

~ The Urge to Merge ~  
by Red Hope

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**Violence:** It certainly has violence in it.

**Sexual Content:** This is femslash but nothing too sexually explicit.

**Summary:** Niki Sanders has returned home to Las Vegas after her horrifying experience in New York City. She tries to carry on a normal life again and move past her husband's death. But any solace is short lived when Niki meets the famous Doctor Toni Kevin, who is notable for her psychological cures. Niki develops an interest in Toni, but her alter ego, Jessica, isn't too keen on the psychologist. Suddenly, everything becomes skewed when Micah is kidnapped, and it seems like the good doctor has all the answers.

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## Chapter 1

Niki Sanders flicker her high beams down once she noticed the cars pulled off to the side of the road. She also slowed down and stole a quick glance at the two cars parked on the shoulder. As she passed, she watched a violent scene of a man squarely punching a woman in the face. Niki turned her head away, and her eyes fluttered.

Niki kept driving though. She made it around a sharp bend, but the image of the stranger getting beaten flashed before her eyes. It gave her a bad taste in her mouth, and she felt an old, bitter anger arise in her that was something she often resisted.

"Go back," whispered Niki's own voice, yet she never moved her lips.

Niki swallowed and disregarded the ghostly words. Although she began to drive slower because she couldn't help but think about that woman's danger.

"You know what it's like," the voice encouraged. "Don't let it happen when we can do something about it."

Niki pulled off onto the side of the road. She had a frantic heartbeat as she struggled with herself. She peered up into the rear view mirror and stared at the direction she'd driven. She briefly closed her eyes then opened them again. There in the backseat, she saw herself sitting quite confidently.

"Come on, Niki." Jessica gradually arched her eyebrow. "If you wait any longer, she may be dead."

Niki felt the panic set in deeper. She slammed her foot onto the gas pedal and spun the wheel. In seconds, she had her car turned around on the lonely road, and she sped down the road.

"Jessica," Niki called.

"Right here," came back Jessica's voice despite she couldn't be seen.

"I... I think this is more your department than mine," Niki softly admitted. She noted the cars on the opposite shoulder so she pulled onto her shoulder.

"Park the car, and I'll take it from here," Jessica promised.

Niki had put her hand on the parking gear and shifted it out of drive. As soon as she'd done so, she suddenly felt an out of body experience, and she could no longer move despite her body was in motion. She felt as if she was watching television now.

Jessica Sanders tossed open the car door, and her long legs lifted her from the car. She briefly heard a woman's painful cry, which fueled her deeper rage. She suddenly broke into a run and crossed the road instantly. She leapt over the first car's hood, yet she slammed her right hand onto the hood, and managed to turn herself to the right. She'd made all the right calculations and nailed a guy in his chest with her feet.

The man flew back a few feet and hit the ground hard. He groaned but confusingly peered up at what'd hit him so hard.

Jessica glanced down at the woman that was huddled on the ground and against the black car. She could barely make out the woman's features in the late evening. She turned her head back to the attacker, and she noticed he was getting to his feet.

The man was on his wobble feet, yet he reached behind to his back. He was going for a gun.

Jessica knew what he was after, and she moved fast. She rushed him, grabbed his wrist, and yanked his arm up to the sky. A gunshot rang out.

"Who the Hell are you?"

Jessica was smug, but she grabbed the man by the throat. She started to squeeze, but she leaned over the small man. "Your worst nightmare." She tightened her hold and whispered, "Let go of the gun, and I might make this painless as possible for you."

The man bared his teeth and shut his eyes. He then felt his feet lifted off the ground, and he dangled. Soon the pain increased in his right wrist so he screamed and released the gun.

Jessica now easily lifted the man into both her hands. She hefted him over her head then gave him a hard throw. She watched him fly before he hit the gravel, rustic ground. She then knelt and picked up the gun.

The attacker groaned in pain and rested on his side. He tried to sit up, but the pain was too great.

Jessica sashayed up with the gun in her right hand. She knelt down in front of him then pressed the gun's barrel against his temple. She darkly loomed over him and growled, "Shooting you would be too kind. I rather return the favor you showed her."

"Jessica, let him go," Niki tried.

Jessica ignored the remark and instead trailed the barrel down his temple to his cheek.

"Please don't," the man begged. "I didn't mean to-"

"To beat the shit out of her?" Jessica snapped. "You made that apparent." She grabbed him by the throat again. She then slowly started to stand and lifted him up too.

The woman worked through some of her haze. She was bloody, and her black blouse was stained. She forced her aching body to lift her. Yet she had to lean against the car for support. She gasped for air, but she focused her vision on the scene of her savior holding up her attacker in the air. She needed to stop anybody from dying.

"Don't do this, Jessica," Niki pleaded.

"So he can do it again?" Jessica hotly fought.

The man swallowed and frantically wondered who the woman was talking to now. He couldn't see anybody besides the woman he'd attacked. He knew she hadn't spoken either.

"No because we don't need another death on our hands," Niki argued.

Jessica growled and lifted the man higher up, and she repointed the gun at his forehead. "It'll be on mine." She cocked the gun.

"It'll be on ours," Niki sadly reminded. "Please."

"She's... right," the female stranger informed. She'd managed to cover the small distance and hoped to stop any deaths.

Jessica sharply turned her head, and she was clearly stunned. She wasn't sure whether the woman's ability to walk surprised her more or the fact that Jessica was sure the woman had heard Niki too.

"He's not worth it," the woman argued, "and it's not his fault. Trust me." She licked her cracked, bloody lips. "Just let... him go." She was breathing heavy and starting to weaken.

Jessica felt her fire fade out. She gave a brief extra squeeze, then she released the man. She stared down at him and watched him curl into a ball like a frightened kitten. He was quite the opposite compared to how Jessica and Niki saw him earlier.

"Thank you," the woman murmured, but she lost her strength. She began to collapse to the ground.

Jessica acted hastily and caught the woman in her long arms. She adjusted the unconscious load and straightened up better. She glanced back at the fearful man huddled on the ground. She huffed and walked back to the cars.

"We have to get her help," Niki informed. She watched Jessica peer down at woman in their arms, and Niki could tell it wasn't too bad. There was just a lot of blood.

"No hospitals," Jessica coldly stated. She crossed the road then dropped the gun by her car's wheel. She managed the rear door open, and she carefully rested the small woman down in the backseat. She hastily inspected the woman's injuries and decided they weren't too bad. There was just a lot of blood spread out from the lacerations over her face. Jessica carefully pushed the woman's black blouse up and carefully inspected her ribcage.

"I didn't think you could be that gentle," Niki commented.

"There's a lot you don't know about me," Jessica gruffly replied. She pulled the shirt back down once she was satisfied that nothing was wrong. She straightened up from the car and closed the door quietly. She scooped up the gun. She clearly looked over the weapon but decided to rid of it instead.

Jessica Sanders held the gun with both hands, and she grounded her teeth. She slowly started to bend the gun in half, then she wiped it clean of her prints. Finally she threw it with all her strength over the hood of the car. She lost sight of it in the darkness.

Jessica hopped back in the running car. She buckled up then drove off quickly. She carefully watched the few passing cars on her way back home. Occasionally she glanced in the rear mirror and visually checked on the woman. On her third check, she actually saw Niki there.

Niki was squeezed in the small opening left by the petite woman. She had the woman's head in her lap and was inspecting the wounds.

Jessica swallowed, but she focused back on her driving. "How is she?"

Niki peered up at the mirror and briefly held eye contact with Jessica. "It's not too bad." She lowered her gaze again. "You know, she heard me."

Jessica didn't respond, but she was thinking about it.

"How is that possible?" Niki murmured.

Jessica still held her silence, yet her eyes were a sharp gray. They were typically bluer whenever Niki was in control but that wasn't the case now. She glanced back in the mirror again and only saw Niki's face, which was peaceful and eyes closed. Jessica had a faint ache in her chest.

After another fifteen minutes, Jessica finally pulled into the driveway of her home. She parked the car, flicked off the headlights, and shut off the car. She got out then went to the back of the car. She carefully pulled the petite, raven-haired beauty out of the car. She shifted the stranger in arms then kicked the door shut.

Jessica easily carried the woman to the front door, entered, and was greeted by her son.

"Hi, Mom." Micah peered around the television and became wide eye. "Holy shit, who is that, Mom?"

"Watch your language," Jessica warned. She mentally groaned at herself because she often cussed. She set her thought aside and hurried to her bedroom. "Can you get my bedroom door, Micah?"

Micah slid off the sofa then rushed ahead of his mother. He opened the door nice and wide then flipped the over head light switch. He was awestruck and watched how his

mom easily carry the woman to the made bed.

Jessica carefully lowered the injured woman, but she turned her head to Micah. "Can you get me some wet clothes from the bathroom?"

Micah snapped to and nodded. He rushed off.

Jessica gazed back at the unconscious woman on her bed. She softly sighed and whispered, "This is more you than me, Niki." She turned her head to the left and stared at the long, high mirror that was apart of her closet. She observed how Niki was seated in the same place as she but studied the stranger.

Jessica turned back to the woman then slowly she started to let go of her dominant control. She felt herself fade into the background of the body she'd possessed earlier. Now she was the one watching a seeming television episode.

Niki blinked a few times now that she back in control of her body. She smiled at seeing her son coming back with the wet washclothes plus a towel. "Thanks, cutie." She placed a quick kiss to his temple. "Can you also get me some of that ointment and any bandages we have?"

"Sure thing, Mom." Micah went off on his mission again.

Niki now focused on her task to get the wounds cleaned as best as possible. She started by wiping the blood away. As she went along, she was able to fully take in the woman's striking features. She'd never seen such ridge cheek bones or full lips. Then the woman's midnight hair reflected the light in certain spots.

With her freehand, Niki picked up the tiny but aged pendent hooked to the woman's black necklace. She leaned over closer and after inspection, she realized it was a black tree that had connecting branches to its roots. Then a Celtic border in green encircled the tree. But upon careful inspection, Niki noticed a small, red symbol etched into the tree's trunk. She'd never seen such a symbol, but she figured it had something to do with the Celts.

Niki lowered the charm then continued her task to clean the blood away. Her son dropped off the supplies, and she asked him to wait out in the living room for her and close the door too. Once it was shut, Niki unbutton the woman's top and proceeded to clean the blood on her upper chest. She didn't see any bruising on her ribs, which was a good sign.

It took Niki a solid forty-five minutes to clean and treat the wounds. She had to use a few butterfly bandages to keep some open wounds closed. She had the woman's clothes completely removed by the end, and she pulled away the sheets on the

opposite side of the bed. Niki picked up the small woman and felt the stark weight. She wondered how Jessica so easily managed to carry this woman earlier.

Niki carefully tucked the woman under the cool sheets then settled the blanket and comforter over her. She left her room then ducked into the laundry room with the woman's clothes. She got them into the washer and started the normal cycle.

Micah looked at his mother when she silently approached her. He scooted down on the couch to make room.

Niki sunk into the sofa and spread out her long legs. She dropped her head back and covered her forehead with her right hand.

Micah slightly grinned but watched his television program.

Niki sighed then lifted her head up. She focused on the television and asked, "What is this, Micah?"

Micah shrugged and replied, "It's the Discovery Channel... its about these Ghostbusters."

"Ghostbusters?" Niki skeptically argued.

"Yeah... you know. People have ghost problems in their house so they hire these ghostbusters to detect them and get rid of them." Micah grabbed the remote and turned it up a bit. "It's really cool."

Niki slightly grinned and teased, "You're going to have nightmares tonight."

"Mom," Micah complained and sighed.

Niki patted her son's knee, but she watched the show a bit. She sensed Micah's curious eyes that would go to her, to the TV, and back to her. She turned her head to Micah and answered his unasked question. "I don't know her name, where she's from, or anything else."

Micah giggled and shook his head at how his mother understood him so well. He became more serious after a beat. "What happened to her?"

Niki shrugged and simply replied, "I think she was attacked." She refused to go into details and let Micah hear the entire story.

"Will she be okay?"

Niki stretched out her hand and clutched her son's knee. "Yeah... I think so." She patted his knee then let go. She looked back at the television and complained, "Isn't there anything else better on?"

Micah had a wide grin, and he took the remote. He handed it to his mother and let her pick something. "It's kinda boring anyway."

Niki started channel flipping but asked, "You don't believe in ghosts?"

"Nah," Micah waved off. "They're not real."

The mother softly laughed, but she finally settled on a channel. She set the remote down, and she was pleasantly surprised when Micah snuggled up to her. She stretched out her arm and encircled his waist after his head came to her thigh. She fondly studied him for a few seconds, then she looked up at the television again.

Micah watched the TV with his mother for awhile, but he was feeling sleepy pretty early. He'd done his schoolwork earlier, had dinner, and only started to watch TV just before his mom came home. He now slowly started to fall asleep.

Niki glanced down at her son. She let him stay like that for another half an hour before she shifted then picked him up. She stood up with the precious bundle in her arms and easily carried him to his room.

Micah woke up, but he was clearly groggy. He helped get ready for bed then was tucked into bed for the night. He received a kiss on the forehead, and he whispered loving words to his mother. Quickly he faded back into his dreamscape.

Niki disappeared out of the dim room. She closed the door but left a crack in it. She went back to television and turned the volume down some. She briefly went to the laundry room and took care of the stranger's clothes. She then plopped back into the sofa and flipped through a few channels again. She defocused from the show and wondered what she should do about the woman in her bed.

Niki decided she'd just sleep on her couch tonight. It would be easier that way. With that decided, she leaned forward and untied her black boots. She kicked them off then settled onto the sofa. Her long legs easily ate away at the open space of the sofa, and she turned on her side.

The gargle from the television faded into the backdrop while Niki thought about the nameless woman. She couldn't imagine why that man was attacking her. And she was still baffled how the stranger had heard her speaking to Jessica. It was impossible and utterly ridiculous.



But perhaps the woman had telepathy? But it didn't quite make sense to Niki because the woman didn't seem to require any focusing to use telepathy. The stranger had acted as if Niki and Jessica had been two people, side by side, in a heated argument. Niki set aside her thoughts and decided she'd know more once the woman woke up.

Finally Niki faded into her restless dreams. She couldn't completely get comfortable on the couch. She turned much of the time while the nightmares bothered her tonight. She'd dreamt that Jessica had taken complete control of her body, became utterly violent, and went on a rampage that ended in Micah's death. She shot up straight from the sofa, and she was covered in sweat from the nightmare.

Niki caught her breath first. She climbed out of the sofa then padded to the bathroom near her bedroom. She closed the door quietly then went to the sink. She partially feared seeing Jessica there, but it was her own reflection.

Niki turned on the water then splashed the cool water against her heated skin. She then soaped up her hands and cleaned away the earlier sweat. She briefly let the water just drip off her clean face then she reached for the towel. She dried her face then pulled the towel away. Her reflection mirrored right back at her without any change.

"Do you really think I'd do that to Micah?" Jessica softly asked.

Niki noticed her eyes were ash gray in the mirror when they normally were not. She set the towel on the side of the sink and stared at her now changed reflection. She could tell it was Jessica because of the gray eyes, the stoic look, and the arrogance that was never Niki's.

"I protect him... and I protect you." Jessica folded her arms in the mirror then she seemed to lean against the side of the edge of the mirror. "I've been protecting you for a long time."

"If you call killing people protecting then-"

"I do what I have to do... to keep us safe," Jessica fought. "I do what you can't do."

Niki shook her head, but her reflection didn't do the same. "It's wrong... and you know it too." She locked eyes with her stoic image.

"And that's why I do it," Jessica hotly argued. "So you don't have to live with it."

"But I do," Niki rasped. "I am starting to realize I'm just as responsible."

"No you're not." Jessica's tone was softer than earlier. She dropped her arms and faced Niki in the mirror. "I made the choices."

"And I made the choice to let you," Niki coldly reminded. She stepped back and sunk down onto the tub's edge. She bowed her head. "I have to live with your choices." She swallowed and peered up at Jessica. "How is that protecting me?" She got up and walked away without another word. She turned off the bathroom light and went back to the television.

Niki laid back down, but she really couldn't sleep. She grabbed the blanket off the back of her sofa and pulled it over her body. She tried to watch the television, but she really wasn't into it.

"You're right," Jessica sadly whispered, then she faded away from any consciousness that Niki claimed.

Niki never replied, and she never heard from Jessica the rest of the night. She started to feel her eyes heavy, and she dozed off finally just a few hours before dawn. This time her dreams were hardly memorable.

An hour after dawn, Niki woke up to her internal alarm clock. She first checked on the stranger, who was still asleep and hadn't moved during the night. She closed the door quietly then checked on Micah. She had to get him ready for school. She readied him then hurried him to the door. She walked Micah outside and to the bus stop. She stayed with him until the bus came and took him off to school.

Niki entered her house again, but she heard the movements from her room. She told herself to be careful about entering so she wouldn't startle the woman. She first knocked then pushed the door open.

The petite woman was seated so that her back was to the door. She twisted her head around and spotted the tall, blond bombshell that entered. She recognized her from last night despite her memory was somewhat fuzzy.

"Hi," Niki carefully started, "I'm Niki Sanders." She stopped beside the opposite corner of the bed. She rested her hand on the edge of the bed. She then realized the woman's slight predicament without any clothes. "I'm sorry. I have your clothes in the drier. Let me get them."

Before the stranger could get a word out, Niki was gone. She lowered her head and sighed deeply. She kept the blankets over her body, but her eyes trailed over to the nightstand next to her. She noted her wallet and cell phone there. She picked up her wallet and was surprised that nothing was amiss or shifted. She realized just how lucky she was to be picked up by this tall stranger.

Niki returned with the folded jeans, black blouse, and other articles in her hands. She

set them on the bed next to the woman. "How do you feel?"

The woman cleared her throat and spoke for the first time. "I have a slight headache... body ache too." She then grinned and mentioned, "But happy to be alive."

Niki grinned back, but she saddened some. "You just had some bad cuts and bruising around your face and shoulders. You should be fine after a few days."

The woman nodded then she glanced at her clothes in silent hint.

Niki understood and back stepped once. "I'll be right outside in the living room."

"Thank you."

Niki nodded then left the room. She closed the door behind herself so that the stranger had some privacy.

The woman achingly slid out of the high bed. She then proceeded to get dressed into her fresh clothes. She was surprised by her hostess's manners, but she appreciated them too. She ran her fingers through her dark hair after getting everything on but her shoes. She scanned around the room until she found them, then she slipped her feet in and got her shoes laced.

Afterward, she collected her wallet and cell phone from the night stand. She slipped the wallet into her right back pocket then the cell phone went into her left front pocket. She left the bedroom and spotted the tall blond seated in front of a television.

Niki switched off the television then stood up. She easily towered over the petite woman that came toe to toe with her.

"Thank you for your help last night," the stranger insisted, and she had a smile too. She then held up her hand. "I'm Toni... Toni Kevin."

Niki took the woman's small hand, but she found it to be a strong shake. "Niki Sanders," she introduced again. She let go then directed the sofa next to her. "Sit down, please."

Toni nodded and took a seat with the young woman. She touched her aching forehead for a second, but she quickly pulled her hand away. "I don't quite recall everything from last night." She sighed and peered up at curious blue eyes. "I do remember you being there. You stopped him."

Niki shook her head and asked, "Who was he?"

Toni sighed and combed her hair back again. She softly replied, "His name is Philip Cutterman." She hesitated but met Niki's curious gaze. "He's a patient of mine."

Niki did a doubletake and questioned, "A patient?"

Toni nodded once. "Yes." She reached for her wallet and extracted it. She opened it and pulled out a business card, which she held out to Niki. "I'm a psychologist."

Niki had just read that information on the card. She visibly tensed at the thought of a shrink being so close to her with her troubles. She handed back the card and tried to stay calm so she wouldn't show anything. "Why was he attacking you?"

Toni had put her wallet away. She shifted on the sofa. "It's complicated really." She sighed then tried to properly construct her next words without telling too much either. "He has... certain troubles, and he really relies on me to help him through it. I've been away because of personal problems." She paused then quietly finished, "I suppose he couldn't handle the time apart and decided to seek me out."

"If he needed your help then why would he attack you?"

"Well, that's apart of his problem really. He has... urges that he can't control completely." Toni didn't want to dig into it, but she softly added, "I'm really the only person that understands his problems. I try my best to help him." She then leaned back into the sofa. "You can't save everybody though."

"No," Niki murmured, "you can't." She relaxed against the sofa too. She absorbed the new information she had about the former stranger.

Toni had a perplexed look on her face. She turned to Niki and asked, "How did you manage to stop him?" She shook her head and mentioned, "For some reason, I keep thinking you fought with him. You held him up in the air." She shook her head in complete confusion.

"He had a gun," Niki quickly explained, "and I took it from him. I just used that to scare him a bit, and he backed off."

Toni nodded and accepted the explanation. She really had no full recollection for some reason.

"Do you need to get home?" Niki offered. "I can't imagine if your car is or isn't still there."

The psychologist thought about it. She pulled out her cell phone and pushed a side button. After it lit up, she noticed there were a few missed calls. She slipped her

phone back into its home then met Niki's gaze. "I think I may need a ride."

Niki silently agreed so she and Toni gathered themselves and got into the car. Niki followed Toni's directions once they were on the road and deeper into Las Vegas. Toni pointed out her house, and she felt relieved to see it. She only could imagine where her car was located because her and Niki hadn't seen it on the road.

Niki pulled into the driveway. She was impressed by the size of the house, and she knew this suburban area of Las Vegas was a wealthy sector. She glanced at Toni, who unbuckled herself.

Toni smiled at her savior. "Thank you again for everything, Niki."

"It wasn't much," Niki argued. She felt like it wasn't since Jessica had taken care of everything.

"No," Toni argued, "it was a lot." She reached back to her pocket and pulled out a more worn business card. This was the only one that had her cell phone written on the back of it. "Please give me a call sometime soon." She held out the card. "I'd like to repay you for what you did."

Niki waved her hand and refused to take the card. "It's okay."

"No." Toni pushed the card into the younger woman's hand. "Please." She watched long fingers finally take the card. "I'd at least like to take you to dinner so I can thank you."

Niki lost her fight. She smiled and nodded. "I'll call next week."

"Thank you." Toni gave a final smile, then she climbed out of the seat. She started to close the door, but Niki's voice stopped her.

"You might want to report... your charming patient to the police."

Toni held the partially closed door. "I know." She had a concerned look. "I think it's out of my hands now."

"I think so too." Niki hesitated but added, "Let me give you my number... in case something comes up."

Toni Kevin was mildly shocked, but she pulled out her cell phone. "Go ahead."

Niki reported her ten digit number then explained, "That's my cell phone too."

"Great." The psychologist saved the number under Niki's full name. "Thank you again, Niki. I'll talk to you soon."

"See you." Niki watched the petite yet striking woman close the door and head to her house. She set her black car in reverse and returned home. Her entire ride consisted of thinking about the mysterious Toni Kevin.

## **Chapter 2**

Niki quickly moved in front of the mirror, and she hastily worked to get her makeup finished. She only had a few more minutes to get ready. She needed to be on her way for her date. She startled at her thought of this being a date tonight, and she slipped with her lipstick.

"Damn it," she softly cursed. She cleaned up the lipstick and redid it. After she pulled the lipstick away, her reflection developed a smirk, but she hadn't moved her real lips.

"I think you like this psychologist," Jessica taunted.

"It's just a dinner," Niki brushed off. She capped her lipstick and set it aside.

"Not the way I understand it." Jessica lifted her eyebrow into a perfect arch. "You think it's a date. You've never dressed up this much... not even for D.L."

"Please," Niki muttered. She walked off and went to her bedroom. She walked right to her closet because she needed a lightweight jacket.

"What you think is going to happen once she realizes the truth about us?" Jessica interrupted. She stood ridged and confident in the mirror.

"She won't," Niki argued.

"It could happen." Jessica tilted her head. "And if she finds out then she'll want us in a straight jacket." She shifted closer in the mirror. "Been there, done that... I'm not going back after your stunt with the cops."

Niki grabbed a handle, but she hesitated from opening the closet. "I don't think Toni is like that."

"She's a shrink," Jessica snapped. "We'd be a classic bookcase to her." She sensed Niki's deflating excitement and surfaced fears. "If she threatens to take us from Micah, then I'll solve this myself."

Niki grew angry at the threat, and her voice raised in a rare display. "Don't you think

you've killed enough people?"

"Who said anything about killing?" Jessica put her hands on her hips. "I'll just make her life a living Hell." She slotted her eyes at Niki.

Niki stepped back and sunk down on the foot of the bed. She stared at the floor for a beat then lifted her eyes to her living reflection. "Don't do this, Jessica."

Jessica shifted her arms until she had them folded. She studied Niki's desperate features then after a moment, she replied, "It's a fair warning, Niki. As long as she doesn't harm us or separate us from Micah then it's all jim dandy by me."

Niki licked her dry lips then she nodded. "Alright." She had to agree that she couldn't be taken from Micah or the reverse.

"Good." Jessica was satisfied by the rare agreement between them. She then sat down on the bed too and suddenly her image shifted until it matched Niki's.

Niki realized her alter ego was dormant again. She got to her feet and finished getting ready. She pulled out her light coat then picked up her cell phone from the dresser. She hurried out of the quiet house and was thankful that Micah was at her friend's for the night.

The drive to the restaurant didn't take too long. After getting out of her car, Niki was about to pull out her phone and call Toni, but she hesitated when she spotted Toni by the entrance. She smiled and approached the other woman.

Toni had a warm smile and greeted, "It's good to see you, Niki." She appreciated her view of Niki, who looked rather sensual in her maroon v-cut top, black pants, and black dress boots.

"You too, Toni."

"Come on." Toni guided Niki into the nice steakhouse restaurant. She was quite famished herself. She approached the host and told him her name. She and Niki were immediately taken to a table for two. She shrugged off her jacket and revealed her green top that matched her rich green eyes.

Niki hung her jacket on the back of the chair like Toni. She then sat and became comfortable in the cushy chair.

"So Micah made it to your friend's house okay?"

Niki smiled at older woman's concern. "Yeah, it wasn't a problem."

"Good." Toni smiled when the server appeared with their delayed menus. She took hers and let Niki order her drink first. She noted that Niki merely got an ice tea so she did the same. She carefully looked over her menu then mentioned, "The seafood can be very good."

Niki chuckled but kept her head down.

"I know... you wouldn't think so since we're out in the desert." Toni looked to the a la carte menu. "We should split what's on the carte."

Niki was going to suggest that, and she chuckled quietly. "Do you like asparagus?"

Toni nodded then dared, "Mashed potatoes with skin?"

"Perfect," Niki agreed. She heard Toni's soft laugh, which made her smile more. She then decided she'd follow Toni's suggestion. She would have swordfish for her entree.

Toni made up her mind then closed up her menu. She noticed how Niki was observing the busy restaurant. "You've never been here?"

"No." Niki focused back on the psychologist. "Do you come here often?"

"Rarely although it's one of my favorites." Toni rested back in the chair. "I hardly have time. My work keeps me so busy."

Niki was slightly hesitant to bring up Toni's work. She didn't want to lead Toni anywhere near her and Jessica.

Toni keenly felt the shift in Niki. She already understood what caused it so she switched topics quickly. "I did manage to get my car back."

Niki calmed and encouraged the topic. "Did the towing cost much?"

"It wasn't extraordinary," the psychologist replied. "I think the polices' questions were far more obnoxious than anything. But I think they settled down and are off on their man hunt."

"I hope they catch him."

"I hope so too," Toni sadly confided. "It's hard to say what he'll do." She then fell short on anymore details because the server returned. She and Niki put in their orders, but only continued their friendly conversation after the server departed. They discussed each other's lives, yet it mostly remained on their pasts and families.



Niki felt quite absorbed during the dinner. She hadn't been involved in such a pleasant dinner in a long time. She felt her face ache from the smiles. By the time the check arrived, she felt saddened that her evening with Toni would end.

Toni took care of the bill despite Niki's fighting efforts to help pay. She brushed off Niki several times and reminded that she wanted to repay Niki somehow. Toni then climbed to her feet and collected her jacket. She slightly reclined her head to fully take in Niki's tall stature.

Niki put on her coat this time then strolled along side Toni to the restaurant's exit. "Thank you for dinner, Toni."

"It was my pleasure," the psychologist insisted. She decided to walk Niki to her car. "It's been a long time since I've had good company."

Niki felt an ache in her for the older woman. Toni had already told her how her life was lonely because work often took over Toni's life plus Toni had no siblings and her parents were dead. Niki also learned that Toni was originally from South Carolina, and it explained why Toni had a faint southern twang.

Toni stood beside Niki's car. She shrugged on her own jacket because of the night breeze. She then smiled up at the crystal blue eyes that warmly studied her. "I appreciate you coming out... especially when you have a son to care for."

"He doesn't mind getting a night away from mom once in awhile," Niki joked.

Toni took the joke more seriously and asked, "Does he mind sharing a night with his mother and another person?"

Niki tilted her head and considered the hinted request. She knew she shouldn't agree, but she felt something for this woman that she'd never experienced with others, not even D.L. She developed a smile and replied, "No, I don't think he'd mind."

Toni couldn't hide her own smile. She nodded then stepped back once. "I'll call you soon, Niki. Be safe driving home."

Niki only let Toni get a step away. "Toni?" She approached the smaller woman and merely followed her urge. She leaned down and kissed Toni on the cheek. She then whispered, "Thanks for tonight. It was wonderful."

Toni had slightly dark features, but she clearly blushed from the gesture. She cleared her voice once Niki straightened up. "My pleasure." She needed to escape so she backed away several steps. "Goodnight, Niki." She spun on her heels then hurried off

to her car.

"See ya," Niki whispered only to herself. She pleased that Toni positively received her gesture. She chuckled at the mental image of Toni's blush. She went around her car and got into the driver's seat. Niki's drive home was pleasant, and she thought about the dinner. She realized that Jessica was right, and honestly Niki realized she was smitten with Doctor Toni Kevin. How could it be possible after everything? What was it about Toni that made Niki feel so great and even connected?

Niki knew she wouldn't have her answers tonight. She wasn't even sure if she was quite ready for those answers anyway. She didn't directly go home and instead went to her friend's house to get Micah. She parked in the street and turned off her car. She slipped her car keys into her front pocket while she went to the front door. She knocked on it and waited for a minute so she knocked again. Still there was no answer so she became concerned.

Niki tried the door knob and was surprised to find it unlocked. Now that she looked at it, she realized it was actually dented somehow like somebody sabotaged it. She became even more frantic and rushed into the house.

"Micah?" she hollered. She'd entered in the kitchen and noticed everything was a mess. "Oh my god." She hurried through the house. "Katie?" She wasn't getting any response.

Niki checked the downstairs but found nobody. She only saw a complete mess of things, which wasn't Katie's style. She knew somebody had torn up the house. Fear was starting to pump through Niki, and she bounded up the steps to the second floor.

"Micah? Katie?" she called. She halted a step from Katie's closed room once she saw the lights were on inside. She dared to go forward, and she grabbed the handle. She pushed it open and was stunned to see Katie on the bed, nude. She was also tied up and gagged.

"Oh god," Niki gasped. She hastened to the side of the bed. "Katie?" She removed the gag and surveyed the familiar cuts and bruises that covered Katie's body. "Hold on, let me get you something." She hurried to the bathroom where she knew Katie kept bathrobes. She grabbed one but also swiped a pair of small scissors off the sink.

Niki rush back then set the robe aside for a moment. She proceeded to cut the nylon rope, then she helped her stricken friend sit up. "Katie, are you okay?" She put the robe around the frightened woman. "What happened?"

Katie shook her head and emotionally whispered, "Some man broke in here." She lifted her red eyes to Niki. "He took Micah. I'm so sorry, Niki." She began to cry

again.

Niki could barely control her breathing. "I've got to find Micah." She hastily thought and asked, "Who was he?"

"I don't know." Katie shook her head, yet her eyes traveled to her nightstand beside her bed. "He... he left that though."

Niki followed Katie's stare. She spotted something all too familiar, and she picked up the business card on the nightstand. She read Toni's full name clearly printed on it.

"He said he works for her." Katie grabbed her friend's arm. "I'm so sorry, Niki. This is my fault."

"It's okay," Niki insisted. She took her friend's hand from her arm. "Call 911. Tell them what's happened." She then moved away.

"Where you going?"

Niki swallowed against the lump in her throat. "I have to find my son." She didn't wait for a response and left the room.

Katie picked up her cordless phone from the nightstand. She hesitated and stared at Niki, who was rushing down the dark hallway.

Niki was poised at the top of the steps. She lifted the business card and reread the psychologist's name. She was panicked and scared about what could happen to Micah. Where could she start? She then felt herself disconnect from her body, and her legs moved without her control. She rushed down the steps and angrily balled up the business card in her right fist.

"I told you, Niki," Jessica warned. Now in control, Jessica Sanders rushed out of the open front door and across the lawn. She tore out the keys from her pocket, and she hopped into the black car. She harshly throttled the engine then sped out of the small housing complex.

Jessica raced through the streets and roads. She knew from Niki's memory exactly where Doctor Kevin lived. She shut off her headlights just before she turned into the house's driveway. She cut off the engine and glanced at the red BMW parked in front of the garage. "My, my I may just have to steal that when I'm done."

Jessica leaned to her right and yanked open the glove box. She reached in and revealed a shiny silver gun that was fully loaded. She shut the glove box then got out of the car. She first noted the few lights on at one side of the house. She suspected

Doctor Kevin was getting ready for bed.

Jessica slipped to the backside of the house by going around the garage. She hid her gun in a back pocket and toyed with some windows. She found one open and silently climbed through it. She landed inside of some guestroom suspected. Jessica opened the door and entered a main hallway.

Toni moved away from the open door of her master bedroom. She was slowly unbuttoning her green blouse and going over to her walk-in closet. She stopped short beside her flat screen television, which was currently off. She turned to it and picked up the remote from the long dresser. She peered up at the screen that hung on her wall.

Toni pointed the remote at the television, and her finger rested on the power button. But she didn't push it because of the faint reflection in the screen. She furrowed her eyebrows once recognizing the face. She whirled around while saying, "Niki?"

Jessica growled and rushed the psychologist, who she'd snuck up on silently. She slammed Toni back into the dresser.

Toni had dropped the remote, and the wind was knocked out of her. She gasped for air, but the taller woman pushed against her roughly and pinned her hard. She grabbed Niki's strong arm and peered up into gray eyes that weren't at all friendly compared to earlier tonight. "Niki, what's going-"

"Shut up," Jessica snarled. "Tell me what you did with my son."

"What?" Toni was a mix of fear and confusion. "I don't know-" She was cut off sharply.

Jessica swung the psychologist around and threw her to the wood floor. She stepped over the prone woman and reached back to her gun. "That's the wrong answer, doc." She brandished her gun. She knelt down over the psychologist and put the gun to Toni's temple. She had a clear view of Toni's prior wounds from several nights ago, but it didn't matter to her. She only had two things on her mind now.

"I want my son back then I want you dead."

Toni was petrified and pleaded, "I don't know what you're talking about, Niki."

Jessica was clearly becoming agitated further by the lack of answers. She pushed the barrel harder against Toni's head and leaned into her. "Yes you do. You hired somebody to kidnap him."

"Niki, why-"

Jessica's left hand shot out and wrapped around Toni's throat. She cut off the psychologist's lies. "Niki has left me in charge." She leaned in some and hotly breathed, "I'm Jessica Sanders." She now moved the gun and let it trail up to the top of Toni's head. "And if you don't answer my questions right then you'll be diagnosed with a hole in your head."

Toni stared at the woman, who had dramatically changed personalities compared to tonight's dinner. She then was flooded by her hidden memories from the night of her attack. "My god... you're her. You saved me."

Jessica smirked and reminded, "And soon I'll kill you." She jerked the psychologist. "Tell me where my son is, now," she growled.

Toni shut her eyes and uttered, "I don't know. I have nothing to do with it." She reached for Jessica's arm that had the hand on her neck. She clung to the muscular arm and pleaded, "I'm telling you the truth."

"Then why did I find your business card there?" Jessica hotly argued. "And the man that took my son said he worked for you."

Toni opened her eyes, and the desperation showed in them. "Nobody works for me." She swallowed and softly added, "And a lot of people have my card."

"Jessica," Niki broke through, "she's telling the truth. Can't you see that?"

Jessica was going to reply, but she fell short at Toni's sudden wide eye expression.

"Niki?" Toni called.

Jessica tilted her head at the interesting turn of events. She smirked. "Well, I suppose I'm not the only wack job here."

"Let her go, Jessica," Niki demanded. She was angry and struggled against Jessica's strong lock on her body.

"Not until I know what's happened to Micah," Jessica argued.

"I don't know." Toni's thoughts raced through her head, yet it finally occurred to her. "Philip has him."

"Philip?" Jessica echoed.

"Yes, the patient that attacked me that night." Toni swallowed against the strong hand on her throat. "This is his kind of thing. And the more time you waste here, the more plausible it is that Micah may be harmed... or killed."

Jessica slotted her eyes, and her jaw clenched tightly.

"Come on, Jessica. Just let her go." Niki couldn't regain control over her body, but she hoped to reason with her alter ego. "We have to find Micah," she pleaded in hopes it'd get Jessica to stop thinking about killing Toni.

Jessica suddenly pulled the gun away but stayed focused on the psychologist. "Do you know where this Philip might have Micah?"

"Yes," Toni replied. "He's probably hiding from the police. He owns this rundown warehouse outside the city."

Jessica had very gray eyes, but she suddenly yanked her hand away from Toni's throat. She put her gun away, yet she coldly stared at the psychologist. "If you're lying to me-"

"I know," Toni argued. "That's why I'm not lying." She rubbed her sore neck. She suspected there was a bruise already forming there. She was surprised by Niki or rather Jessica's aggressive nature and strength.

Jessica rose up and ordered, "Get up." She waited for Toni to stand too.

"How can you hear me, Toni?" Niki asked.

"We don't have time for that," Toni argued. "I can explain on the way." She found her shoes and put them on hastily.

Jessica arched an eyebrow because for once she agreed with the psychologist's style. She stepped aside as the psychologist breezed past her.

"I'll drive." Toni grabbed her keys and phone from her dresser then hurried down the hallway.

"My kind of woman," Jessica muttered. She easily caught up to Toni because of her wide strides. She left the house and got into the now unlocked BMW.

Toni shifted her car into reverse and rushed out of the driveway. She put on her headlights then raced down the road. "The warehouse will probably take thirty minutes to get there. It's outside of the city a ways." She hit the gas so that the V-6 engine growled louder. "I think I can cut it to fifteen minutes."

Jessica smirked and stretched out her legs in the comfortable car. Yeah maybe this Doctor Toni Kevin had some flare after all.

Toni glanced at the changed woman beside her. She focused back on her speeding driving through the busy streets. "So multiple personalities huh?"

"No," Jessica coldly replied, "just dual personalities. There's only enough room for Niki and I." She rested her right arm on the door's arm rest. "Three or more is a crowd."

The psychologist softly laughed despite it hadn't meant to be a joke.

"How can you hear me?" Niki spoke up.

Toni looked at Jessica, but she could tell that the woman hadn't physically spoke. She indeed heard Niki because Niki's voice was lighter and gentler compared to Jessica's tones. "You're not the first, and you certainly won't be the last."

"You have telepathy?" Jessica theorized.

Toni snorted and replied, "Luckily, no." She braked the car and made a sharp right turn but her German made car easily handled it. "It's a bit more complicated than that really."

"Can you explain it?" Niki urged.

The psychologist sighed, but she tried to compose her explanation. "I've had this for some time. I don't know for how long exactly... I can't quite tell whether it's a curse or a gift." She shook her head, but she stopped the car at a red light. "This... ability I have let's me see people's problems." She glanced at Jessica and added, "Psychologically speaking that is."

The light went green, and the red BMW zipped through the streets with ease.

"I can just talk to people and instantly understood who they are, what they are..."

"What makes them tick," Jessica summarized.

"Exactly." Toni flashed her left blinker and switched into the fast lane. She zipped past a few cars and opened up her car more now that they were on the highway. "I can also momentarily cure people from their mental illness if I'm in close proximity of them."

"Interesting," Niki murmured. She now had a view of Toni because Jessica had turned her head.

"Does that explain why this Philip attacked you?" Jessica queried.

"I'm afraid so." Toni sighed deeply. "I've been working years with Philip. He's..." She reached up and swept her hair behind her right ear. "He's a..."

"A what?" Jessica coldly demanded.

"He has antisocial personality disorder," Toni carefully explained.

Jessica slotted her eyes at the news.

"What does that mean exactly?" Niki's voice slightly trembled in fear.

"It's a common disorder that serial killer's suffer from," Jessica answered. She stared coldly at the psychologist. "Right, doc?"

"Yes," Toni admitted in an irritated voice. "He's never committed any crimes. For years, I've been helping him try to move past his disorder."

"He's about to meet a real killer." Jessica became amused and began to theorize again. "You temporarily cure him... help him feel normal. So you keep doing it, but you get too deeply involved." She shrugged. "That's why you were having personal problems. Then he freaks out because he's lost his drug and hunts you down without really understanding what's happened to him."

Toni Kevin had a dark expression, but she let out a long breath. "Yes, that's pretty much how it happened."

"Hmmm." Jessica's lips thinned, and she folded her arms. "Now thanks to you my son is involved."

"Jessica," Niki argued.

"It's okay, Niki." Toni shook her head and pushed down on the gas pedal. She suddenly was doing eighty-five. "She's right."

Niki was thinking about something, and her thoughts were connected to Jessica's for once. So it was Jessica that posed the question that Niki had derived.

"Why did Philip suddenly turn scared that night?" Jessica cocked her head and waited for her and Niki's answer.



Toni switched back to the slow lane, which was empty of cars for a few miles ahead. "I used my... gift or whatever to temporarily cure his disorder." She slowed her car and took the next exit. "That's half the reason why I passed out. It can take a lot of energy to do it."

Toni floored her car to ninety on the empty road. She threw up dusty behind her car, and she knew the warehouse was only a mile down here. She slowed down again and kept an eye for that dirt road.

"How do you know your way so well?" Jessica questioned.

"I came out here once when he was having a real bad day," Toni explained. She shut off her headlights and made a left onto a dirt road. She drove very slowly, but she pointed at the abandon warehouse behind the locked fence ahead of them. "That's it there." She picked out the yellow lights glowing from the upper row of windows. She stopped her car in front of the fence.

Jessica got out of the car then shut the door. She approached the fence, which was chained and locked.

Toni had turned off her car, and she hurried to the gate. "Great." She picked up the padlock. "He's never locked it."

"He has reason to now," Jessica muttered. She took the lock into her right hand. "Move back."

The psychologist was confused, but she backed away.

Jessica easily yanked the lock down and snapped the chain into several broken pieces. She threw the lock onto the dusty ground. She then pulled open one gate.

"My god," Toni muttered. "You have super strength."

Jessica smirked and joked, "Brilliant deduction, Dr. Kevin." She then was going to go but a small hand on her wrist stopped her.

"You can't go charging in there," Toni argued. "You could get your son killed."

"She has a point," Niki broke in.

Jessica sighed and looked back at the psychologist. "I wasn't planning on it. Just stay here and wait 'til I get back."

"I'm coming too," Toni fought. "I got your son into this mess."

"Toni, just stay here. Jessica can handle this."

Toni slotted her eyes at Niki's insistence and also Jessica's now smug attitude. She never saw Niki act this confident, but Jessica certainly was in comparison. "I'm going. I can help y'all stop Philip."

Jessica sighed because she didn't have time to argue. "Alright. Stick close." She and Toni Kevin silently moved forward and closer to the warehouse.

"The door is on the side." Toni then pointed in the direction.

"Is there any other way in?"

Toni's eyebrows knitted together, and she shook her head. "No."

Jessica clenched her hands, but she asked, "Does the back of the warehouse have a lot of crates or whatever stocked back there?"

"Actually yes." Toni considered her mental map from the last time she'd been in the warehouse. "Philip had moved all these empty crates and boxes back there to open up the space inside."

"Perfect." Jessica crept off, and Toni stayed on her heels. She came to the rear of the warehouse, and she knelt down. She both visually inspected and felt around for something against the outside. She then found exactly what she wanted. It was curled up piece of siding from aging and probably weathering.

Toni was awed when the tall blond easily peeled back the metal siding to reveal an opening to the warehouse. She shook her head and peered up at the smug woman.

"Stay behind me," Jessica uttered. She ducked into the dark hole, but she was slow and careful so she wouldn't make noise. She came up to a tall crate stack but there was an opening to go around it. She kept behind the stack, but she peered through the small openings and let her eyes adjust to the dim lighting.

Toni remained positioned behind the taller woman. She tilted her head and listened.

"If your mother hadn't gotten involved, boy then you wouldn't be here," spoke a familiar man. It was indeed Philip.

Jessica tried to see through the openings of the crates in hopes she'd see her son.

"Over there," Niki pointed out. "Off to the left."

Jessica followed her alter ego's instructions. She now focused on the small man that was squatted beside a barred crate.

"You don't want to do this, mister," Micah implored.

Philip stepped away from the crate, which gave Jessica a clear view now. "Sorry, kid. But keeping you will bring me Dr. K."

Jessica glanced back at the psychologist that'd been nicknamed. She raised an eyebrow.

Toni rolled her eyes, but stayed quiet.

Jessica turned back to the slotted openings in the crate. She felt her anger rise at seeing her son barred inside of the small crate. She couldn't wait to kill this son of a bitch. She reached for the gun and clicked off the safety.

Toni touched Jessica's shoulder to get her attention. "Be careful," she murmured.

Jessica didn't respond and started to inch her way around the crates.

Toni claimed Jessica's vacated spot. She had every intent to help when it was the right moment. If she could get close to Philip then she could temporarily cure him and hopefully he'd calm from his psychological insanity. She checked her right pocket and felt the slight bulge of her cell phone.

Jessica stayed in the shadows and worked her way closer to Philip, who had his back to rear of the warehouse.

Philip sat down in a wood chair. At his feet, he had systematically set out twelve knives earlier. He know carefully studied each blade, and he seemed to be deciding on something.

Jessica craned her neck to the side and now noted the plethora of knives. She silently cursed because this could be more dangerous for her son than herself.

"We should get Micah out first," Niki suggested. "Then Toni can take him through the back."

Jessica liked the idea. She silently agreed by making her way closer to the cage that held her son. She made it to the cage and squatted down. She kept one eye on Philip's back while peering into the cage.

Micah was seated in the box; his back against one side and his head near his propped knees. He saw the shadow and lifted his head. He became wide eye at seeing his mother, then he spotted her gun.

Jessica held up her index finger to her sealed lips.

Micah realized this was his mother's alter ego. He was now felt sorry for this man that'd kidnapped him.

Jessica noted the padlock on the crate, and she silently cursed. There was no way she could free Micah without making any noise. She focused her light ash eyes on the man's back, and her lip curled into a snarl. Time for my favorite plan, she mentally decided. Jessica now carefully inched up towards Philip's back. She held the gun with both hands and crept closer and closer.

Philip leaned forward and picked up a butcher's knife. He held it up like it was a prize. He felt comfort by holding it. He had a dark sparkle in his eyes. "First, I'll show you how it is to be a real man" Then unexpectedly he felt cold steal pressed into the back of his head.

"No, first you'll have your brains blown out," an angry voice promised.

Philip was tense, but he held his knife still. He recognized the woman's voice instantly. "It's you."

Jessica tightly held her gun. "You got it."

"Where's Dr. K?"

Jessica decided to play with him. She smirked and taunted, "After I asked her where you were, I killed her." She couldn't control the amusement that filled her at seeing how tense Philip grew. "I still can't get her blood off my shirt."

"You bitch, I needed her!" Philip suddenly sprung up from his chair, spun, and swiped at Jessica.

Jessica was taken by surprise. She took the blade to her left wrist, and she almost dropped her gun.

Philip lunged for Jessica and took her to the ground.

Jessica lost her gun, which skidded away several feet. She now found a sharp blade closer to her neck. She hastily grabbed the man's wrist and held him at bay.

"I can't control my urges without Dr. K's help," Philip snarled. His rage enabled him to lower the knife lower to Jessica's throat.

Jessica was briefly shocked by his strength, but it was more his luck and leverage. She gritted her teeth and fought against him.

Toni appeared from the crates and saw the struggle in progress. She moved into the open more and deduced a distraction would help Jessica. "Philip," she called.

Philip sharply lifted his head at hearing the voice of salvation to him. "Dr. K?"

Jessica took her opening, and she slugged the man hard. She sent him sailing off her body and the knife was lost. She started to get up, but she realized her mistake.

Philip had just managed to his feet, but he now possessed Jessica's gun.

"Shit," Jessica murmured.

Philip aimed the gun at Jessica, but he glanced at Dr. Kevin. "She said she killed you."

"I lied," Jessica retorted. She took a step closer.

Philip switched his attention to the moving woman. "Stop or I'll shoot you." His eyes were wild but held promise in them.

"Mom," Micah hollered. He clung to the bars of the crate.

"It's okay, Micah." Jessica eyed her enemy.

Dr. Kevin slowly came closer to the locked crate. She glanced at the boy inside, and she felt her heart drop. She knew this was her fault.

"I'll let your son live if you cooperate," Philip told the tall blond.

Jessica clenched her jaw and stared acidly at the crazy man. She didn't trust him to keep any promise.

Toni Kevin knew there was nothing she could do to free Micah. She switched her attention to the stand off. She centered her full attention on Philip, and she tried to awaken her abilities. Please work from this far, she mentally pleaded.

Jessica fisted her hands at her side. She spied the butcher knife between them.

"Don't even think of it." Philip moved forward and kicked the knife far away. He grew angrier and ordered, "Get on your knees."

Jessica needed time to find her opening. She slowly sunk to her knees.

Philip was pleased that she listened for once. He then glanced at Dr. Kevin, who he realized had that familiar focused expression. He became fearful at what she was doing. "No!"

Toni sensed her power now sought out Philip. She felt weakened, but she didn't let it stop her.

Philip stared down at the gun and became scared of it. He suddenly dropped it and backed away from Jessica.

Jessica slotted her eyes, but she didn't hesitate to pick up the weapon.

Philip backed away from Jessica in pure fear. "Not you again... stay away."

Jessica climbed to her incredible height. She approached the scared man, and she grabbed him by the throat. She hauled him off his feet again and held him up high. "You sick bastard." She knew Philip would have victimized her son if she hadn't shown up. She revealed a dark smile. "I'll cure you myself."

Toni collapsed to her knees and hands. She breathed deeply.

Micah watched in horror as her mother's alter ego slammed the small man against a steel wall. He looked at Toni and urged, "You have to help her stop herself. Please."

Toni caught her breath then looked over at Jessica, who was putting her gun away. She closed her eyes then urged her legs to lift her up.

Micah caught a brief glimpse at Toni's eyes, which were like obsidian and flashed red. He tensed, but he curiously watched her hurry to his mother.

"Jessica, let him go."

Jessica ignored Toni's approach, and she struck Philip hard in the stomach.

"Come on, Jessica let him down." Niki was back and trying to take control, but Jessica denied her.

"Not this time," Jessica hissed. "I won't let this fuckin' sicko hurt Micah again." She pulled back her right hand and fisted it. She grinned at Philip's terrified look.

"Please don't kill me," Philip implored.

"Soon you'll be begging me to kill you," Jessica swore.

Toni made it in time to touch Jessica's arm. "Let it go, Jessica."

Jessica felt some calming effect that came instantly upon Toni's contact. She turned her head to the psychologist and was surprised to find midnight eyes that stared back at her.

"Jessica, let the police handle him. Please." Niki had a plea in her voice.

"She's right, Jessica." Toni studied the blue-gray eyes above her. "Just let them deal with him."

Jessica turned her head back to Philip. She still had her fisted hand raised. She snarled then suddenly threw her punch at him, but she purposely missed. Her hand tore through the metal wall and put a hole through it.

Philip gasped then fainted from pure shock. He was a loose heap in Jessica's left hand.

Jessica opened her hand and watched him collapse into a useless pile. She pulled her hand from the hole then gave him a faint kick in the side for extra measure. She glanced at her left arm, which still sported the long, shallow cut.

Toni sighed in relief, but she touched her pounding forehead. She blinked her eyes a few times and each time caused her eyes to soften into a gentle green.

Jessica looked at the psychologist. "Are you okay?"

"Yea," Toni murmured. "Go take care of your son. I'll handle Philip here."

Jessica didn't argue it. She went over to the crate that held her son. She felt her temper boil, but she capped it off. She grabbed the padlock and instructed, "Back away, Micah."

Micah nodded and wiggled back as far as he could in the crate. He closed his eyes, then he heard a loud snap. Next the crate's door was ripped off, and he was pulled out by long arms.

Jessica held her son closely and whispered, "Are you okay?"

Micah smiled at his mother's alter ego. He realized that Jessica loved him just as much

as Niki. "I'm fine, promise." He then hugged his mother.

Jessica wrapped her arms around him tightly. "I love you, Micah."

"Love you too, mom." Micah tightened his hold.

Jessica felt much calmer than earlier, but her protective streak hadn't dissolved by far. That psycho was still free, and she refused to release her control of Niki's body.

"Yes, I want to report a kidnapping and attempted attack," Toni replied. She had her cell phone against her ear. She was checking Philip's pulse and found it to be strong. She stood up and continued to talk to the 911 operator.

Micah came out of the hug, but he was situated in his mother's lap. He studied the gray eyes that held fragments of his mother's blue. "You're Jessica, right?"

Jessica softly sighed, but she touched her son's chin. "Yes."

Micah looked down for a second, but he peered back up. "You've always been protecting us?"

"Yes," Jessica repeated. She then tilted her head and murmured, "I'm sorry about what happened between us and between your father and I."

Micah frowned, but he leaned his head against Jessica's neck. "I know you didn't mean to hurt any of us."

Jessica kissed Micah's forehead then whispered, "Never again." She then let Micah slip from her lap, and they both stood up. She took Micah's hand in hers then they went over to Toni and Philip. She kept Micah tucked behind her, but she looked at Toni.

Toni closed up her phone after talking to the operator. "They'll be here soon." She looked back at the unconscious man. "We should tie him up."

"There's some rope over by his chair," Micah pointed out.

Toni looked over there and indeed spotted it. "Let me get that." She hurried over there, but she glanced at the line of knives. She sucked her breath and collected the rope. She went back over to them and knelt beside Philip. "That was too close."

"Yes it was," Niki spoke up. She was watching through Jessica's eyes. She studied Micah's handsome features. "Far too close."



"Well he won't bother anybody again once they lock him up." Toni finished up her knots then stood up. She had a sad look on her face. "I wish I could have helped him."

Jessica grunted and shook her head.

"Like you say, you can't save everybody, Toni."

"That doesn't exactly make it easy to accept, Niki." Toni kept staring at the unconscious man that was on the verge of becoming a serial killer.

Micah had a confused look, and he looked between Jessica and Toni.

Jessica caught the look and softly promised, "Later." She then turned her head to the left at hearing a low siren. "I think that's them."

"Come on." Toni led the way to the front door. She worked the latch she held the door locked. She released it and slid the door open enough. She, Jessica, and Micah met the flood of officers halfway between the gates and warehouse. "He's tied up, inside."

Three officers quickly agreed to go inside and deal with him. The two remaining took out pads and asked the three witnesses what'd happened tonight. Toni mostly took over the story, but Jessica and Micah spoke up and handled questions. Once the officers were satisfied, they let the women and child go to the waiting BMW.

Toni collapsed into her driver's seat. She felt exhausted, and she glanced over at Jessica. "You do this all the time?"

"More than I'd like," Jessica quipped.

Toni grunted then buckled up. She glanced in her mirror and ordered, "Buckle in, Micah."

Jessica twisted around just after hearing Micah's belt click. She smiled at him then straightened back in her seat.

"You too, Supergirl," Toni jested. She shifted her car into reverse and carefully backed up until she faced the main road.

Jessica made no comment about the smart joke. She buckled in though and relaxed in the chair after a long moment.

Toni switched on her headlights then made a right onto the lonely road. She looked at the time on the digital clock and couldn't believe it was two in the morning. She wiped away her sleepiness and focused on her driving because she had precious cargo.

The drive was indeed longer on the way back because Toni did the legal limit. She eventually pulled into her driveway and parked the car. She turned off the engine then glanced back at Micah, who was sound asleep. She grinned.

Jessica already knew from checking on him earlier. She now quietly got out of the car.

Toni did the same and shut the door gently. She looked over at the tall beauty. "Why don't y'all just stay here for the night? It's too late for ya'll to be driving home."

Jessica glanced at the dark window, but she couldn't see Micah because of the tint.

"I have a guestroom," Toni offered.

"We should stay," Niki softly agreed.

Toni slightly smiled at Niki's agreement.

Jessica sighed then nodded. "Fine." She opened the rear door carefully, and she leaned over her son. She unbuckled him then scooped him up tenderly.

Niki was able to watch how gentle Jessica was with Micah. She felt an ache because she realized how much Jessica did love Micah too. It wasn't any different than how she felt about Micah. "Let's get some rest."

Jessica did feel worn now. She adjusted her precious package in her arms and followed Toni to the front door.

Micah stayed asleep, but he rested his head on his mother's shoulder.

"This way," Toni softly instructed. She guided the blond beauty through the house and to the guest room. She pushed the door open then flicked on the hallway light once Jessica entered the room. She didn't want the light in the room to wake up Micah.

Jessica went to the double bed and lowered her son first. She then faced the psychologist.

"We should take care of that." Toni indicated the wound on Jessica's left arm. The wound was clearly visible through the shirt's slash.

Jessica silently agreed and nodded.

Toni took the tall blond to the bathroom and switched on the lights. "Sit there." She pointed at the toilet. She busied with getting some cleaning supplies.

Jessica set the lid down then took a seat on the hard cover. She scanned the large bathroom and was thoroughly impressed. She figured Dr. Kevin's business as a psychologist paid well. She carefully worked to roll her sleeve up and revealed her laceration.

Toni squatted down and set several items on the floor to her right. She had a wet, warm washcloth in her hand. She took Jessica's extended arm and gently cleaned the wound.

"Is it bad?" Niki questioned.

"No, it doesn't seem to be deep." Toni pulled back the washcloth and saw that the wound was far more longer than deep. "But there's no telling how dirty that knife was." She stood up and went to the sink again. She cleaned out the cloth of the blood and this time grabbed a bar of scentless soap. She came back to Jessica.

Jessica merely observed how Toni damped her arm again. She was intrigued by Toni's careful administrations. She felt a brief sting when the soap cleansed her wound.

"You don't talk much compared to Niki."

"No reason to," Jessica harshly replied. She still wasn't fully comfortable with the psychologist, and it clearly showed.

"Don't worry," Toni mentioned as she stood up, "I don't plan to shrink you." She set the washcloth on the edge of the sink. She'd clean it later. She knelt back down and picked up the tube of ointment. She spun the cap off then pushed out a quarter size amount.

Jessica sensed the cool ointment come over her skin, and Toni trailed it down her long wound. "I hate psychologists," she casually mentioned.

"Hmmm." Toni picked up a wrapped gauze and proceeded to wrap it around Jessica's arm. "That's what I heard." She peered up with dark emerald eyes and mentioned, "You nearly killed an associate of mine a few months ago." She focused back on her task.

Jessica furrowed her eyebrows, yet it quickly came to her. "Dr. Witherson."

"Yes." Toni Kevin tied the two ends of the wrap near Jessica's wrist. "I didn't realize you were that Sanders until it hit me tonight." She collected her medical supplies and quipped, "Or until it strangled me tonight." She opened her cabinet mirror above her sink and put her supplies away. She shut the door and Jessica's dark face stared back

at her in the mirror.

"Niki gave her fair warning."

Toni knew that Jessica meant Dr. Witherson. "And did you give her a fair one?" She waited a beat but received no answer. "What scares you so bad about a psychiatrist?"

Jessica grew darker and warned, "Are you trying to shrink me now?"

"No," Toni softly replied to the reflection, "just trying to get to know you." She then became confused by the softened features in the mirror and how the Jessica's reflection moved. She twisted around and realized that Jessica hadn't moved an inch.

"Take it easy, Jessica." Niki looked over at Toni, who was tense.

Toni looked at the mirror then back at Jessica. She touched her forehead and rasped, "What is going on here?"

Jessica slotted her eyes and looked back at Niki in the mirror. She realized that Doctor Kevin could indeed see Niki too.

Niki studied Toni and whispered, "You can see me?"

Toni's confused eyes lifted to the mirror. "Yes." She distinctly noticed the differences between Niki in the mirror and Jessica standing next to her.

Jessica turned her head to Niki, and she merely raised an eyebrow. She folded her arms and stared at Toni.

"This is bizarre," Niki decided.

"Tell me about it," Toni muttered. She combed her fingers through her midnight hair. "This doesn't quite make sense."

"Feel a bit crazy, doc?" Jessica taunted.

Toni mocked glared at the joke and replied, "No, I feel a headache." She rubbed her forehead then muttered, "There's more going on here than any of us understand."

Niki looked between Jessica and Toni then suggested, "We should get some rest. We're not going to get any answers tonight."

"You're right," Toni muttered. She rubbed her aching eyes, which somewhat helped.

"Fine by me." Jessica walked away from the sink and mirror and went to the door.

Toni lightly touched Jessica's wrapped arm. "If there's anything you need to understand, Jessica it's that a psychiatrist and a psychologist are horses of two different colors."

Jessica had opened the door some, but she held it in place. "How is that?"

"Simply put," Toni explained, "a psychiatrist believes in using medicine to induce certain behavior from a patient. A psychologist uses interpersonal and rational techniques to help a patient work through their troubles rather than drug them."

Jessica considered it for a beat, and it did explain why Dr. Witherson had refused to medicate her and Niki. She'd only gained control once the medication wore off.

Toni could tell Jessica would have to think it over for some time. She grabbed the door and opened it wider. She slipped past and headed down to her bedroom, which allowed light to flood out of the open door into the dark hallway.

Jessica stepped out of the bathroom and softly called, "Goodnight, Toni."

The psychologist stopped in her doorway, turned, and faintly smiled at being called by her first name for once. "Goodnight, Jessica." She entered her room and disappeared off to her side.

Jessica slipped back into the guestroom and found Micah still sound asleep. She softened at the sight of him.

"You love him too," Niki spoke up. "I can feel it."

"Of course," Jessica quietly replied. She proceeded to remove her ruined top and was only left with her black tank top. There on her right shoulder rested the unusual Symbol.

"Thank you." Niki was sincere and true.

Jessica set the top down on the dresser. "You're welcome." She knew Niki meant about everything tonight. It'd taken a lot of Jessica's reserve not to kill Philip because of what he'd done to Micah. She didn't want him to interfere with their lives again, but she guessed that he'd be the one locked up in a padded room for a long time.

Jessica slipped off her dress boots then came to the bed. She carefully removed Micah's shoes, set them down, and crawled into bed.

"Mom?" Micah rolled over and faced the familiar body.

"Right here." Jessica secured her son in her arms and held him close. "Go back to sleep, sweetie." She adjusted the covers over them, then she relaxed finally too. She felt relatively safe here, and the night was catching up to her. Slowly Jessica faded into a deep sleep, but her black tattoo gradually disappeared from her shoulder. She would sleep soundly tonight.

### **Chapter 3**

Toni Kevin swept back her damp hair after just getting showered and dressed for the day. She'd decided to cancel her morning appointment after such a rough night. She bit back a yawn and strolled down the hallway then went into her kitchen. She started a pot of coffee to get her charged.

She picked up the small remote from her counter and switched on the small flat screen television that hung under her cabinet. She went to the local news station and idly listened. Toni then decided to make breakfast while her coffee brewed. She then sensed somebody else in the kitchen, and she glanced back to see the tall, beautiful blond in her kitchen. She focused back on her cooking.

"Good morning, Niki. You want any coffee?"

Niki was slightly surprised that the psychologist automatically knew it was her and not Jessica. "Uh yeah. That'd be nice, thank you."

Toni pulled out two mugs from her cabinet and set it by her brew machine. "Take a seat. It'll be ready in a minute."

Niki took a seat at the table, and lately she'd noticed that Toni had a modern taste about her furniture. She rather liked the style. "How'd you sleep?"

Toni softly smiled, but she kept her back to Niki. She worked at scrambling the eggs in the pan, which were almost done. "Like a rock. You?"

"Really well." Niki worked her fingers through her messy hair. She really didn't care though. "Micah is still asleep. I think he was fairly worn out."

"I can imagine." Toni grabbed a black plate from her cabinet then carefully transferred the eggs onto the plate. She then carried the plate over to Niki and set it in front of her.

"Toni-"

"Ketchup?" the psychologist joked. She caught Niki's smile, but she went back to her counter to get a fork. She pulled one out along with a napkin and gave them to Niki. She then checked on the coffee machine, which was finished brewing. She poured two cups and handed one to Niki. "Milk or sugar?"

"Just black," Niki replied. She now tried the eggs, which were quite tasty just for plain eggs.

Toni now pulled out some bread and popped two pieces into her toaster. She pulled out her butter from her fridge along with three eggs. She set the eggs near the used pan, but she waited for the toast.

Niki enjoyed the warm breakfast that she rarely ever had in her life. She sipped on the coffee and was surprised by the soft french vanilla flavor to it.

Toni placed the butter in front of Niki along with a knife. She then scooped up the ready toast and set it on a bread plate that she'd grabbed. She positioned the toast in front of Niki.

Niki sighed and shook her head. "Thank you, Toni."

"No problem." Toni picked up her coffee then sat down at the table.

"You're going to eat too?"

Toni smiled over the brim of her mug. "I'll make something in a minute." She sipped on her coffee and just let it wake her up. "How is it?"

"Wonderful," Niki insisted.

Toni nodded then glanced over at the small screen. She caught the weather and saw it would be warmer, drier day. The nights were certainly chilly anymore but the days were still reaching the seventies.

"How did you know it was me?" Niki brought up.

Toni turned back to Niki, and she set her mug down. "Besides the obvious factors, I could... sense it was you."

"You can tell the difference between Jessica and I?"

Toni simply nodded then sipped her coffee. She then softly informed, "I can also sense whether or not she's dormant. Like now, I can tell she is."

Niki shook her head. She picked up a piece of toast and buttered it. "None of this makes sense," she muttered.

Toni grinned and wrapped her hands completely around the warm mug. "I know it probably doesn't to you."

"And it does to you?" Niki argued.

"I'm figuring it out," Toni replied.

"Care to share?"

The psychologist chuckled and released her mug. She got up and started to prepare her own breakfast. "I didn't completely become aware of my ability until I was in college. It was like my own education helped me become more aware of it." She was scrambling eggs while her bread toasted. "I learned it and figured out how it could not just help me but others."

Niki admired Toni's quest. She picked up the toast plate and set it on top of the larger plate. "What happened?"

"I eventually learned how to control it fairly well. I could help many of my patients work through their disorders." Toni then sighed and argued, "But I can't help all of them. It did eventually make me quite famed in the psychological field." She slid the readied eggs onto her plate then picked up the toast. "I also noticed over the years that my ability seemed to grow stronger or expand as I used it."

Niki tilted her head and offered, "Exercising it?"

"I think so." Toni sat down at the table with her hot food. She pushed the eggs around with her fork for a beat. "I guess it is a bit like exercising a muscle. The more you work out, the more your muscles will build up." She peered up at Niki, who seemed to fully agree.

"So what's this have to do with Jessica and I?"

Toni first ate some eggs, and her head bobbed. She finally answered, "Well, I think you and Jessica just encouraged my ability to grow." She sipped on her coffee and slightly grinned at Niki's perplexed look.

"How?"

Toni set her mug down then picked up a piece of toast. "I can detect your powers now." She buttered her toast and informed, "Like right now, I know you don't have



any super strength. You can only access it through Jessica."

"You can sense that?" Niki questioned.

"I can." Toni finished her toast then mentioned, "I also know your son is a technopathy." She caught Niki's surprise, but she continued to speak. "I've never been able to detect anybody else's powers until now. I don't know whether it's because I've never been in contact with another evolved person or not. Or if you and Jessica just triggered it somehow."

Niki slotted her eyes at hearing the 'evolved' term. "You know."

Toni Kevin hesitated from eating the last of her egg. "If you mean Chandra Suresh's theory then yes." She finished off her eggs then explained, "After I realized what I have, I began to research it so I came across Professor Suresh's book. That's when it all made senses to me... about who I am... who we are."

Niki leaned back in chair in shock. She couldn't believe that this all was happening to her. Exactly what were the odds that a psychologist with the power to understand life's mysterious would enter her life? She'd come to realize that there were no coincidences anymore.

"I've heard about Suresh's death," Toni mentioned. "I tried to follow his trail so I could meet him. Obviously it didn't happen, and I've been too caught up to follow any other leads." She hesitated but commented, "There seems to be a lot going on."

Niki lifted her eyes from her mug's almost empty contents. She held Toni's gaze. "Yes... yes there is." She swallowed and nervously mentioned, "There is a company that's working to control us."

Toni tensed at the news. She asked, "Who are they?"

"It's complicated." Niki shook her head then locked eyes with Toni. "They say they're here to protect us, but its more like protect us from ourselves."

Toni laced her hands together and set her palms flat against the table. "I'm sure there are some people with powers that could prove to be dangerous." She then shook her head and argued, "Whether or not somebody has a power, all people have the potential to be dangerous. Nobody or company should have the right to play judge."

"Or executioner," Niki murmured.

"They've killed people?" Toni had a dark look on her face.

"It hasn't been exactly proven," Niki answered, "but that's what the suggestion has been." She sighed and threaded her fingers through her hair. "Micah and I have been keeping a low profile. We've already had our dealings with them and paid a price."

"I'm sorry, Niki."

Niki shook her head and softly argued, "It was my damn fault." She thought about D.L.'s death, but she was glad that Sylar was out of the picture now. "Lately I've been considering going to the Company." She met Toni's concerned gaze. "To see if they can stop Jessica. I'm fearful she'll end up harming Micah."

Toni now pushed her plate aside. She felt the pain that coursed through the younger woman. "Listen to me, Niki what you have is a gift."

"A gift?" Niki hotly argued. "You were right last night. I have multiple personality disorder."

"Actually, I was wrong," the psychologist declared. She watched Niki's changing expression, but she composed her next words carefully. "I just made a general assumption. But I figured out it isn't a disorder at all. You don't have the classic symptoms of MPD." She tilted her head. "You don't have depression, panic attacks, phobias, eating disorders... you're not suicidal, and you don't have anything else."

Niki realized that Toni was indeed right. She wasn't exactly happy, but she was content in her life. She had panicky moments, but she never had any serious attack. She'd considered the idea of suicide like most people, who've had fleeting thoughts too. But she'd never leave Micah.

"Then what is this?"

Toni sighed and tried to form the right words that would easily explain how she saw it. "You have," she emphasized, "powers, and Jessica is one of them." Now she started to move her hands while she spoke. "Have you ever noticed how most people wish they could be two people? That they don't like certain aspects about themselves? We've all entertained the idea of being another person at some point in our lives." She then slightly chuckled and offered, "Some of us even become an alter ego when we're drunk. It comes out in us because we let go of our control."

Niki nodded because it was making sense. She then theorized, "So then my ability is to be two people in one?"

"Exactly." Toni lowered her hands. "And through Jessica you're able to access the super strength." She tilted her head. "But don't misunderstand Jessica as being just a power. She's indeed her own entity... her own person."

Niki sighed and bowed her head slightly. "How can you be sure?"

Toni leaned forward some and locked eyes with Niki. "Let me put it this way, if it was MPD then I would have detected when we first spoke. I never suspected a thing, and now I can feel that it is a power."

Niki nodded a few times.

Toni reached over and took Niki's hand into hers. "If you go to this Company, and they eliminate your powers then you'll lose your identity. Trust me." She searched Niki soft blue eyes that were different from Jessica's. "And Jessica does care for Micah. I can tell after last night." She shrugged and argued, "She just handles things opposite of how you do it."

"And I'm afraid that Micah will end up hurt or worse... whether that's by accident or not." Niki studied her hand covered by the smaller one.

"Things do happen," Toni agreed. She squeezed Niki's hand then relinquished her hold. "But I don't think Jessica will do any of it on purpose. She'll do everything she can to protect Micah and you. That actually seems to be what invokes her."

Niki had to agree. It was quite true that Jessica only surfaced at those moments.

"To be honest," Toni continued, "I think if you two work together then it could potentially increase your powers." She tried to think of some analogy. "It's similar to magnets. If two magnets are pushing apart then nothing works right, but if they're attracted to each other then they're much stronger together." She detected a shift in Niki that Niki wasn't even quite aware of, but she simply added, "Besides two heads are better than one." She got up and collected the plates.

"I think the doc has an interesting view."

Niki instantly tensed at hearing Jessica's voice in her head, but she clearly relaxed after a second. She felt like somebody had just sneaked up behind her.

"It's not a view," Toni argued, "it's a scientific hypothesis." She went over to the sink with the dishes. She heard a deep laugh that certainly didn't come from Niki.

"Then how do Jessica and I work it out?"

"It'll take some time." Toni kept her back to the tall blond. She just simply washed off the dishes with water then opened her dishwasher. "But I suspect what it really involves is some trust and truth." She put the dishes into the racks then closed up the

washer. She didn't bother to turn it on yet. She turned around and came back to Niki. "You need to learn to trust Jessica. And I think Jessica may have some secrets that you're not aware of Niki."

"Like what?"

Toni rested her hands on the back of her empty chair and shrugged. "I'm a psychologist... not a fortune teller."

Jessica's laugh could be heard echoing. "Touche," Jessica answered.

Toni slightly grinned, but she picked up her empty mug and decided on another cup of coffee. "You want anymore, Niki?"

"I'm fine." Niki studied Toni's profile then asked, "Can you help Jessica and I?"

The psychologist came back to the table and wrapped her hands around the mug. "I can if you're both are willing otherwise it'll be a waste of time for all of us."

"Through your power?" Jessica tested.

"I'm not talking about that," Toni replied. "I'm talking about using good old fashion therapy." She waved her hand at Niki and mentioned, "The fact that all three of us can communicate will make it far easier."

"How's that?" Niki questioned.

Toni grinned. "It means I don't have to do some hocus pocus to bring Jessica to the surface or visa-versa. Whatever is allowing me to hear the recessive personality too is going to make this easier." She sipped on her black coffee again.

"What would your power do to us?" Niki tried.

"Possibly nothing." Toni shrugged and set her mug down. "You don't have a disorder so my power probably wouldn't do anything." She tilted her head. "I'm leery to even try."

Niki shook her head. "Maybe just start with the therapy first."

"Only if Jessica is willing to do it," Toni reminded. "If you two can't even agree on that then there's no hope to get anywhere else."

Jessica Sanders had been carefully watching and listening through her recessive position. She'd studied Dr. Kevin's mannerism and watched her eyes. Jessica actually

felt somewhat confident that the psychologist wouldn't try anything funny. She also knew that Niki wanted this, and Jessica had to admit she was curious to understand what was between her and Niki.

"Let's try it," Jessica decided finally.

Toni nodded in agreement. "We mind as well get started today. I'll contact my assistant and tell her I won't be in my office today." She then turned her head to the right at hearing quiet footfall. She smiled.

Niki also smiled and greeted, "Good morning, cutie."

Micah instantly figured out that it was Niki that inhabited her mother's body. He went to her and gave a quick hug. "Good morning." He smiled at Toni Kevin.

"You hungry?" Toni inquired.

Micah nodded.

Toni climbed to her feet and took her mug with her. She started making another breakfast.

Niki softened at the gesture from the psychologist, yet she focused on Micah. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yeah." He then tilted his head. "Don't I have school today?"

"You do," Niki agreed, "but I thought I'd let you sleep in for a bit. You're going to be a little late."

"Cool." Micah grinned.

Niki chuckled, but she lectured, "Don't get use to it."

Micah soon had breakfast, and he thoroughly enjoyed it. Toni cleaned up the remainder of her dishes along with the coffee machine. Niki then told Micah to get ready because she was going to take him home, get his bookbag, and then they could get him to school. Toni walked Micah and his mother to the front door, and Niki told Micah to go ahead and get into the car. Once Micah was in the car, Niki turned back to the psychologist in the doorway.

"Just come back here." Toni leaned against the door frame. "I'll be here."

"I might be a bit," Niki admitted. "I want to check on my friend."

"I understand." The psychologist softly smiled. "There's no rush. We have all day."

Niki mirrored back the soft smile. She stood taller than Toni despite she was a step down. Then that similar urge from last night after the dinner returned to her.

"Do it, Niki," Jessica murmured. There was a hint of tease in her voice.

Toni blinked and straightened up from the door frame. She quickly processed what Jessica may have been referring to especially now that Niki clearly blushed.

Niki cleared her throat and took a step down. "I'll see you later, Toni." She silently cursed Jessica for speaking out because it was obvious that Toni heard it. She turned on the next step and rushed to her car and waiting son.

Toni was intrigued and started to grin because she now had a clue. She folded her arms and leaned back against the frame. She remained there until Niki and Micah Sanders were out of the driveway. She then reentered her house and went to find her cell phone. She needed to chat with her assistant about canceling all her appointments and not just her morning sessions.

## **Chapter 4**

"She was a younger sister?"

"Yes," Niki softly replied. She was obviously nervous because she had brief flashes of a similar conversation with Dr. Witherson. She didn't want the same results again.

"How did she die?" Toni carefully inquired.

Niki licked her lips and glanced over at the psychologist. "Do we really need to get into that?"

Toni took the warning for what it was, and she shook her head. "I just find it interesting that your alter ego follows that same name." She hoped her response would trigger Jessica Sanders to speak up. She could sense that Jessica wasn't dormant but indeed quite aware of the session. It was exactly how she wanted it, if she could get Jessica to talk too.

"Where is your father now?" Toni tried.

"I'm not exactly sure," Niki confessed. "He'd came over for a visit not long ago."

"How did it go?"

Niki stretched out her long legs. She tried to be comfortable in the sofa chair, but it was hard. "It was okay until the end." She felt that aged sting in her throat return. "He... he gave Micah a laptop and offered to help pay for Micah's schooling." She met Toni's gaze off to her left. "The tuition is pretty high."

"What made it go ugly?" the psychologist probed.

"Well Hal went into Micah's room, and Micah had taken apart the laptop."

Toni imagined Hal's reaction, which was shortly confirmed.

"He was furious, and I told Hal to leave my house." Niki crossed her legs at her ankles. She combed her damp hair back with her fingers. She'd taken a quick shower at home before coming back to Toni's house. "I tried to call him the next day, but he never called back. It's kind of strange actually." She had a crease along her brow. "He just disappeared."

Toni laced her hands together and rested them in her lap. She filed that bit away for later. She sensed some kind of gap there that needed to be checked, but not right now.

"Can I ask you about something?" Niki turned her head to Toni. She was grateful that Toni wasn't like most psychologists and psychiatrists, who typically sat so doctor and patient faced each other.

"Go ahead," Toni encouraged.

Niki composed her words and thoughts properly then brought up something Dr. Witherson had told her. "If I have MSP then is it possible for Jessica and I to merge?"

"Clinically speaking, yes," Toni replied. She shifted some then explained, "It goes case by case. There are three groups that a MSP patient may fall into." She unlaced her hands and held out her right index finger. "The first group usually have dissociative and post-traumatic symptoms, and they can recover fairly easily. The second group have the same symptoms plus other things coupling like eating disorder or mood swings... substance abuse. The treatment for the second group takes longer, and it's more intense... the results aren't always positive."

"Then the third group is screwed," Niki summarized.

Toni sighed, yet she explained it anyway. "It is the most extreme group. Anybody in the third group is considered to have a disease... they most likely will never recover. And doctors more or less try to make that patient's life as easy and manageable as

possible." She now lowered her hands back to her lap. "If this was a true disorder for you then you'd fall into the first group."

Niki nodded, but she had her head bowed. "You really believe it's a power?"

"I know it is," Toni corrected. "It's possible that the power was invoked in the same format as MSP would for most people. It's why it mimics MSP to anybody that doesn't understand what you really have." She stopped and considered another aspect. "Had it been invoked in another way, then it is possible Jessica could have shaped with a different personality." She unfolded her hands. "Just as you could have been shaped differently if certain events had or hadn't happened in your life."

"That's a lot of if's there," Niki argued.

"There are various views that a person is automatically molded by genetics versus how outside forces mold a person."

Niki turned back to the psychologist. "Nature versus nurture."

"Exactly." Toni showed a smile because Niki knew her psychology.

Niki shook her head and argued, "Tell me how this is a power... a gift?"

"First," Toni started, "you have to get the notion out of your head that it is MSP. It's not, Niki." She tilted her head. "If you can start there then you'll be able to accept this easier." She then finally tackled the question. "When you look at a personality, every last one has characteristics that have pros and cons. A personality has strengths and weaknesses." She paused then added, "An individual has strengths and weaknesses... and not many individuals are satisfied by their weaknesses."

"We're always trying to change and perfect ourselves," Niki agreed.

"Yes, and it doesn't always work out either." Toni chuckled because she could attest to a few of her personal attempts. She became more serious and finally went to her point. "But you have the ability to harbor and nurture two separate personalities inside of you. It gives you an edge over individuals, who can't accomplish such levels. You have the chance to reach limits that average individuals can't achieve."

Niki seriously considered the concept.

Toni saw the gears turning inside of Niki. She sensed she was close to winning Niki over on the thought process. "If you and Jessica can learn to work together then you're both at a higher advantage. It may be possible for y'all to... seamlessly switch between personalities without really noticing. It could open a lot of possibilities and



opportunities that aren't apparent right now." She leaned forward and rested her elbows on her knees. "But if you keep fighting against each other then my bet is you'll end up destroying each other."

Niki breathed deeply and slowly let out her breath. She watched Toni sit back in the chair again. She weighed the good and bad plus how her personality was so opposite of Jessica's. She then murmured, "Her and I do balance each other out."

"Very much so," Toni agreed.

Niki's head bobbed a few times, but she decided to back track. "So," Niki carefully tried, "you think Jessica's particular personality is key to my past?"

Toni tilted her head then honestly replied, "Yes. I think it points in a general direction to your upbringing and past events. Plus how she instantly reacts to negative events in your life also says plenty." She noticed that Jessica had stayed silent so far. She'd hoped the topics would pull Jessica out, yet it seemed Jessica was being stubborn.

"And here I thought I wasn't getting shrinked," remarked an edgy voice.

Suddenly Toni jumped in her seat at the duplicate twin sitting in the sofa chair to the right of Niki. "Oh my god," she gasped and covered her pounding heart.

Niki looked from Jessica to Toni and asked, "You can see her too?"

Toni still kept her hand over her racing heart. She stared across at Jessica. "Yes."

Jessica crossed her legs and slowly shaped a grin.

"I thought I was hallucinating images of Jessica." Niki turned back to Jessica and completely scanned over her duplicate features and body.

Jessica rested her arms on the arm rests, and she tilted her head at the psychologist. "How interesting."

Toni lowered her hand from her chest, but she kept staring at Jessica. She recovered from her initial shock of Jessica Sanders just appearing out of thin air. She cleared her throat some.

"We're not so crazy after all," Jessica declared. She amusingly looked at Niki and chuckled. "It must be a power." She then uncrossed her legs, stood up tall, and slowly approached Toni Kevin. "If it is a power, and you can see me... hear me... then that adds up to something." She loomed over the psychologist.

Niki climbed to her feet too, yet she doubted Jessica could actually do anything.

Jessica grabbed the armchairs on either side of Toni, and she leaned over her. "What does it add up to?"

Toni couldn't believe she was actually seeing Jessica and Niki simultaneously. She lifted her chin and looked Jessica right back in the eye. "I'm not sure."

Jessica tilted her head and leaned in slightly closer. "Come on, Dr. Kevin."

"Jessica," Niki argued.

Jessica ignored her alter ego. She held Toni's eyes with her own. "You really don't know what your powers are, do you?"

"They're still changing," Toni agreed.

Jessica let the tip of her tongue touch her lips for a beat. She then suddenly grinned. "Let's see what your powers will do to Niki and I."

"No," Niki snapped. She came over and tried to touch Jessica, but her hand passed through Jessica's body.

"They won't do anything," Toni fought. "Y'all don't have a mental disorder."

"Perhaps not," Jessica murmured, "but the fact you can detect powers and not just mental disorders says something." She bent forward even closer so that was little space between her and Toni's face. "Let's see what you're made of, Dr. Kevin."

Toni suddenly felt her wild heart in her throat just as Jessica leaned in the rest of the way. She remained wide eye but suddenly Jessica disappeared. She sunk down in her seat and closed her eyes. She was breathing heavy.

"Damnit," Niki hissed. She came over and knelt down in front of the shaken psychologist. "I'm sorry, Toni."

Toni had her head in her hands. She ran her fingers through her hair then lifted her head. "It's okay." She'd caught her breath and muttered, "Jessica has her own style."

"Mmmm." Niki touched the older woman's knee. "We don't need to do this."

"No, it's okay." Toni collected her thoughts and decided, "Maybe Jessica has a point."

"You can't be serious?" Niki argued.

Toni picked up Niki's hand and held it in hers. "I don't know the extent of my powers." She searched Niki's soft eyes. "But I won't do it if you're not willing."

Niki lowered her gaze, and she thought about what could or couldn't happen if Toni tried this. For some reason Jessica wanted to test it, which surprised her. If anything, Jessica consistently protected her so for Jessica to agree to it would mean it was safe enough. She peered back up into curious green eyes.

"Alright," Niki softly replied.

"Good choice." Jessica's voice echoed.

Niki stood up and so did Toni. They faced each other and didn't move for a second.

"Uh... let's do this in open space," Toni decided. She stepped into the open, center of the room and Niki joined her. She stood toe to toe with the taller woman.

"How do we do this?" Niki asked.

"It's more of a 'me' thing," Toni joked, but she and Niki didn't laugh. She held up her hands. "It may take a little time because I'm not sure what I'm doing or anything." She watched warm, large hands fill hers. "But it'll be easier if y'all both relax."

Niki nodded and kept a decent grip on Toni's hands.

Toni closed her eyes but whispered, "You may feel funny... so just go with it." She took a deep breath. "Here goes." She focused internally on her power and brought it to life.

Niki already felt a prickly feeling in her hands, but she didn't let go. She peered down at them, but she couldn't see anything strange. She lifted her head and now found obsidian eyes gazing back at her. She tensed at seeing the color change to Toni's eyes.

"Relax," Toni murmured. Suddenly two red rings formed in her eyes.

Niki sharply shut her eyes from the sudden sensations coursing through her body. "What's... happening?" She squeezed Toni's hands harder, but she was careful not to be too tight.

Toni inhaled deeply as if finding some release. "There it is."

Niki collapsed to her knees, and she dropped her head backwards.

"Don't stop!" Jessica yelled through the haze.

Niki started to scream from the intense pain. She felt as if she was being ripped in half. Then her scream was echoed by Jessica's. Niki watched several flashes go past her that were not her memories but Jessica's. Finally, several countless emotions were stripped from her then it all stopped. Niki started to collapse to her right but strong arms grabbed her.

Toni had let go because she was so weak now. She stumbled backwards and fell to her knees. She was bent forward and gulped for air. She slowly lifted her head, and she gawked at the scene before her. "My god."

Jessica Sanders was on her knees and in her arms rested Niki Sanders. She cradled Niki and studied her before she lifted her head and met Toni's gaze.

Toni breathed deeply then softly repeated, "My god." She shook her head. "You're..."

"Real?" Jessica questioned. She had a grin slightly curl her lips, but she gazed down at Niki.

"You're separate." Toni lowered her eyes to Niki. "Is she..."

Niki was breathing heavily, but she started to lift up. She focused on who had caught her, and she almost fell back, yet she was caught again.

"Easy," Jessica instructed.

Toni stumbled onto her feet, but she came over and knelt back down. "Niki?" She gingerly touched the blond's shoulder.

Niki glanced at Toni, yet she turned back to Jessica and stared at her.

Jessica was amused and had a smirk because of Niki's astonishment. She tilted her head and joked, "We're twins."

Niki didn't seem to believe it. She stretched out her hand and touched Jessica's cheek. This time her hand didn't pass through, and she felt warm flesh. "Jesus." She traced her fingertips down to Jessica's jaw. "How..." She dropped her hand and looked at the psychologist. "What did you do?"

"I..." Toni shook her head and simply stated, "I corrected the evolution gene." She looked between the twins and finished, "I turned it off."

"That's why we separated." Niki touched her forehead, which pounded.

"What about our super strength?" Jessica inquired.

Toni shook her head. "I didn't touch it."

Jessica now slowly stood up on her slightly weak legs.

Toni did the same, but she needed Niki's help. She looked at Jessica, who had walked away.

Jessica held out her arms and looked over her body as if it was new.

Niki carefully watched her alter ego, who was now her identical twin. She took one step towards Jessica and stopped.

Jessica faced the pair and grinned. She came back to them, however, she was focused on Toni. "You can detect and control the evolution gene."

Niki realized that fact too. "Do you know what this means?" She gazed down at Toni.

Toni looked between the twins and whispered, "I'm a cure."

"Or a threat depending on who you are," Jessica clarified. She raised an eyebrow at Niki. "A big threat for some."

Niki slightly narrowed her eyes, but she instantly understood what Jessica meant. There were evil people with abilities like Sylar. She focused back on Toni. "This could be really dangerous, Toni."

Toni looked at her hands for a second then lowered them. She shook her head. "But it could be really good..." She exchanged looks between the twins. "For people who don't want their abilities. Who just want a normal life."

Niki furrowed her eyebrows at those words. She studied Jessica, who was now separated from her. Was she one of the people that didn't want her ability? Did she not want Jessica?

"How about it, Niki?" Jessica tested. It seemed like she could read Niki's thoughts. "Is this really good? Do you feel... normal now?"

Niki approached her identical twin, who had the opposite personality to her. "You are real."

Jessica held out her arms. "Flesh and blood." She dropped her arms to her side. "As

real as you."

Niki searched Jessica's ash eyes, and she started to feel some ache in her. She swallowed and whispered, "You're free, Jessica."

Jessica folded her arms and gave a crooked grin. "Finally."

Niki parted her lips slightly as if to say something. She hesitated yet found her courage. "Do you feel normal, now?"

Jessica dropped her arms then started to slowly circle Niki. Her eyes stayed on Niki.

Niki briefly spotted the Symbol on Jessica's right shoulder, but she made no comment.

Jessica paused beside Niki's left side and murmured, "No." She stopped her circling in front of Niki.

Niki shook her head because she seemed to be putting her thoughts together. "Why doesn't this make me feel good?" She blinked a few times and looked at Jessica. "Why don't I feel good to have you separated from me?" She swallowed down her rising emotions, but it was hard. "I've tried so hard to stop you and get rid of you."

"Now you're gettin' attached huh?" Jessica for once wasn't condescending.

"I just... I can feel apart of me gone." Niki placed her hand over her chest.

Jessica stayed quiet for a moment then offered, "We're connected, Niki."

"Yeah," Niki hoarsely agreed. She dropped her hand off her chest.

"We could make a good team." Jessica watched Niki's expression, but she already felt exactly what Niki felt. "We did against Linderman once I understood what you were fighting for."

Niki silently agreed. She'd been truly proud of Jessica when they'd entered Linderman's office with D.L. After Linderman offered Jessica millions of dollar, Niki swore that it was all over and yet Jessica released her control before the temptation let her make a mistake. Jessica had shown trust in Niki's ability to make the right choice for them both.

Toni remained silent, but she carefully observed the pair work out their differences. Just maybe separating them was a perfect way to let them work out their differences. It would be a step in the right direction.

"No more lies?" Niki asked her twin. "No more secrets?"

Jessica slowly nodded her head. "You have to trust me to protect us and Micah." She searched Niki's soft blue eyes. "I love him, Niki. I know that."

"I know that too." Niki licked her dry lips. "And I know you've been trying to protect me for a long time."

"Since you were a kid," Jessica confessed. She stepped closer then revealed, "You don't remember Hal beating you."

Niki closed her eyes and turned her head away. She felt a soft hand on her cheek that turned her head back. She forced herself to look because she'd said she didn't want anymore secrets or lies.

"You would blackout," Jessica explained, "and I would takeover. I took all his punches so you wouldn't have to remember it."

"Why?" Niki emotionally whispered.

Jessica was a mix of sadness and bitterness. "Because I love you." She huffed and pulled her hand from Niki's cheek. She waved her hand at her and Niki's bodies. "We're the same yet different. I can handle the things that are too hard for you... the things you don't want to see."

"And what if I can handle it?"

"Then... you don't need me anymore," Jessica answered.

Niki grabbed Jessica's hand and argued, "Yes I do." She paused. "We need each other... we're too much apart of each other now to be apart." She felt that twist in her stomach since she was separated from Jessica. "You're apart of who I am."

Jessica sadly smiled at the truth.

Niki smiled too but more confidently. "You're my greatest strength."

Jessica softened for the first time ever because the precious words from the one that meant the most to her drove deep into her. She shook her head and truthfully confessed, "And you are my strength, Niki." She had unshed tears in her eyes, and she whispered, "I am because you are."

Niki moved forward and hugged her twin tightly. She felt strong arms encircle her, and a few tears rolled down her cheeks. A nagging weight slipped off her shoulders at

that moment because she finally accepted Jessica and ultimately herself.

Jessica came out of the hug and looked over at the silent psychologist. "Fix us."

Toni felt a smile curl at her lips. She lightly jested, "And here I thought this was fixed." She neared the pair and became more serious. "I'm glad to see you two work this out." She smiled.

Jessica hesitated but replied, "Me too."

Niki could tell these recent events would alter Jessica. And it would open new dynamics to her relationship with Jessica. She set her thoughts aside and asked, "Can you reverse it, Toni?"

The psychologist took a deep breath and replied, "I hope so." She backed stepped once. "Let's sit on the floor for this one."

The twins agreed and followed Toni back to the middle of the room. They sat side by side and faced Toni. Toni raised her hands up and asked Jessica and Niki to hold hands as well. She wasn't sure how this would work out, but she was confident that if she could turn it off, then she could turn it back on too. Everybody closed their eyes, and Toni began to focus again.

Jessica this time felt the sharp pain first that originated in her head. She grounded her teeth and squeezed Niki's hand for support. Then her body felt like it was broken into shards of glass so she closed her eyes tightly. Finally her scream ripped through the quiet house.

Niki felt like she was on fire then gradually it was like a cool liquid was poured over her. Suddenly her head was slammed by Jessica's memories, personality, and emotions. She struggled to breathe, yet it felt so hard. She rasped for air and leaned forward.

Toni now only held Niki's hands because Jessica had disappeared. She had wide, black eyes and the red rings were back. She seemed to stare deep into Niki as if she could see something else. Whatever she saw in her mind was moving at an incredibly rate, but Toni easily understood each detail. She was a psychologist, and it all made sense to her. She made her last adjustment to Niki's brain so that the evolutionary gene was fully functional again, then she backed out.

Niki gasped for air when it all stopped. She could breathe easily again, and her frantic heartbeat tried to come back down. She used her hands to hold herself up.

Toni crumbled to her side and rested on the floor as if in pain. She shut her eyes,



which were easing into a leafy green again. She was far weaker than last time, but she noticed her recovery was faster.

Niki straightened up slightly and touched Toni. "Are you okay?"

The psychologist nodded and rasped, "Give me... a second." She now rolled onto her back into a more comfortable position. She placed her hands over her rapidly beating heart. "That was very intense."

Niki swallowed against the dryness in her throat. "Tell me about it." She breathed deeply once then a thought occurred to her. "Jessica?"

"Right here," Jessica answered. There was pain that threaded her voice.

Niki gingerly touched her forehead. "Are you okay?"

"Besides feeling like I was just shoved into a jar, I'm great."

Niki slightly grinned. "No place like home huh?" She heard Jessica's grunt, and she imagined Jessica would have rolled her eyes if it was possible.

Toni turned her head to Niki. "Well, that sure was fascinating." She now sat up. She groaned at the slight pain in her head. "This may require a lot of aspirin though."

"I thought psychologists didn't use medicine," Jessica taunted.

Toni mock glared and remarked, "This one might." She glanced at Niki. "Do you need any?"

"I think so." Niki got to her feet and helped Toni get up. She paused once she was up again, and she stared down at Toni. She sensed that her cheeks were rosy. "I... thanks, Toni for..."

Toni grinned and tried to lighten the mood. "For the headache?"

Niki laughed and smiled, but then she warmly replied, "For helping Jessica and I."

Toni gingerly touched the younger woman's arm. "It's a start... a really good start."

"It is," Niki whispered, "it really is." She watched Toni's expression, and she felt that pull return. What was it about Toni? She was nervous to follow it, but then she felt a surge of courage from somewhere in her. She leaned down.

Toni forgot about her head. She raised her hand up and touched Niki's cheek once she

was close enough. Then her lips sealed against Niki's in a light kiss.

Niki shifted closer and slipped an arm around Toni. She drew them together and deepened the kiss. Small fingers threaded through her hair, and she was invited into Toni's mouth. She and Toni passed soft moans at the instant contact. Niki let her tongue sensually move across Toni's before she had to withdraw for air.

Toni inhaled deeply after the kiss. She prayed nobody could hear her heartbeat, which was more erratic than earlier. She peered up into sky blue eyes. "I... I told myself I'd never get involved with anybody again because of my work... because I can't be hurt again." She faintly shook her head then admitted, "But there's something about you that makes me want to be involved... to try again."

Niki was silent, but she finally found her words. "I know how you feel." She traced Toni's defined jawline. "Let's take this slow... give it some time... a few more dates."

"I didn't realize we ever went on one," Toni teased. She chuckled at Niki's returned blush. "Oh, I see." She grinned but Niki's fingertips traced her lips. "A few more dates then," she murmured.

Niki lowered her head again and softly added, "A few more kisses." She met Toni for another long, sensual kiss.

Toni came out of the kiss with a slightly dreamy look. She quirked a grin and joked, "Maybe a few more than a few."

"Maybe," Niki murmured, and she grinned back.

"This is real sweet and all," Jessica interrupted, "but I could use the aspirin, love birds."

Niki rolled her eyes and sighed.

Toni chuckled and separated from the blond beauty. "Come on." She led the way to her kitchen where she had a small cabinet with a few minor medicines. She handed Niki the bottle of aspirin then went about getting cups of water.

After Niki took the two pills, she glanced at her watch. She looked over at Toni, who was putting the bottle away. "I should be going... Micah will be home soon."

Toni turned around and came back over. "He's done at three-thirty?"

"Yes, and he'll be there around four." Niki drank the last of the water, and Toni took the glass. "Thank you for everything, Toni."

Toni set the empty glasses by the sink. She shrugged as she came over to Niki. She slipped her hands into her pockets. "It's the least I can do after getting Micah kidnapped."

"And you helped save him," Jessica broke in again.

Niki flashed a grin at Toni. "And that's coming from the hard ass's mouth."

"I'll remember that comment," Jessica warned. Her voice was positioned off to the right.

Niki turned her head that way and saw Jessica's reflection coming off the black oven's glass door. "You do that." She winked at her reflection then walked away.

Jessica remained reflecting in the glass, and she slowly developed a wry grin as her alter ego left.

Toni joined Niki on the walk to the front door. "I'll... call you tomorrow."

"Yeah." Niki bobbed her head. "That'd be good." She stopped in front of the closed door. "Call at anytime."

Toni nodded, and she grew slightly nervous. She wasn't exactly sure how to say goodbye.

Niki resisted the chuckle that wanted to come up. She stepped forward and gave Toni a soft kiss on the lips. "See ya," she whispered, then she headed out the door.

Toni grasped the door's handle, but she stood there and watched Niki go. She had a silly smile on her face.

Niki was almost in her car, but she waved at Toni then got in quickly. She started her car and reversed out of the driveway. She soon was on her way home.

"You've really fallen for her," Jessica taunted.

Niki grinned this time around compared to yesterday. She slightly adjusted the strap across her chest then put her hand back on the wheel. She peered up in the rearview mirror and instantly saw Jessica in the backseat.

Jessica saw that sly smirk on Niki's face, which was rare. "What?"

"You find her attractive," Niki brought up.

Jessica huffed and folded her arms. "She's... not half bad," she revealed.

Niki laughed and shook her head. "You think she's hot, Jessica. I can tell." She stopped her car at the intersection light that was red. She peered back up in the mirror.

Jessica considered her alter ego's words. She bit her lower lip then suggested, "Call her." She grinned at Niki's raised eyebrow technique that mimicked her own. "Tell her to come over tonight."

"Micah is home."

"Oh that never stopped you with D.L.," Jessica thoroughly teased.

Niki released a long sigh then pushed on the gas pedal. "It's too soon."

"You don't want to screw this up." Jessica clearly understood what was the problem.

"Yeah, I don't." Niki combed her hair back with her left hand. "I really like her, Jess."

Jessica had a soft grin at hearing the nickname for the first time. She realized that her relationship with Niki was going to get better. It already was on the way. "I know." She tilted her head and tried again. "Just invite her over. Get to know her more... let her get to know us."

Niki turned the wheel to make a right turn. She thought about how Jessica phrased it. "This is an us... isn't it?" She glanced in the mirror. "I mean we're both going to have to like her."

Jessica was quiet, and it seemed like she was staring out the front window. She eventually spoke though. "Yes." She met Niki's stare in the mirror. "The fact that she's pretty hot is a plus, Niki."

Niki laughed despite the serious topic. She breathed deeply and nodded once.

"Give me some time too," Jessica confided.

Niki couldn't agree more. She had no idea where any of this would lead and it was a lot to take in right now. She simply wanted to get to know Toni better and see where it would take her and Jessica. She considered Toni's power and mentioned, "You know, this could be dangerous... for Toni."

"You mean her power," Jessica clarified.

"If the Company finds out about her..." Niki shook her head. "Between Toni and Molly Walker, they could control all of us."

Jessica felt a faint anger bubble to the surface. "We need to keep a close eye on Toni."

Niki understood Jessica's very logical attitude. She was glad that Jessica agreed with her on the idea of making sure nobody from the Company came after Toni. "We should tell Toni more about the Company."

"I don't think she needs to get anymore involved than what she knows now," Jessica argued. "Ignorance is bliss, Niki."

"It can also be dangerous," Niki reminded. "I should know."

Jessica sighed deeply and tried to make some kind of choice. "Let's just wait it out first. Maybe the Company won't even notice her."

"And if they do, all bets are off." Niki sped up her car.

"We can't go against the Company, Niki." Jessica became darker because her protective streak showed. "We have too much at stake."

Niki shook her head and mentioned, "For once it's me that wants to put up the fight, and you want to hide."

"I'm not hiding," Jessica snapped. "I'm being smart about this. What do you think the two of us can do against them? They're far more powerful than us... and Micah got involved last time." She hesitated but uttered, "He got involved because of me."

Niki silently cursed herself for even bringing this up. She flipped her blinker on and turned into the short driveway in front of her house. She parked the car then looked up in the mirror. "All I'm saying is if the Company comes into our life again, then we need to put a stop to it. Because if we don't then they'll just keep coming back... again and again, Jessica. You know I'm right."

Jessica lowered her head, which broke her eye contact with her alter ego. She knew it was all true, and she would do anything to protect Niki and Micah from the Company. She just didn't want to even consider the consequences at the end of it all. They'd lost D.L. and now Niki was falling for this Toni Kevin. Just what would it cost them if the Company showed up again?

Niki unbuckled her seatbelt and twisted around in her chair. She was relieved to see Jessica still there. "You're right that the risks are high."

Jessica peered up at Niki.

"And you've taught me the costs are higher if I hide from my problems." Niki studied her reflection, and she saw the clear concern in Jessica's ash eyes.

Jessica slowly released her breath then nodded. "Alright." She bit her lower lip. "If it happens, we'll deal with it... together."

Niki sadly smiled at getting a promise now. "Hopefully we won't cross that bridge."

"Hopefully," Jessica muttered. Then she and Niki both turned their heads to the right.

"Micah," Niki murmured. She turned the car off and climbed out of the car.

"Hey, mom," Micah called. He was hurrying down the sidewalk after walking home from school.

Niki came around her car and met him. "Hey, cutie." She knelt and gave him a large hug. She kissed him on the forehead and asked, "How was school?"

"It was good. I got a lot of homework."

"Yeah?" Niki took Micah's hand and walked with him to the house. "What you feel like for dinner?"

Micah stood on the stoop and waited for his mom to unlock the door. "I'm kind of in the mood for chicken."

Niki chuckled and opened the door. "I'm feeling the same."

"Ask him about inviting Toni over," Jessica suggested.

Niki closed the door, and she decided whether or not to take the suggestion. She picked up Micah's bookbag before he disappeared into his bedroom with it. She pulled out his lunchbox. "You feel like having a guest over for dinner?"

Micah received his bookbag back. "You mean Toni, right?" He followed his mom into the kitchen.

The mother set the box on the counter and turned back to her son. "Yeah, I was thinking it'd be nice to have her over."

Micah suddenly had a smile. "She's pretty cool, mom." He then went more serious. "Do... do you like her or somethin', mom?"

Niki came over then squatted down in front of her son. She rested her hands on her knees. "It's a bit early to tell, Micah."

"What about Dad?"

Niki reached forward and rested her hands on Micah's hips. "I'll always love your father." She felt the sting in her eyes. "There's nobody that can replace him."

Micah slightly bowed his head but looked up again. "Can you love somebody else?"

"I can," Niki started to explain, "but that doesn't mean I won't stop loving your father." She tilted her head. "Will you ever stop loving him?"

Micah quickly shook his head.

"Same for me too," Niki agreed. She lifted her hand and rested her palm against her son's cheek. "There are some things I feel for Toni... I'm just not sure what they are yet."

"Did you feel those things for Dad too?"

"Similar but different too," Niki replied. "She's not like your father and your father isn't like her." She waited a beat then asked, "Does it make sense?"

Micah nodded his head. Then he honestly stated, "If she makes you happy then you should keep talking to her."

Niki sadly smiled at her son's wisdom. "Yeah."

"Mom?"

"Yeah, cutie?"

Micah was slightly apprehensive, but he questioned, "Is Jessica staying?"

Niki knew she needed to have this talk with her son. "She wants to stay, Micah." She watched his face then informed, "I want her to stay too. We're working out our differences." She tilted her head. "Are you okay with it?"

Micah had fuzzy eyes as he seriously thought about it. "She won't hurt us anymore?"

Niki sighed, but she showed a wistful smile. "She won't anymore, Micah. She didn't realize it before, but she wants to help us... protect us from bad things." She searched

her son's brown eyes then mentioned, "I trust her, Micah."

Micah now nodded, and he thought back on his experience last night. He had Jessica to thank. "I trust her too." He then furrowed his eyebrows. "Does this mean I have two moms?"

Niki laughed at the unexpected question. "I guess so, cutie." She devilishly grinned and teased, "And I think you need it."

"Mom," Micah complained. He sighed and rolled his eyes.

Niki chuckled but leaned forward for a hug.

Micah warmly hugged back then after the hug, he suggested, "You should call Toni now because dinner is soon."

Niki laughed because Micah liked to keep to his schedule during the weekdays. "You're right." She kissed him on the cheek and stood up. "Why don't you get started on your homework."

Micah nodded and headed for his room.

"Micah?"

The boy stopped and glanced back at his glowing mother.

"I love you."

Micah warmly smiled then replied, "I love you too, mom." He then hefted his bookbag onto his back and wandered into his room.

Niki leaned against the counter. She still had her smile, and she contently sighed.

"Thanks, Niki," Jessica sincerely offered. She was surprised by Niki backing her up earlier. There was a pause then she mentioned, "You better give Toni a call."

Niki shook her head, yet she fished out her cell phone from her front pocket. She flipped it open, drew up Toni's name, and stared at the number. "Jess... if this doesn't work out then..."

Jessica understood that Niki didn't mean tonight's dinner. Niki was nervous about everything between Toni and them not working out right. She considered an old quote that Niki often referred to at these times. "Love doesn't make the world go 'round. Love is what makes the ride worthwhile."



Niki raised an eyebrow. "I can't believe you remember that quote." She gave in and hit the Send button on her phone. She raised it up to her ear and listened to the ring then there was an answer after a few seconds. "Hey, Toni." She slowly smiled then mentioned, "I just thought if you're free tonight that you might like to have dinner with us." And that smile of hers spread wider. "That'd be wonderful." She listened to Toni, but she lifted her head and saw Jessica's reflection coming off the glossy, black microwave.

Jessica had a sly grin, and she just winked at her alter ego. She didn't realize how content she felt until Niki smiled back at her. Just maybe this whole merge wasn't solely between her and Niki. Maybe this family was about to get a little bigger... just maybe.

**The End.**