myself locked in my room at home spinning dreams of what she looked like under that uniform!

Then one day in the fall of my senior year, it happened. I had to stay after school, because I had gotten detention for being late to my English class. My friends and I had snuck off school property at lunch to eat at the local pizzeria instead of the crummy cafeteria. I had to make a quick stop in the girls' locker room upon our return, causing me to be late, even though they had made it in sufficient time. It sucked because I knew I was going to miss my daily highlight of seeing my dream girl on the way home from school. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but take the long route, even though I knew it was pointless. I just figured if I couldn't see her I could at least see where she went to school and be content with that for the day.

However, as I came within eyesight of the front of Saint Mary's Catholic School, my heart stopped for a moment before starting again in double time. There sitting under a tree was my crush by herself reading. She was wearing a light fall jacket, but the rest of her attire was the same as usual. This was my chance. I had to walk right by her, because she was sitting not even ten feet from the sidewalk. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know if I could even think of anything as my feet closed the distance. Suddenly I was close enough that when she looked up at the sound of my feet on the pavement, our gazes caught. I had to do something, say something, so in quick fashion my brilliant mind came up with the perfect opening line, a casual, nonchalant, "Hey."

"Hi, Ben," she answered.

It was the sweetest voice I thought I had ever heard. I was so taken aback by the fact she had addressed me by name that I actually stopped walking just as I came up even with her. "How are you?" I asked, trying to still be cool, even though I could feel sweat on my back. I was glad I was wearing my letter jacket, so she couldn't see how nervous she made me.

"I'm fine. How are you? You're walking home later than usual."

I shrugged. "Yeah. I had detention."

She smiled. "What did you do?"

"Was late to class. You're here later than usual, too."

She nodded. "I just thought I would sit out here and start on my homework. It's a nice afternoon. I love this kind of weather. I thought I would enjoy it. I couldn't do it at home."

"Why not?"

"Loud, pesky little brothers," she complained. "Are you in a hurry?"

"No. Why?"

"You can sit... if you want," she offered, somewhat shyly. I took the offer and sat next to her closely but not so closely it seemed inappropriate. "Aren't you going to ask me my name?" she inquired, again modestly.

"I know your name," I confessed. "Mary Katherine La Croix."

"Where did you learn that?"

I shrugged. "Around. How did you know my name?"

"I heard talk about you from some of the other girls," she said.

"Not all bad, I hope," I joked. I knew it was probably not good. In fact, I was sure my sexual orientation had come up. I didn't hide it after all, just didn't vocally advertise it either around the private school girls.

She didn't comment. Instead she asked, "Why do they call you Ben or Big Ben as it may be?"

I saw her eyes on my embroidered nickname of my jacket. "Oh, my friends have been calling me Ben since I was a kid. It stuck. Now they call me Big Ben, because I'm the starting center for the girl's basketball team."

"I love basketball, watching it at least. I bet you're good. You're certainly tall enough."

"I'm all right." The truth was I was better than all right, but I didn't want to seem arrogant. At six foot three, I dominated our district and was being recruited by several schools for college.

"I would like to watch you play."

"I'd like to have you watching me play. Perhaps we can work that out."

"So, what's your real name?"

"Sydney Benson."

"Which name do you prefer?"

"Ben," I answered.

"Why?" curiously she asked.

"Because I like it better. It makes me feel more like myself."

"It makes you sound like a boy."

"So?" I huffed. "There is a reason why. The boys gave the name."

She looked regretful at the tone of my voice. "I didn't mean to offend you or anything. May I ask you something?"

"What?"

"I only see you hanging around with guys."

"And? What's the question?"

"Do you like all the same stuff the guys do?"

"For the most part, yeah."

"Sports?"

"I think that's a given," I stated.

She nodded in agreement. "Cars?"

"Not that I could ever afford one, but I do love sports cars, especially the classics."

"What about... girls?" she asked, not quite meeting my eyes with her question.

I was so shocked that I didn't answer at first. My mind reeled with the possible reasons she could be asking me such a thing, but the fear of rejection made it to the forefront and dictated my answer. "Why are you asking me that? That's an awfully personal question to ask someone you don't know," I chastised.

"I heard rumors... gossip, really," she confessed, still not meeting my gaze.

I wasn't prepared to be discussing my sexual feelings with the girl over which I had fantasized for years. Moreover, I wasn't steeled against the idea of my dream woman spurning me as I was sure was meant to follow the line of questioning. In the moment of truth, I was truly scared for the first time in my life for wanting another woman. That emotion moved me to an action unlike myself. I quickly stood, not even bothering to answer the question.

"Ben, wait," she said.

I didn't heed the request. Walking a few steps, I said, "Obviously if you thought those rumors were false you wouldn't be asking me."

"Are they false?" Mary Katherine questioned, sitting there looking up with me in confusion at my reaction.

"Does it matter one way or the other?" I demanded to know.

This time she was the one who didn't answer the question. Instead she dropped her gaze. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I just thought you might want to talk to someone about it."

"And you think you're the right person? You want to talk to me about that? Why? So you can save me? So you can convert me? I don't need saving, Mary Katherine! You Catholic girls are all the same! You think I don't know about those rumors? The same girls who run around with their skirts pulled up too high and make out with all the neighborhood boys gossip about me being a lesbian! So what? It doesn't bother me! I don't need to talk about it with anyone!"

"Ben," she said. There was a lilt to her soft voice, but I ignored it, too far removed into my own self-doubt just then.

Instead I waved her off with my hand. I didn't even bother to say good bye. Picking up my pace to practically a run as soon as the school was out of sight, I raced home and up to my room. Throwing myself down onto my bed, I let the feelings overcome me, doubt, anger, fear, desire all rushed through me at the thought of my exchange with Mary Katherine. My sexual fantasies of her were ruined in one conversation. In one short talk, the last several years of pent up lust were extinguished. I wanted to hate her for making me feel so small, so afraid, so alone just then in a way I never had. That night as I went to bed, instead of my usual routine of thinking about that blue-eyed angel and pleasuring my teenage body, I cried into my pillow. I cried over emotions I had never felt, feelings I knew I could never tell anyone else.

The following morning I was sluggish at basketball practice and moped around school the rest of the day. My friends asked me once or twice if I was okay, but I claimed I was. I knew I couldn't tell them. I was one of the guys after all. I had a reputation to uphold. Talking about feelings was something we didn't do. I dreaded the walk home for the first time in all the years we'd be going that route, but I couldn't say that without arising suspicions so I went along as I always did.

Mary Katherine was outside the school with her friends when we happened by, but I didn't even look at her. It was difficult not to. Instead I played aloof, and she finally walked away, taking a seat under the same tree where I had seen her the previous day. She opened her backpack and pulled out a book, essentially ignoring the rest of us. I tried to do the same, but after a few minutes I heard my name being called.

I looked at her. My friends were too involved with the other girls to notice. She motioned me over, and even though I hated her just then, I went to her. I couldn't help myself. "What?" I asked, shoving hands into my front jeans pockets.

"Are you any good at physics?"

"Okay, I guess. Why?"

"Do you think you could help me? I couldn't really follow in class today," she admitted.

Against my better judgment, I took a seat. "Let's see. What are you studying?" I inquired, leaning closely to her, so we could share the book. I could feel her arm rub against mine as we both read the passage. "What part is confusing to you?"

She shook her head and then spared a look at her friends, who were still engaged in conversation with mine. "I'm not confused. I just wanted to talk to you alone for a second." I bristled on the inside, figuring this was the moment of rejection she couldn't get in yesterday, but I said nothing. I couldn't get upset in front of my friends. I was too cool for that. "I just wanted to apologize for yesterday. I didn't mean to upset you. You were right. It was rude of me to ask you something so personal. I'm really sorry." I was caught off guard, not expecting an apology. She continued. "And to answer your question from yesterday, it doesn't matter to me one way or the other."

I was amazed. Her acceptance meant a great deal just then. Feeling like she was truly telling me the truth, I said, "It's true, you know. The rumors, I mean."

She looked me directly in the eyes and softly said, "I know."

"And you're okay with that?"

"Why wouldn't I be? I have an aunt, an ex-nun actually, who is a lesbian. I'm cool with it."

"An ex-nun? Wow," I replied in shocked amazement. "How did your family take that?"

"My father was fine with it. My mom never said anything one way or the other, but she seems to be okay with it. It was my grandmother that had the hard time. She's the staunch Catholic. She convinced my parents to send me to school here, saying the public schools weren't good enough, and I could use more religion. My brothers go to a boys' Catholic school for the same reason. I didn't really want to come at first, but now I have friends here."

"Yeah, I see that. You run with the popular crowd."

"As do you apparently." I nodded my head and looked in the direction of my friends. My best friend Jason noticed me looking his way. His face showed utter surprise. "Why is he looking at you like that?" Mary Katherine asked.

"Because I'm talking to you. I haven't put much effort into making friends with any of you girls. I just figured I was wasting my time. I thought you would hate me."

"Well, some of the girls don't like you for that reason, but they're hypocrites. They only believe in the parts of the Bible that suit them. They think you're going to hell but conveniently forget that they aren't supposed to be having sex before marriage. Heck, there's only one virgin left in my group of friends."

"Really? And who might that be? The guys and I have been wondering." Mary Katherine flushed a little. "You?" I asked.

"Yeah, me."

"Why?"

"Because I just don't think I'm ready. You can get diseases or get pregnant. Besides, I really haven't met anyone I would even consider having sex with. Guys at our age are all the same. It's all they think about, and knowing that is a huge turn off." I nodded in agreement. For a moment I felt a little ashamed that I had nightly thoughts of her in my arms, of her body pressed against mine, writhing against me. Mary Katherine looked at me again, oblivious to the thoughts I was having just then. "You know, you're a lot easier to talk to than I expected. I thought at first you were just reserved, because you didn't want to hang out here with your friends."

"Well, I just thought me being who I am, it would be difficult to make friends. A lot of girls don't want to be friends with me. I think yours just put up with me to be close to the guys."

"I'd like to be friends with you... if you're interested. Maybe we could hang out sometime."

"Yeah, I'd like that."

"Great. What are you doing tomorrow after school?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"You want to come to my house?"

"Okay." Before either of us to speak further, my friends called out toward me, saying they were going. "I gotta go."

"Sure. I'll see you tomorrow then?"

"Yeah. See you then."

Catching up with my friends as they started to walk home, I heard them talking about me. "What was that? You spoke to your dream girl?" Jason mentioned.

I couldn't help the small flush that rose in my face. "Actually we talked yesterday."

"Today you looked awfully close," Jake teased, punching me in the arm. "You gonna put the moves on her?"

"Not yet. She asked me over to her house tomorrow, so we'll see," I said, knowing full-well I was too scared to even contemplate doing such a thing. She wanted to be friends. That would have to do for now.

"Ben's got a date with Mary Katherine! All right! Way to go, Ben! Thought you'd never get up the nerve to even talk to the girl," Todd joked.

"It's not a date. We're just hanging out."

"Does she know about you? Does she know you fancy the skirts?" Jason inquired with a tease.

"Yeah, as a matter of fact she does. She says she's cool with it."

"Five bucks says Ben gets some hot Catholic school girl ass," Jason proclaimed, turning to the other boys.

"Ten bucks she doesn't even make it to first," Jake countered. "Ben's too scared to even talk to the girl. Took her three years."

"I am right here, guys," I grumbled. "She wants to be friends. I have to be cool with that for now if I ever want anything else. Just have to play my cards right," I said, knowing I wasn't going to try anything with Mary Katherine. Jake was right. I was afraid. My fantasy had been restored, and I wanted to keep it intact.

The rest of the day and into the night I wondered about the next day. I couldn't believe what I was going to do. I was thrilled at the idea as well as terrified that I might do something to damage the fragile relationship we had established. The next morning I spent extra time trying to figure out what to wear to school before heading to basketball practice. I knew I wanted to look

cool but not like I had taken a lot of time in putting myself together. Deciding on my favorite baggy jeans and t-shirt with a red button up over the top, I threw it into my gym bag.

That afternoon as I walked with my friends toward Mary Katherine's school, the guys took another chance at harassing me. I fidgeted with my backpack, tossing it from one shoulder to the other, not being able to settle. Upon our arrival, the congregation began, but my eyes were on the lookout for Mary Katherine. I couldn't help but smile when I saw her coming down the stairs. Walking up to our group, she said a perfunctory greeting to the guys before turning to me.

"You ready to go?" I nodded. "My car's this way."

Together we walked toward the parking lot. I wasn't sure what to say, so I remained quiet. She led me to a nondescript sedan. Once we got into the car, I asked, "How far away do you live?"

"Not too far. It's only about ten minutes. Where do you live?"

"Not far from here. Just a few blocks away actually."

"Show me," she said.

I shrugged. "Okay. Take a left out of here." I gave her the directions to my place. She slowed the car as we drove by the Victorian two-story.

"Nice place."

"It's all right. Now that my brother's in college, I've turned his room into my rec room. That's kind of nice to have all that space."

"What's your brother's name? How old is he?"

"It's William. He's twenty."

"How old are you since we're on the subject?"

"I just turned eighteen. You?"

"I'm seventeen. Don't turn eighteen until the spring. Have you been applying to colleges?"

I nodded. "A few. I'm being recruited by some to play ball."

"Like who?"

"UConn and Tennessee are the biggest schools."

"Holy shit. You really must be good then. Those schools have more NCAA titles than any other."

I laughed at her cursing. I never imagined her to do that. Even more, I was intrigued at her knowledge of basketball. "Yeah, they do."

"So, which way are you leaning? Are those your favorites?"

"I like the idea of UCLA too. California would be nice. Tennessee is a great program and so is UConn. The coaching styles are different. I'm just not sure where I'd fit right now. I think I like UConn academically more than the others, but we'll see. I'm going to go visit colleges more over the holidays and make a decision then. What about you?"

Mary Katherine shrugged. "My dad wants me to go to Harvard, my mom Stanford. That's where they went."

"Where do you want to go?"

"I have no idea. I'm going to look at schools over break, too." She turned on the radio, filling the car with preppy pop music.

I frowned. "You listen to this crap?" I joked.

"Yeah. What do you listen to?" I changed the station to rap. She rolled her eyes. "Of course. Are you sure you aren't a guy under those clothes? My brothers listen to the same shit," she said.

I could tell she was teasing me, so I took it in stride. "I assure you. If you were to undress me, there would be all woman under here." If she could give me trouble, I could give it right back.

"Is that an offer?" she quipped.

I couldn't believe she said that. However, I decided to throw caution out the window. After all, she seemed to do it. "Depends on whether or not you'd take me up on it." Mary Katherine just laughed but didn't comment further. She had a beautiful laugh. It made my heart palpitate. This girl was even cooler than I had ever imagined she would be.

Arriving at her house, I looked up at the home twice the size of my own. I followed her through the front door. "Mom?" she called.

"In here, honey," came the answer of a light feminine voice.

Mary Katherine and I followed the voice. I saw a woman that looked quite similar to her daughter sitting in a decent-sized office off the den. The woman looked at me and gave a quizzical smile. "Mom, this is Sydney Benson."

"Hi there. Nice to meet you, Sydney," she said standing.

"You too, Mrs. La Croix."

Her eyes spotted my nickname on my letter jacket. "Big Ben? How cute. How do you two know each other?"

I answered for us. "Some guy friends of mine are friends with Mary Katherine's."

"Then you don't go to Saint Mary's?"

"No, ma'am. I got to Westlake."

"Where is that?"

"It's the public high school not to far from Saint Mary's. My friends and I walk by there on my way home everyday."

"I see." She was studying me with penetrating eyes, and it made me nervous. "Well, it's nice to meet you, Sydney. You girls go on now. I still have work to do here. Dinner will be ready at six as usual, Mary Katherine. Will Sydney being staying?"

Both women looked at me for an answer. "I'll have to call home and see," I answered.

"Do that and let me know, okay?"

"Yes, ma'am." I could feel eyes on my back as Mary Katherine and I left the room. She led us upstairs. Walking into what I assumed was her bedroom, I looked around. I never thought I'd be in her room in my life, and I was a little overwhelmed just then. I saw an UConn sweatshirt on her desk chair. "So, you're a Huskies' fan?"

"I like their women's basketball. Do you always act like that in front of adults?"

"Act like what?"

"So polite, so nervous?"

"I wasn't expecting to see your parents, I guess. Your mom is a bit intense."

"It was funny. She does that on purpose. She doesn't want us bringing the wrong kind of people home."

"What constitutes the wrong kind of person?"

"I don't know. I have yet to find out. Obviously it isn't you. She liked you."

"How do you know?"

"She invited you to dinner on meeting you. Most of my friends have to have been around for awhile before getting an invite. Must be your manners," she joked, plopping down on her bed.

Her skirt fluttered a little as she dropped. I averted my eyes. "Sit down if you want." I looked around, weighing my options. "I meant on the bed, Ben. I don't bite, you know." Her blue eyes met mine. For a moment I wasn't sure if she was flirting with me or not. I figured it was just my imagination and took a seat on the double bed. "So, here we are."

"Yeah," I mumbled.

"What do you want to do? I usually do my homework right when I get home to have my nights free."

"We can do that. I have mine with me."

"That's not very much fun, though."

"That's okay. Just hanging out is cool. We don't really have to do anything."

"But before that, you have to call home and see if you can stay for dinner."

"Oh yeah. Just a second." I dug my cell phone out of my bag and dialed my house. Of course no one answered. My parents never got home until dinner time, so I just left a message telling them I wouldn't be there to eat. "Done," I said with a grin.

"Great. I'll tell my mom. Be right back."

I watched her walk out of the room. When I was alone, I took a deep breath. I couldn't believe my fortune. Mary Katherine was so much more than I had imagined her to be, and my head was swimming with all the new knowledge. A few minutes later she returned and climbed onto the bed once again. Given my size our bodies brushed together as we reclined there next to each other. She turned her blue eyes on me, and for a moment I felt as if I couldn't breathe.

"May I ask you something?" she inquired sweetly.

"Sure. What?" I knew I wouldn't be able to deny such a sweet voice.

"Have you ever kissed a guy?"

"No. Why?"

"How do you know you don't like them then?"

I felt myself getting upset, but I tried not to let it show. Her questions about my sexuality made me uneasy. "Let me ask you this. Have you ever kissed a girl?"

"No."

"Then how do you know you wouldn't like it?"

She looked away from me. It took her a moment to reply. "I don't. I wouldn't know if I liked or didn't like something unless I tried it first."

"Have you ever thought about it?"

"Not really. Just as I haven't met any guys that interest me, I haven't met any girls either."

"Then how do you know you're straight?"

She shrugged. "I don't, Ben."

My heart stopped. "What? What are you saying? You're gay?"

"No. I didn't say that either. I just haven't put a lot of thought into it one way or another."

"What's there to think about? I can tell your straight just by looking at you."

She huffed. "I don't like labels, Ben. I am who I am. I just haven't figured that out yet. I guess I admire that about you. You know who you are. You know what you believe."

Sensing her vulnerability I backed off a little. "You'll know yourself in time. You shouldn't worry about it."

"I don't," she said with a smile. "Tell me something. Why are you nicknamed after a clock?"

"It's a tower," I corrected.

"It's a clock," she teased.

"It's a tower."

"Clock," she pressed with a laugh.

"Fine. It's a clock tower. And I think you're just jealous because I have my own theme music."

"Theme music? You have theme music?" She laughed again.

I loved that sound. "Yeah. For basketball they gave my own theme music."

"What is it?"

I chuckled. "It's a clock, the real Big Ben. They chime it when I do something fantastic."

"I bet they ring it often. You seem pretty fantastic. I'd really love to see you play."

"Well, when the season starts I'd love to have you there."

There was a pause in our conversation. I noticed her hands playing with her skirt. I was amused at the height difference between us as my eyes took in our bodies and my feet dangling off the end of her bed. Mary Katherine was in no way short. In fact, I guessed her height to be around five seven or eight, but because I was of abnormal size for a girl, I still towered over her by more than half a foot.

"I'm going to change," she said. "Then we can study. Take your jacket off and stay awhile."

I did as she said. I took off my jacket as well as kicked off my tennis shoes. Pulling a book from my backpack I began reading. She returned minutes later in a pair of jeans and her UConn sweatshirt. Even though the skirt of my fantasies was gone, she still looked adorable. For the next several hours, we focused on our studies. We were taking the same courses for the most part and consulted each other on different topics, but we didn't have small talk.

At six that evening a knock on the door interrupted us. Before she could answer though, a young teenage boy flung open the door. "Mom says dinner's ready," he grumbled, looking at me. Then he turned to go.

Mary Katherine shook her head. "Brat," she mumbled. "I hate it when he does that. I've told him a million times not to open my door like that. Come on. We better go downstairs." I picked up my shoes off the floor and slipped them on. She laughed. "You don't have to wear your shoes, Ben."

"I feel better with them on."

Going downstairs we went into the dinning room. Mary Katherine's father was there as well as her brothers. He smiled at us. "Mom said you had a friend over. Hi. I'm David La Croix." He stuck his hand out in my direction.

"Sydney Benson," I said, taking the offering.

"Nice to meet you, Sydney."

"You too, sir."

"Please have a seat. Mary Katherine, why don't you get your guest a drink?"

"What do you want?"

"Whatever." I eyed the table. There were three glasses of milk on the table and two glasses of wine. "Milk's good." I took a chair where there was no glass. The rest of the family did as well. Mary Katherine returned a few minutes later with my drink.

When everyone was settled, Mr. La Croix led the family in a prayer. I sat respectfully quiet while he did so. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched as Mary Katherine followed the Catholic tradition of making a cross over her body. There was something irreverently sexy about seeing

her with head bowed and eyes closed. Her lips were slightly parted. Once the prayer was finished, the food was passed around for each of us to help ourselves. I hadn't mentioned it earlier, but I had a ravenous appetite, about which my parents always complained. However, just then I only took a portion equal to the size of Mary Katherine's out of politeness. Dinner was full of her parents asking Mary Katherine, her brothers, and me about school.

I had just finished my plate when Mrs. La Croix handed me the main entree. "I don't believe for a moment you're full," she said with a smile, so much like her daughter's.

"Thank you," I replied, taking it and helping myself to another modest portion.

"More," she pushed. "Don't make me serve you, Sydney, or you'll end up with all this on your plate," she said with an easy voice. She and Mary Katherine had similar senses of humor, but I had been taught not to talk back to an adult.

"Yes, ma'am." With that I served myself as much as I really wanted.

"That's better. I had a suspicion that you were going to eat as much as the boys. You're a growing girl after all. How tall are you anyway?"

"I'm six three."

"Wow. Do you play basketball?" Mary Katherine's father asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Mary Katherine and I love to watch basketball. We'll have to come see you sometime."

"That would be great."

When dinner came to its conclusion, Mrs. La Croix said, "Mary Katherine, it's your turn to do dishes."

"Mom," she whined. "I have a guest."

"I'll help you," I offered. It was one of my duties at home, so I was used to it.

"There you go. Now it's not a problem," her mother replied.

She rolled her eyes anyway but started to clear the dishes. I assisted her and realized the rest of the family did as well, everyone taking at least their own dishes to the kitchen. Then the two of us were left alone for her to load the dishwasher. I stayed with her but noticed her brothers go outside and start shooting basketball in the driveway.

"You can go out there if you want," she said.

I shook my head. "I'll stay with you."

"I know you want to play."

"A few more minutes isn't going to kill me. Besides, I haven't been invited."

"You don't have to be invited. They'll play with you. Go on. You know you want to."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. I'll be out in just a few minutes."

I smiled at her. I really liked this girl. I always thought she was perfect. Now I knew it. Heading outside I got involved in an impromptu game with her younger high school age brothers. As promised she came outside a little later and just watched.

Stopping the game in progress, I asked, "Why don't we play two on two?"

"I'm not good," Mary Katherine said.

"Yeah, she really isn't," her youngest brother stated.

"That's okay. She can be on my team. Girls versus boys. What do you say?"

No one really had further objections, so we began our game. The La Croixs were right. Mary Katherine wasn't very good, but it wasn't from a lack of trying. She just couldn't outmaneuver her taller brothers. The four of us played until it was dark before I decided I really had to get home. Mary Katherine and I went up to her room, so I could gather my stuff. I thanked her parents again for dinner before we went back outside to leave. I paused in front of the hoop for a moment. Looking around to make sure no one was watching us, I jumped as high as I could. I touched the rim and grabbed onto it for a brief second before coming down.

"Wow, you have quite the vertical," she said.

"Do you mind if I try something?"

"No."

"Where's the ball?"

"In the garage." She went and got it for me.

"Is this thing the right height?"

"I think so. Why?"

I looked around again to make sure we were alone. Taking the ball in my right hand I took a running start at the hoop and jumped again, trying to dunk it. This time even though I got the height I wasn't able to do it as the ball went bouncing off the rim and into the grass. "Damn," I grumbled.

"You're really close. You almost had it."

"I was just hoping," I said. "I've always dreamed of what it might be like. I've never been that close before."

"Well, you were almost there. Just needed another inch or so. Maybe once the season gets going."

"Maybe," I agreed. I put the ball back in its place. We went to her car and drove back to my place.

When she pulled up to the curb in front of my house, I thanked her for the ride. She smiled that pretty smile and said, "I had a good time today. Maybe we could do it again soon."

"I'd like that."

"Call me sometime," she suggested.

"Okay." I dug out my phone. "What's your number?"

We exchanged phone numbers. She smiled a second time. "I have to get home. My parents are probably counting the minutes I've been gone."

"I understand. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night."

Over the next few months Mary Katherine and I spent lots of time together. I was a frequent visitor at her house, so much so that I was even placed into the kitchen duty rotation, even though she and I always did the chore together, and there were plenty of times we went to my house after school as well. Her family treated me as one of their own, and it was common to see her parents come to my basketball games with her. Eventually my parents and hers got to know one another too, and I couldn't have hoped for a better situation. Because our parents approved of each other and knew the other's parents, we were even allowed to spend the night at each other's houses.

Mary Katherine and I went along in our friendship like everything was perfect, but I could never rid her from my sexual thoughts. In fact, the more time we spent together, the more I thought about her, which seemed impossible. We had gotten so comfortable that we hugged and cuddled almost all the time, even in bed at night if I stayed over at her house. It became the norm, and

even as much as I liked it, it tormented me, too. I wanted so much more, always had, but I was beginning to feel guilty for having feelings for my new best friend.

The night of my last basketball game before Christmas Break began I was pumped. Not only was the semester over, I was going to visit colleges over break, and Mary Katherine and I were going to go to a party with some friends that night after the game. However, just then I had to concentrate on the best team in the district outside of us. They had quite a few players who were known for their three-point scoring abilities, and our records were the same.

As I warmed up with my team, I looked up at the crowd in the bleachers. My parents were there with my brother and the entire La Croix family. I couldn't help but smile at Mary Katherine sitting there wearing my letter jacket I had lent her the night before when she had left my house. It overwhelmed her completely but looked absolutely adorable. A few rows up were my best pals from the neighborhood. The guys had their girlfriends with them, but I saw Jason pointing down to Mary Katherine and make the same lewd gesture he often did when he teased me about getting more intimate with my favorite redhead.

Even though the guys knew I was spending almost all my free time with her those days, I had to confess to them that I had not gotten very far. In fact, I had never even attempted to try something. Of course they were full of advice of how to get her in bed, none of which I would have ever tried. Nevertheless, they were determined to get me laid by my dream girl. The guys had made a pact that tonight was going to be the night. They were going to do whatever it took to hook the two of us up, even though I pleaded for them not to interfere.

The game that night proved to be a tougher match up than what I had hoped for. My team was looking sluggish, and my game was a little off as well, being distracted by my friends' plans for me after. In fact, going into the last quarter, it was a tied game. My coach was furious, because we weren't playing our best. As we huddled for a timeout, the coach let us all have it for good reason. Looking at me, she yelled, "Benson, you're the captain of this team! Get your head in the game and make this happen! You all get Benson the ball down low! We're going to have to do this the old fashion way with sweat! No more showmanship! Just get the job done!"

I looked my teammates. "Just give me the ball. I'll kick it back out if they double team."

Several minutes passed with us only taking a slight lead. They were swarming me completely every time I got the ball, but I knew Mary Katherine was watching me, and it inspired me to do better than what I previously thought was my best. Kicking it into high gear, I scored us some much-needed points. It was obvious they were getting desperate to keep up the pace as they started to shoot off three-point attempts, but fortunately for us they were not falling.

On one such attempt, one of my fellow teammates came down with the rebound. I started to spirit full-speed down court and called for the ball, knowing there were under two minutes to go. The pass took flight in my direction, perfectly executed by our point guard. It fell right in front of me by just a step as soon as I crossed the midline. Grabbing it I noticed I had a completely open court in front of me and dribbled quickly as I could toward the basket. I felt it inside myself. This was the moment I had always wanted. I knew I could do it. Taking a hard jump, I soared through

the air toward the hoop, clutching the ball with both hands. It seemed like slow motion, rising toward the rim, and before I could even comprehend it I had dunked it hard through the hoop. I hung for a brief second before dropping to my feet. I heard the crowd roar as my theme music chimed for a job well done. However, there was one voice above all others that caught my ears. Turning to Mary Katherine, I saw her cheering wildly for me, screaming my name excitedly.

It was the momentum that completely shut down our opponents, and we held on to win it by half a dozen points. As my team gathered around me congratulating me on my accomplishment, I noticed my girl standing in patient wait for me, a dreaming smile across her face. Walking over to her, I opened my arms for a hug. She jumped into them, clutching me fiercely as I held her suspended from the ground.

"You did it! I'm so happy for you! I always knew you could!"

"I did it for you. I couldn't have done it without you and all those nights of practice in your driveway. Thanks for believing me."

"Always, Ben."

"If you want to wait here for me while I get my bag, we can go to the party together."

"I thought we might. My bag is in the car. I'll need to change at your house before we go."

"Of course. Let me thank your parents for coming, and then I have to get into the locker room. Coach looked pissed at me for that dunk." I put her down and curved my arm around her shoulders as we went to talk to our respective parents. All four of them hugged me and then sent me on my way.

When I arrived in the locker room all my teammates once again congratulated me, but our coach's scream silenced us all. "Benson, I said no showboating! What about that didn't you understand?" she yelled.

"I'm sorry," I offered, but I couldn't keep the smile off my face. I felt too giddy.

She smiled softly. Patting me on the shoulder, she said, "I always knew this day would come. I'm proud of you. Just promise me you won't do it again. I don't want to see you get hurt before state."

"Ah, Coach, that's not fair," I complained.

"I'm serious. There's no reason to risk an injury for a few easy points. You did it once. We all know you can do it. Everyone's going to know about that by tomorrow morning. There's no need to do it again."

"But,"

She silenced me with another smile. "Enough. We'll talk more about this later. You all played horribly tonight, but a win is a win. Let's all enjoy the excitement of the night, and we'll talk about this game after break."

Knowing I wanted to shower before the party, I opted to just throw sweats on over my jersey and headed back out to the gym. Mary Katherine was sitting on the bleachers just waiting. She was still wearing my jacket. With a smile for her, I shouldered her bag next to my own and brought my arm around her. We walked slowly to my car, having to stop every few moments to receive congratulations on my accomplishment. However, once in the car, she smiled at me again.

"You really were incredible."

"I didn't play well. I was distracted."

"By?"

I shrugged. "Just lots of stuff going on in my head."

"Something you want to talk about?"

I spared her a look before turning to the road. "It's just a lot of different things, school, break, ball, colleges, all that stuff." There was no way I could admit that she was weighing on my mind heavily.

"I understand. I'm in the same boat." Not knowing what to say just then, I turned on the radio, putting it on the pop music she liked. However, she changed it to rap. We smiled at each other.

At my house I showered while she changed. Then I quickly dressed and joined her in my bedroom. She was putting on makeup in my mirror. I had seen her do it before, but that night it took on new feelings to me. She looked sexier than she ever had in that moment. Her red hair had been curled but still hung freely half way down her back. She still was wearing my jacket which engulfed her, but I saw her short skirt peeking out from under it. She always looked so good in skirts, and I loved seeing her in them. I waited until she was finished dressing before we went downstairs to bid my parents good bye and remind them that she was staying the night when we returned from the party.

Once outside the house, I suggested, "Todd's house isn't far from here. Just at the end of the street. You feel like walking, or do you want to take the car?"

"Let's walk if you're up to it. It's a nice night."

I nodded in agreement. Even though it was cold, the sky was clear showing the stars. We walked slowly closely together down the block. Her arm found its way looped through mine. Briefly I wondered if my life could get any better than that moment. Mary Katherine was with me, and I had dunked for the first time in my life. I knew there was really only one thing missing to make me feel whole just then, and that was a chance to kiss the girl next to me. Wondering what my

guy friends had in mind for that night, I hoped it wouldn't leave me embarrassed in front of my dream girl.

The party was already going when we walked in. The guys immediately came up to me and started to slap me on the back and high-five me on the dunk. Mary Katherine moved toward the other girls that were in attendance. For awhile we all just hung around drinking and talking. I was happy that night, consuming more beer than I should have and reveling in my moment of glory. The alcohol made it easier to feel all right about my thoughts toward Mary Katherine, so I consumed it greedily at the encouragement of my friends.

After all of us, save Mary Katherine I thought, were sufficiently drunk, we decided to play basketball outside. The girls stayed behind and asked Mary Katherine to stay with them when she made a move to follow me. We exchanged a look. The girls had always been polite to her but never really inclusive, however, in my inebriated state I didn't think anything of it as Jason grabbed me by the arm to continue outside. After that moment I didn't give it another thought.

About an hour passed, and I found it unusual that the girls never came outside as they almost always did. A peek through the windows confirmed that they were all still inside and seemed to be having fun on their own by the laughing. Even Mary Katherine seemed to be having a good time. Chastising myself that I couldn't allow her out of my sight for that long, I went back to the game. Finally though when we had all had enough, we headed back inside, grabbing beers from the kitchen as we went back to the girls in the den.

Since my legs were tired, I didn't want to sit just then and propped myself up with my shoulder against the door frame of the door leading from the hall to the den and started to stretch them. "Where's Mary Katherine?" I asked, taking a swig of my beer.

"Bathroom," Todd's girlfriend answered, receiving a kiss from her boyfriend. I watched them have a whispered conversation with each other. I felt envious. I wanted so much to be that close to Mary Katherine. Suddenly my musings were broken with a slap to my jean-clad ass. I jumped slightly and turned.

"Hey, champ," the girl of my thoughts greeted, snuggling into my body.

"Hey, yourself," I answered, curving an arm around her back.

"Look up," she whispered. I did, seeing mistletoe hanging from the doorway. Our eyes met again.

"Looks like someone has to kiss Big Ben," Jason teased from across the room. "Who's it going to be?"

All eyes turned to Mary Katherine in expectation. Her blue eyes looked up at me in question. I could feel my heart pounding hard. For a split second I honestly thought it was going to happen, but being too afraid, I stepped away after a moment and headed down the hall. I couldn't believe I almost fell for that ploy the guys had devised. I wasn't about to kiss her in front of everyone.

Getting as far away as I could, I stepped into the laundry room off the kitchen. Putting my beer can to my forehead, I closed my eyes. Almost immediately I heard the door close and felt arms around my waist.

"Ben," Mary Katherine whispered. "Ben, they were just teasing us."

"I know."

"Then what's the matter?" I shook my head. "Come on. Talk to me." Again I declined with a shake of my head. I tried not to watch as she climbed up onto the dryer next to me. It was a challenge for her, being that it was already sitting on a raised platform, but the result put us almost on the same eye level. She pulled me to her between her open legs. I still wouldn't look at her. "Ben, look at me." I refused. "Please, Ben." The plea was my undoing. I met her eyes. Our faces were so close together. "Don't you want to kiss me?"

I exhaled quickly. I couldn't answer the question. I could only respond with actions as I looked into those pretty eyes. Leaning down I captured the lips I had dreamed of for years with my own. I heard a moan but wasn't sure who it actually belonged to. Feeling hands cradling the back of my head, I pressed deeper. My tongue snaked out to taste Mary Katherine's lips, and within a moment I was inside of her mouth. Curving my arms around her body to pull her closer, I realized for the first time that I was still holding my beer can. I quickly discarded it on the washing machine. It felt like a dream as we kissed, never breaking contact except for air. Mary Katherine's hands roamed over my back, gripping at me. I couldn't help myself. All the years of longing were making me insatiable. My hands roamed all over her body before finding their way under her skirt. Grabbing her backside in both my hands, I jerked her hips forward against mine. She winced. "What's wrong?" I asked, feeling her body tense.

"Your belt buckle."

I looked down our bodies. Somehow I had managed to flip up the front of her skirt and my buckle was wedged between the apex of her legs. Immediately four hands went to work on it, and soon it was open, but she didn't stop there as her hands continued onto the button and zipper of my jeans. Being so baggy, they immediately began to sag off my waist. I felt her legs come around me and lock against my back as she pulled me back for more kissing. It was heaven to be that way with her, but it was short-lived as we were interrupted unexpectedly by Jason. When he saw us, he fled, but it was enough to break the carnal urgency that had surrounded us. I felt her head burrow into my neck as she clutched to the back of my shirt. She was taking deep breaths.

"Are you okay?" I asked softly, running my hand through her red hair. She shook her head. "What's the matter, sweetie?" I could hear her crying. "Mary Katherine?"

"Why does this have to be so hard? If you were a guy, it wouldn't be this difficult."

I didn't even allow her another sentence as I ripped myself out of her arms. Anger gripped me at that utterance. I couldn't believe she had just said that after everything we had been through. "I'm not a guy, and I never will be!" I yelled.

"Ben, let me explain."

"No! That said it all right there! I don't need to hear more!" I zipped my jeans with as much dignity as I could muster and stormed out of the laundry room.

"Ben!" she called out after me. I ignored her. "Ben, please, stop!"

Still I neglected her pleas. In my indignation I hurried out the front door of the house, letting the storm door slam in my wake. I couldn't believe that had just happened. I couldn't believe she would ever hurt me that way. Walking at a quick pace toward my house, I could hear her in the distance behind me pleading for me to stop, to let her explain herself. I kept going, and it wasn't until I felt a hand grab me by the arm that I turned around. "What?" I screamed down at her.

She was crying. "Ben, I didn't mean that how it sounded."

"There is no other way for that to sound, Mary Katherine! You want me to be something I'm not!"

"No, no I don't. You have to believe me, Ben."

"What do you want from me, Mary Katherine?" I yelled. Her tears made my anger wane slightly.

"I want you," she cried.

"You want another version of me."

"No. I want you, just as you are, Ben. Don't you understand? I want you." She moved into my space and pulled my body to hers. With a voice trembling full of sexual need, she whispered, "I want you."

"Then why did you say that?"

"Because if you were a guy, I wouldn't be so scared of what other people thought. I don't want to be scared, but I am."

"There's nothing I can do to help you with that, sweetheart. People already think we're together. Don't you know that?"

"But now it'll be true," she whispered. "Please, Ben. Take me home. I'll do anything you want."

I couldn't believe my hearing. The woman of my dreams had just offered herself to me. It was an offer I couldn't refuse, even if I was more intoxicated than I wanted to be for this moment. Putting an arm across her shoulders, I said, "Come on. Let's go."

Getting back to my house, I took a moment to make sure everyone was asleep before leading us up the stairs to my room. I locked my door to ensure our privacy before putting my arms around

her from behind. She jumped slightly before nestling back against me. She shivered a little as I pulled my letter jacket off of her. I did the same with the blue cardigan sweater she was wearing. I couldn't believe the way fate had turned that night as my lips found her neck and my hands found her clothed breasts. She turned in my arms, so we were facing each other. Our mouths came together again, and as soon as they did, my hands began a more frantic pace. She was out of her top and cotton bra quickly, and then my hands were on the zipper of her skirt. Within just a few moments she was standing there in a pair of white cotton bikinis and her heeled black boots. Backing her up towards my crumpled unmade bed, I pushed her down onto it. Her body under mine felt even better than all my fantasies combined.

"Are you going to take your clothes off?" she whispered anxiously.

It was the first time I noticed I was still dressed, even in my winter coat. Not wanting to leave her, I shrugged out of my jacket and shirt without even breaking lip contact with her neck. My bra followed quickly, leaving me in my jeans and tennis shoes. I had to prop up on one arm and rise off her slightly to get to my belt and jeans. I pushed all my clothes off my hips and struggled to get out of them with my shoes still in place, but after a few moments I was completely naked on top of her. Knowing she still had on her boots, I pulled back to take care of that problem for us.

Looking back into her face when I was finished with that task, I saw panic. She was shaking slightly under me. Kissing her mouth reassuringly, I mumbled, "It's okay. I've got you." She said nothing, only clutched to my shoulders reflexively. Cradling her to me with my left arm, my right hand trailed down the front of her body and between her legs. Her hips jerked as she gasped. Even through the cotton that separated us, I could tell she was wet. Ridding her of her last article of clothing, we were completely naked, skin pressed against each other. She was still trembling in my arms, but I didn't even stop to think about what that might mean. Instead I went back to my mission. Mary Katherine was so wet that I couldn't even wait. I pushed myself into her tightness.

She gasped in pain and gave a breathless cry of my name. "Ben."

I looked into her face. A single tear dropped from the corner of her eye. I kissed it, tasting the salt on my lips. She continued to whimper. "It's okay, Mary Katherine. You're okay. Shh. Just try to relax."

"Ben," she whimpered. The timbre of her voice trembled. "It hurts."

"It'll stop soon. The worst part is over. I promise."

She groaned as I slowly withdrew only to push in again. "Ben, I want you to stop," she cried.

I didn't. "Come on, baby. It won't hurt in just a minute. You just have to get used to it."

"Ben, please. Please stop," she asked again. Her arms clutched me as I continued my pace. Her voice grew firmer. "Ben, stop!" This time I followed the instruction. I didn't withdraw but paused. I looked at her in confusion and frustration. She was crying. "I can't," she whispered.

"You already are," I mentioned with an edge to my voice. I couldn't believe I was getting so close only to be denied.

"I don't want to," she stated, wrapping her hand around my wrist and pulled at it, forcing me to withdraw. My hand came away stained with her blood.

"You already did," I said.

She pushed against my body, and I rolled away from her reluctantly. "I think I'm going to be sick," she cried. She rushed into my bathroom and threw up. It hurt to know she found being with me that distasteful. A few minutes later she returned, looking pale. "I want to go home," she sobbed.

"Fine! Go home! I'm not driving you, though!" The frustration and anguish over the rejection made me angrier than I had ever been. In fact, I had never spoken to her the way I had that night.

Blue eyes looked at me in hurt. Going to her bag, she picked up her cell phone. After a moment she cried, "Dad, can you come get me?" A pause. "No, I'm not okay." Another pause. "I'm at Ben's." Finally she whispered, "Thanks, Dad. Bye."

I laid on the bed watching as she threw on some clothes and shoved the ones she had worn that night into her bag. I couldn't believe this wonderful day was coming to such a horrible end. The woman I dreamed of didn't want me after all, and now we both knew it. It hurt, but seeing her tears, the anger started to wane. After all, they were my one weakness. Rising from the bed, I came to her and tried to put my arms around her, but she rebuffed me.

"Don't. I don't want you to touch me."

Knowing it was a lost cause, I stepped back. Going to my dresser, I put on my pajamas and then followed her out my bedroom door and downstairs to watch out the front door for her father. "You're going to be cold without a jacket. Do you want to borrow one?" She shook her head. Awkward silence encompassed us until we saw her father's car pull up in front of my house. I watched from the front porch as she ran down the walkway. She was still crying. I took it as a bad sign that she wouldn't even look up at me as they drove away. The girl of my dreams had just left, possibly for the last time. The pain radiated from my chest until it reached my eyes, and I started to cry. It had gone from so good to so horrific in just a matter of an hour. Feeling myself getting sick to my stomach, I went back to my room and relieved it of its contents in my toilet before sinking to the floor in tears.

The next day I awoke with a terrible headache lying on the floor of my bathroom. My eyes burned, and body ached. Stretching my frame, my eyes noticed the dried blood under the fingernails of my right hand, reminding me of what had happened the night before. I had sex

with Mary Katherine, and it went horribly wrong. My heart hurt, but with the alcohol gone, I felt my concern for her begin. I recalled physically hurting her the night before when I had taken her virginity roughly. That wasn't how I had wanted it to go and regretted my actions immensely. Not only that, I was worried that we had ruined our relationship with what had taken place. She was my best friend and the girl I so desperately still wanted. The thought of it being over wasn't something I was prepared to accept.

With that in mind, I forced myself up off the floor. I had to see her, so I took a long shower, trying to will my head to stop pounding. Dressing in a pair of jeans and a sweater, I grabbed my jacket and went downstairs. My parents greeted me, but I just grumbled in return, saying I wanted to take the car. When they asked where Mary Katherine was, I didn't answer, just waved the question off as I headed out the side door to the garage.

Twenty minutes later I was in front of the La Croix's house. I just sat in my car, because I didn't know what I was supposed to say. However, I knew I had to try, so I made my way to the door and rang the bell. Her father opened it. "Mr. La Croix, hi," I hesitantly greeted.

"Sydney. What are you doing here?" His voice didn't hold the usual affection he had for me. He also didn't invite me in.

"I came by to see Mary Katherine. Is she at home?" I knew she was. Her car was sitting on the street.

"Yes, she is."

"May I see her?"

"I have a better idea. Let's go for a walk. I want to talk to you." I knew his suggestion was a directive as I watched him get his coat and his wallet from the entryway. He stepped outside. Together we walked halfway down the block in silence. "How are you today, Sydney? You look just as hung over as Mary Katherine."

I figured there was no point in lying. I did feel terrible. "Not so good."

"Headache?"

"Yeah. How's Mary Katherine?"

"She's sick as a dog. What were you two drinking last night?"

"Sir, I never saw Mary Katherine drink any alcohol."

"Well, she was drunk when I picked her up from your house last night. How do you explain that?"

"We were at a friend of mine's house last night. I never saw her drink anything but cranberry juice."

"Well, there was something in that juice then, because she was stumbling by the time we got home. I had to help her up the stairs. She threw up everywhere."

"Honestly, Mr. La Croix, I didn't know. I wasn't paying that much attention to her beverages."

"Then what were you doing?"

"Playing around with my friends. We were talking and then went outside to play basketball. She stayed inside with the other girls."

"Is it possible someone slipped something into her drink?"

"I guess. I was with the guys the whole time, though."

"I meant one of the girls. Mary Katherine doesn't drink. She knows it's against the law and makes you do stupid things. We've talked to her about it time and time again. She wouldn't drink on her own accord. That's why I'm asking."

I had to agree with him on that point. At all the parties we'd ever been to, she never drank anything, choosing non-alcoholic beverages. "I suppose."

"And I assume you were too drunk to notice something was wrong?" he pressed.

Her heart sank. "I guess."

He shook his head. "I'm really disappointed in the both of you, Sydney. Mary Katherine has been told to watch her surroundings when she's out, and you should have been watching for her too. If you're not going to look out for each other, I can't let her go out with you."

"Yes, sir," I answered, dropping my head. I felt terrible.

There was a pause as he took a deep breath. "Sydney, this isn't easy for me. Mary Katherine is my daughter. Even if she is my oldest, she holds a special place in my heart as my little girl. She told her mother and me what happened last night. I'm not sure she meant to, but she wasn't exactly in her right mind at the time. I asked her why she was crying so much, and in between throwing up on my wife and me as we tried to get her into bed and balling, she told us about having sex with you for the first time. She said you hurt her." His voice was laced with anger.

"Sir, I didn't- we didn't- it just happened. I swear I wouldn't have done it if we both hadn't been drunk. We had never even kissed until last night." My eyes started to tear, and I couldn't hold back. I stopped walking as the sobs racked my body, and I doubled over, clenching my fists to my face as I sunk to the ground.

Mary Katherine's father sat next to me, placing a hand on my back. Neither of us said anything for several minutes. Finally though, he said, "We've seen this develop slowly over time and so have your parents. We all figured it was just a matter of time until the two of you realized it yourselves, if you hadn't already. I've never seen my daughter with anyone else the way she is with you. Your parents say the same thing about you. We just didn't know what boundaries to set for the two of you. We had no proof you were more than friends. Neither of you gave any indication that you were, and we didn't want to make an issue of it if we were misreading things. Both of you claimed that you were just friends. However, that's over now. I already talked to your parents this morning."

"Did you tell them what happened?"

"I told them that I thought the two of you had been drinking and knew the two of you had moved beyond friendship according to Mary Katherine. I didn't tell them about the sex. It sounded like drunken foolishness to me, and even though I am upset it happened, there is nothing I can do to change it. My daughter lost her virginity by making a poor decision, and that is something she has to live with. I hold you responsible as much as I hold her responsible for what happened."

"Yes, sir," I mumbled. There was really nothing else I could say.

"Now, in light of this new aspect of your relationship, there will be new ground rules. You are not allowed in the house unless her mother or I are home. She is not allowed at your house unless one of your parents is home. You can be in her room, but the door has to stay open at all times. There will be no more sleepovers, and a curfew will be put in effect immediately. We've been flexible with her on that, but it stops now. She is to be home at midnight, ten on school nights, no exceptions. We will not tolerate a repeat of last night. No more drinking, no more parties. You are too young to be having sex. Even though you can't get pregnant, there is the emotional responsibility that comes with that activity that the two of you clearly don't understand." I said nothing, knowing there was nothing I could say just then. He sighed. "Sydney, we like you. We think you're a good kid. You just made a poor decision last night, and it cost my little girl dearly."

"I'm sorry," I mumbled.

"I believe you, but now we have to try to fix as much of the damage as we can. Come on. I'm going to show you the first trick about dating a La Croix woman," he said, patting me on the shoulder as he stood. We walked a little further until we got their local grocery store. He walked us over to the candy aisle and grabbed a bag of bite-sized Crunch bars. He tossed them in my direction. "Those are Mary Katherine's favorites. Chocolate and flowers. They go a long way after a fight." He picked up a second bag of chocolate and then led us over to the floral department. He studied the selection for a few minutes. Turning to me, he said, "Pick something. It doesn't have to be expensive, just meaningful. It has to look like you put thought into it." I followed those instructions and ended up with a trio of white roses. He ended up with a bunch of purple irises. Going to the checkout, we both paid for our respective items before heading home.

Upon arrival back to the house, he allowed me inside. Mrs. La Croix was sitting in the den reading when she saw me. She greeted me neutrally and said Mary Katherine was awake but still in bed. I looked at Mr. La Croix who nodded his permission for me to go upstairs. Getting to the door, I knocked softly and waited for her answer. When it came I gently opened the door all the way.

She was lying in bed looking terribly sick. "Ben, hi. What are you doing here?"

"I came by to see you if that's okay." She didn't respond. "Is that okay?"

"I guess. I don't feel so well."

I left the door open as I had been instructed and crossed the room to her bed. Taking a tentative seat, I said, "I'm sorry you're sick. These are for you." I presented her with the flowers and candy.

"Thanks."

We were both quiet a moment. "I just wanted to apologize for last night," I said. "I was drunk, so drunk that I didn't even realize you were, too."

"I didn't drink anything. I don't know how I got so sick. I hardly remember last night."

"Well, your dad just asked me about that. He thinks someone slipped something into your drink. I don't know who would have done it, but it makes the most sense. I didn't think you had been drinking either. What do you remember from last night?"

"The party and being at your house. I don't know how I got home," she admitted, not meeting my gaze.

"Do you remember what happened at the party in the laundry room?" She nodded. "Do you remember us at my house having sex?" Another nod. "Look, I'm sorry I hurt you last night. I didn't know what I was doing. I wasn't thinking clearly. I drank way too much. I never wanted our first time to be like that. You have to believe me, Mary Katherine. I would never want to hurt you," softly I said, reaching for her hand. She let me take it. "I know it doesn't change the fact that it happened, and I took your virginity without your permission really." The thought saddened me once again. Covering my face with my hand, I took several deep breaths. I didn't want to cry in front of her.

A consoling hand came up to my face. "Ben, you didn't force me. You stopped when I asked you to. I just didn't stop us when I should have."

"Do you regret it?"

She paused in answer. "I regret that we weren't ourselves. I regret that it took getting drunk to know what each other wanted. I regret that it wasn't romantic and special." I nodded my head in

understanding. Looking me deeply in the eyes, she continued, "But I don't regret that it was you. In fact, I wish I had had more courage before now to say something. I always assumed you knew and just didn't like me that way."

"Not like you that way? You must be joking. I have liked you that way forever, before I even knew your name."

"Tell me what happened last night. I remember being in bed with you and feeling really sick to my stomach. I don't remember much after that."

"Was that before or after I..."

"About the same time. I remember feeling you inside. It really hurt. I couldn't- it just hurt too much, and I was so sick. The room was spinning and hazy."

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

"What happened after that?"

"We fought."

"I vaguely remember that. Over what?"

"You wanted to stop, and I didn't, but we stopped, though. You ran into the bathroom and puked. You were crying saying you wanted to go home. You called your dad to come get you."

"So my dad picked me up and brought me home?"

"Yeah."

"Do you know anything that happened after that?"

I nodded. "Your dad and I talked about it. He reamed me for what happened. He said you continued to be sick, and you spilled your guts, literally and figuratively. You threw up on your parents several times apparently and told them about us having sex."

"Oh, my God. I never would have told them, Ben."

"Well, you weren't in your right mind. He's really mad at me for letting you get hurt. He thinks someone drugged you and blames me for not watching out for you."

"It's not your fault."

"It is. I should have known something was up with you. I was just too drunk to put it together. Then I made it worse by trying to have sex with you when you were like that. God, I hate myself for hurting you."

"Ben," she whispered, sitting up gingerly. She put her arms around me, and I did the same. Bringing her into a hug, I held her closely for several minutes. I could feel her head in the crook of my neck. "Ben, I wanted to," she confessed. "Don't be mad at yourself for something I wanted, too."

"But you never would have done it if you hadn't gotten in trouble at the party."

"That doesn't mean I didn't want to. Whatever I drank, it only made me lose my inhibitions. It didn't make me feel anything that wasn't already there. I love you, Ben," she softly said into my neck. "I wanted to be with you."

My heart fluttered at hearing that. Kissing the red head, I answered, "I love you, too, Mary Katherine."

We sat that way for several minutes before a knock on the door disturbed us. Her mother looked at us. "I thought I would put your roses in some water," she said.

Mary Katherine nodded her head and allowed her mother to take them before we were left alone again. "I guess now that everyone knows they won't let us be alone any more."

I shook my head. "I thought your dad was going to kill me when he saw me at the door. He said he won't let us be alone together. We have to have adult supervision."

"That's the last thing I ever wanted to happen," she grumbled. "Does that mean you aren't supposed to be in here?"

"They said I could be in here as long as the door stayed open, and they were home."

She nodded and pulled out of my arms. Settling back down into bed, she asked, "Will you stay here with me for awhile? Lie next to me and hold me."

"Okay, sure." I pulled off my jacket and tossed it over the end of the bed before climbing onto the vacant side. I figured I wouldn't press my luck with her parents that day more than I already had and stayed on the outside of the covers, even as much as I didn't want to. Putting my arms around my girl, I cuddled her protectively and closed my eyes. Our reverie only lasted a few minutes until her mother came back.

"I think it's time for Sydney to go," she stated. "You need your rest, Mary Katherine."

Knowing we had no room to argue, I nodded my head. Her mother waited in the hallway as I put on my coat to ensure I was going to do as she asked. I leaned down and placed a kiss on Mary Katherine's forehead. "I'll call you later." With that I was escorted to the front door.

Getting back in my car, I drove toward home. The conversation with Mr. La Croix weighed heavily on my mind. He had to have been right. Someone intentionally slipped Mary Katherine something at the party. It was the only logical explanation, and I was going to find out who it

was. Going to Todd's I rang the bell and then opened the door, knowing his parents were still gone. All the party-goers from the night before, minus the girls, were still there, wallowing in their hangovers. I scowled at the collective group.

"Hey, champ. How was your night?" Todd questioned. He was trying to nurse his own hangover with another beer.

"Which one of you did it?"

"Did what?" Jake asked.

"Which one of you drugged Mary Katherine?"

"What do you mean drugged? We didn't drug her. We slipped her some vodka. That's all," Jason stated. He looked as if he was telling the truth.

"Somebody did more than that, and I want to know who it was and what it was they gave her," I demanded.

Jason looked at me and the rest of the group. "Todd, you didn't," he mumbled. "I thought we all agreed it was just going to be vodka."

"What did you give her, Todd?"

He looked at Jason. "Just a little something to help her relax. It worked, didn't it? She was all over you. You got laid, didn't you? Isn't that what matters?"

"No, that's not what matters, asshole! You made her sick! Now what did you give her?"

He still didn't answer, but Jason did it for him. "Todd thought it would be a good idea to give her more than vodka. He wanted to slip some X in her drink."

"You gave Mary Katherine X?"

"Just enough to get her to in the right mind set. After she had it, she drank the vodka no problem. There wasn't going to be a way to feed her vodka without a little help. She would have noticed."

"When did you give it to her? X doesn't usually work that slowly. We were here for hours."

He grinned. "I had a little help from the girls. They're the ones that crushed it up and put it in her drink while we were playing hoops. It worked out in the end, didn't it? Tell me you got laid. I paid good money for a guaranteed lay for you."

"It was virtually date rape that way, Todd! She wouldn't have had sex with me if she wasn't drugged! You should have told me that was what you were planning to do! You ruined everything! I'm damn lucky she's even talking to me today!"

"Come on, Ben. Lighten up. You got what you wanted. You should be thanking me," Todd sneered.

Feeling my anger grow, I rushed across the room to where he was sitting and grabbed him out of his seat by his t-shirt. He was so shocked he didn't even have time to react as his beer fell to the floor, and I slammed him into the wall. "Don't you ever do that to her again! I could kill you for hurting her like that!"

"You've wanted that girl forever, Ben! I made it happen for you, and this is the thanks I get?" Screaming in frustration, I couldn't control myself. My fist went flying, hitting him right in the jaw. His eyes turned cold as he glared at me in disbelief. "Fuck, Ben! That's the last time I ever do anything nice for you, man!"

"It wasn't nice, Todd! I practically raped my girlfriend! Things will never be the same between us, and it's your fault!" With that I turned and left them all standing there.

Things between Mary Katherine and me changed dramatically after that night. Her parents were constantly monitoring us. I truly felt like a person they didn't trust anymore. They made it nearly impossible for the two of us to have any privacy together. We would go out together almost every weekend night, but the curfew was strictly enforced. Even more they rescinded their original decision about allowing me upstairs in Mary Katherine's room, deciding that the first floor was truly the only place I belonged. Long nights of trying to progress our relationship on the couch of the den didn't let us get very far, especially with her parents wandering through at any moment. It forced the both of us to stay on our best behavior, even though the sexual curiosity had grown stronger than ever. Fortunately my parents were not as strict. At my house Mary Katherine was allowed in my room with the door closed but only if they were home. We did all our making out at my house, but she was too scared of getting caught to go further. The desperation began to get to us.

One February day when I went by school to see her, she greeted me with a hug. We were supposed to go to her house to study as was our usual habit. However, she said, "I told my parents I was going to the mall with some friends after school."

"Really?" I questioned in surprise. I had never known her to lie to her parents.

She nodded. "Let's go to your house."

"Yeah, sure. We should leave your car here and walk."

She agreed. Holding hands we walked back to my house. It was completely empty as usual. Neither of my parents got home from work until after six. We had almost three whole hours alone together. We detoured to the kitchen for a snack and beverages before heading up to my room. I went to my stereo and turned it on, putting in my favorite rap CD. She flopped down on my bed and placed her drink on my nightstand. Moving over to the bed, I joined her on the queen-sized bed. We just reclined quietly for a few minutes eating chips and drinking soda while

we listened to the music. However, when it was clear we both had finished our snack, we cuddled.

"It's so nice to be alone. I thought this day would never come," she mentioned.

"Me neither. This was a good idea."

She nodded, meeting eyes with me. I smiled down at her and then moved to kiss her softly. It felt good to be relaxed again with each other like this. The overbearing parents were putting a damper on our relationship. As if we both knew we had to take advantage of our opportunity, we began to kiss and fondle each other more ardently through our clothes. Finding my way between her thighs, I concentrated on her neck. She was so sensitive there. I loved the sounds she made when I would nip her playfully. My hands freely wandered to her school-required button down and slowly worked open the buttons. Mary Katherine's back arched as my left hand found its target, her lace covered breasts.

"Ben," she whispered, cradling my head in her hands.

I knew what she wanted. I had been able to recognize quickly over the past month and a half. Without a word, I circled her back with my left hand and freed her from her confines. My mouth joined my left hand in exploration for long minutes. Feeling her hips rocking into mine, I wanted desperately to know if she was starting to get turned on, too. My right hand slipped under her skirt. She was. Looking in her eyes, I took a deep breath before asking, "Do you want to... you know?"

She exhaled, the air covering my face, we were so close together. "Do you?" anxiously she asked.

"Yeah... but only if you do," I tried to reassure her. I wasn't about to make the same mistake that I had over Christmas Break. "We don't have to if you don't want to. I don't want you to think I'm pressuring you or anything."

Mary Katherine gave a slow nod. "Okay. I want to."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. I just..."

"You just what?"

"I just don't want it to hurt like last time," she admitted shyly, breaking our eye contact.

"I'll be gentle. I promise. I won't hurt you, Mary Katherine."

She nodded her head. I could tell she was still uncertain, but we continued our pace, slowly undressing each other until there were no clothes separating us. Lying on top of her, I looked

down into those blue eyes. I kissed her softly as my right hand found between her thighs once again. She gave a nervous exhale.

"I've got you. I promise not to hurt you," I whispered, leaning to kiss her. Going slowly I only used two fingers and slipped into her. She whimpered. "Are you okay? Does this hurt?" She shook her head, but I saw tears. "Mary Katherine, are you sure you're all right? Do you want me to stop?"

"No. I'm sorry. I just..." Her crying made her stop talking.

"It's all right. I've got you." I didn't really know what else to say. This wasn't the reaction I was expecting. Hearing no other words forthcoming, I just decided to forge ahead. Moving slowly I set a gentle pace for her, and it was only a few moments before she started to respond. Her arms clutched my back as we kissed. Not being really experienced this way, I did what I thought she would like. She seemed to enjoy it, but I didn't know for sure, so I inquired, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah."

"Does it hurt at all?"

"No. It feels good actually," she confessed.

"Good. I'm glad." A few more minutes passed, and even though it felt good to both of us, I was surprised I wasn't eliciting the responses I had seen in porn or read online. This didn't seem like it would be difficult. Then I had a horrible thought of not being able to please her. It gripped me like a vice and refused to leave. If I couldn't please Mary Katherine sexually, she wouldn't love me. She would find someone else.

"Ben, Ben, that hurts," she winced. I hadn't even realized in my panic I had started to push harder than I wanted to.

"Sorry," I whispered.

She looked at me quizzically. "Are you okay?"

"Fine," I quickly responded. It sounded fake even to my ears.

"Baby, what's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Ben, talk to me. What's wrong, baby?" she asked, cupping my face in her hands. It was my turn to cry, but I held my tears, so they wouldn't fall. "Ben, please tell me what's wrong. Am I not doing something you want?"

"No. I just didn't think it would be this hard."

"What would be this hard?"

"You know."

"No, I don't. You need to tell me."

"Pleasing you," I choked out.

"Ben, you are. It feels really good. I like what you're doing." She kissed my temple sweetly.

"What if I can't make you come?" I questioned, falling victim to her sweet, consoling wiles.

"It's okay."

"No, it's not," I grumbled in disagreement.

"It might just take some time," she said.

There was silence between us for a moment. Neither of us moved. This wasn't working the way I wanted it to. Finally after a moment, I kissed her ear. "May I... go down on you?"

"What?"

"Will you let me?" I had renewed my hope. That was what was missing. All the women came when their lovers went down on them in lesbian porn.

"Only if you want to," supportively she answered.

I was determined to please her, so with her permission I inched my way down her body, placing kisses along her skin. Tasting the soft skin of her stomach, I took in the scent of her. She smelled incredible, and I found myself wanting to know the taste of her, more than I had originally thought. Reaching my goal, I groaned at the wetness that awaited my mouth. I was suddenly hungry for her. That first taste was better than anything I had ever had before, and hearing the cry that came from above me, I knew this was what was going to please her.

"Ben," she cried, fingers lacing through my hair. "God, Ben."

"I've got you, baby. You're beautiful, Mary Katherine." The sounds of pleasure continued from my girlfriend's mouth, making me feel extremely good about my own efforts. Getting the hang of it, I added my fingers to the task. After awhile her moans changed to cries and then screams as her legs started to tense. Her grip on the back of my head became stronger, and then before I even realized it, her thighs clamped down around my shoulders as her inner walls began to contract. She cried out my name one last time with a long string of profanities and taking God's name in vain in a way I had never heard from her before. Then there was silence as she panted for breath. I had done it. I had made her come. Leaving my fingers inside of her, I crawled back

up her body and nuzzled into her neck, kissing it gently. Her arms held me closely. "Are you okay?" I whispered.

She nodded. "Yeah," she mumbled. Her voice was scratchy and raw. She cleared her throat for a moment. "My throat hurts."

"You want me to get you a drink?"

"No. I don't want you to leave." A few moments passed before she whispered, "This is starting to hurt. Will you pull out?" I really didn't want to, but I did as she asked. Putting my arms around her, I sighed. She started to giggle, and I couldn't help myself. I joined her. "And you were worried," she said, combing her hands through my hair.

"I just wanted to make you happy," I confessed.

"I would say you succeeded. Now the question remains if I can make you just as happy," she mentioned. Our eyes met. It took me a moment to realize what she was saying, but when I felt her hand slip between my thighs, I caught on quickly. Until that moment I had never thought about her ever reciprocating. None of my fantasies entailed that, but just then as her fingers teased me, my desires to have her know me just as intimately surfaced. My insides ached with need. I wanted to feel her inside of me just as badly as I had wanted to feel her. I whimpered with her teasing strokes on the outside of my heat. "Ben, are you a virgin?" she asked.

I met her eyes. I knew I had to tell her the truth, even though it wasn't the cool thing to do. Even though I had enough solo experience to last a lifetime, I had never been with someone else. Slowly I nodded my head. "Yeah," I admitted.

The smile that graced her face made me realize I had made the right decision. Neither of us said more as I felt her slowly slip inside of me. My eyes closed as I moaned in enjoyment. It felt good. Everything about it felt good. Feeling Mary Katherine rolling us over, so I was on my back, she took on the task of trying to please me. She was a natural, though. Every touch was just perfect, and it wasn't long until I was as incapacitated as she had been. After I had calmed, she pulled out and snuggled into my shoulder. We laid in silence. I tugged the sheet and comforter that was at the foot of my bed up over us, and we just cuddled together until we fell asleep.

When I awoke from our nap, I looked at the clock. It was 5:30. I knew my parents were going to be home soon, and Mary Katherine was not supposed to be there. Even though I didn't want to do it, I gently nudged her awake. "We have to get up. My parents will be home soon."

"I don't want to," she grumbled.

"I know. Me neither, but you aren't supposed to be here. Remember?"

"I know." Both of us slowly rose from the bed and pulled on our clothes. Together we walked back to her school, so she could get her car. "You want to come over after dinner and study?" she asked as we cuddled by her car.

"I'll ask if I can when I get home."

We kissed gently. "I love you, Ben."

"I love you, too. I'll call you after dinner."

She nodded her head in agreement before getting into her car. I watched her drive out of sight before turning to walk home. By the time I got there, my parents had arrived. They greeted me pleasantly and asked how my day was. I gave them the usual answer before going upstairs to my room. Collapsing onto my bed, I couldn't keep the smile off my face as I relived the afternoon in my mind. Mary Katherine and I finally had sex after all the years of dreaming of her. At that moment I didn't think I could ever be happier.

Over the course of the next few months, we found time to sneak away together to fulfill our sexual desires, even though our parents were still trying to keep tight reigns on us. When we were at each other's places under supervision, we were often busted making out, and each of us could tell it was wearing on our parents who were trying to keep us out of trouble, not knowing they were waging a useless war against our hormones. Mary Katherine and I were determined to be together regardless of what they said.

For Mary Katherine's eighteenth birthday that April, her parents allowed me to take her out since it was a Friday night, saying they were having a party for her on Saturday with her friends from school. Since it was a weekend night, we made the most of it. I took her to a nice dinner with my savings and then took her star-gazing out in this secluded place outside of town. Really it was just an excuse to be alone together without our parents. Taking my parents' old SUV out to this field we had discovered a few weeks ago, we parked it in the seclusion. It didn't take us long to find our way into the far backseat to do what we really wanted. We had hours together. Regretfully we were not able to stay as long as it took to satiate our desires. I had to take her home for her curfew.

That night though when I walked her to the door, she told me to be quiet and snuck me inside. She ran upstairs to tell her parents she was home while I lingered in the entry. A few minutes later she quietly snuck down the stairs and motioned for me to follow her. I did. We went down into the basement, which was forbidden territory to me, but right then I didn't care. All that mattered to me was the look on my girlfriend's face that told me she wasn't finished with me yet. Mary Katherine only turned on one small light to illuminate the space.

The basement was unfinished with a damp dark feel to it, but I didn't care as I felt my girlfriend's arms come around me. She pulled me over to the washer and dryer and jumped up onto the dryer, so we were on closer eye level. "We have to be quiet," she whispered.

"Are you sure about this?"

"You can't leave me like this, Ben. I'm far from finished with you."

That was all I needed to hear. I immediately went back to pleasuring her as we had been doing most of the night. We were so involved in it, though, we didn't hear the footsteps upstairs or the basement door open. However, when the overhead light came on and feet bound down the steps, there was nothing that could be done to conceal what we were doing. Even though we managed to haphazardly cover ourselves with our clothes, it was still obvious as her father glared at us.

"That's what I thought," he stated. "I knew I didn't hear your car drive away. Both of you upstairs now!" Making ourselves presentable, we followed his instructions and went upstairs. Going into the den, we saw Mary Katherine's mother standing there. She didn't look pleased either. Her father turned to me. "It's time for you to go, Sydney."

I nodded my head and looked at Mary Katherine. She looked scared. I didn't blame her. Both her parents looked pissed. "Happy birthday," I whispered. There was so much more I wanted say but didn't in front of her parents. With that I was escorted out to my car. As I opened my car door, Mary Katherine's father grabbed me by the shoulder and spun me around. Seeing the anger in his eyes, I was afraid for a moment. However, he quickly dropped his hold on me and crossed his arms across his chest.

"I trusted you, Sydney! And you just threw that away! My daughter is not yours for the taking! You will not be alone with her ever again, Sydney! I gave you a second chance, and you blew it! All you had to do was behave, and you blew it! And for what? You will never have a second chance with us! You better go home and think hard about what you've done! I will be telling your parents!"

True to his word, by the following morning, my parents woke me up early for a talk. They told me what Mr. La Croix had told them. When they asked me if it was true, I didn't lie. I told them it was and was promptly grounded for a few weeks. It wasn't as bad as Mary Katherine's punishment, though. She was grounded for the rest of the school year. Eight weeks without a social life was a tough punishment for our incursion. During that time, we couldn't even talk on the phone or email. We only saw each other a few minutes a day after school, and even then her mother started picking her up from school to ensure our exchanges were kept to a minimum. I missed her graduation, and she missed mine.

By the time we were allowed to see each other again in June, permanent damage had already been done. Her parents made good on their promise. We were never alone. One of them was always with us at her house, and we weren't allowed to go out together. She wasn't even allowed to come to my house anymore. The rest of the summer followed in the same fashion, and in early August I was to leave for the University of Connecticut for basketball.

The morning I was to leave with my parents I went to her house to say goodbye. We stood outside holding onto each other and crying. I never imagined parting would hurt so much. I had come to love this woman so deeply. Leaving for college was not something I was looking forward to, because it meant I was going to be without her. Even though I had a bright basketball future ahead of me, Mary Katherine had come to mean more. Standing there kissing and promising to write and call, I felt my heart ripping from my chest. Time apart for us was going to be excruciatingly difficult. We wouldn't see each other until the holidays at the earliest.

Once both of us were at our respective colleges, the time and our schedules made it difficult to talk as much as we wanted. The all-night phone calls ceased after a few weeks, replaced with shorter calls a few times a week. Emails likewise dwindled in length and volume. Our schedules were just too much, and without even talking about it, communication almost halted all together until that fateful day. Mary Katherine called me crying and upset. She said she just couldn't do it anymore. It was too hard to be apart. Holding onto the dream was too much heartache for her. I knew it was coming, even though I didn't want it to admit it. We were just too young to cope with the distance. The woman I loved broke up with me that day on the phone, and I never saw or heard from her again. It was painful to realize my dream girl was no longer mine. My Mary Katherine was gone, all grown up into a woman I didn't know any longer.

As an adult I occasionally think about to my childhood. There were so many things about it that gave me great joy, my family, my friends, my glory as a basketball player. However, by far, the first love of my life, Mary Katherine La Croix, dominates those memories. What we had was so pure, so perfect. We were young and in love. There were no complications with life that kept us apart like there are as an adult, no meetings, jobs, kids, or pressures. Back then it was simple. We were determined to be together, to experience life. Sometimes I wonder where she is. What has she become? Is she married? Does she have children? Somewhere out there is a lucky person. Of this I am sure. They are loving my first love, my little Catholic school girl crush, the girl that was always more than what she seemed, my sweet Mary Katherine.

[Alex Tryst's Scrolls](#)
[Main Page](#)