

Finding Hope

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Jade

My life has always been a little unordinary considering I was raised by my uncle since I was five. I don't really remember my parents, but my uncle told me that they died in a car accident on their way back from their vacation. At the time of their accident, I was staying with my grandmother so they could have some time alone, since I took up most of their time. It wasn't long after my parents died that my grandmother died also. My uncle said that she blamed herself for their deaths, since she was the one who suggested that they go away for a bit to try and repair their strained marriage. My uncle said that he tried to tell her that it wasn't her fault multiple times, but she went into a depression and wouldn't eat or talk to anyone until it was too late. My uncle has struggled with all of their deaths because they all died too close together. I really don't remember any of them, but I do feel the pain of not ever getting a chance to know them or to experience my life with them. My uncle has tried to tell me stories about all of them, but it upsets him too bad to get into too much detail, which is understandable because he actually got a chance to know them. My life hasn't always been the easiest, but I'm glad that I've had my uncle through it all because he has helped me cope in more ways than one. I was always a loner at school, which meant I was teased a lot and told that I was an outcast. It didn't really bother me at first until they started rumors about my uncle that wasn't true. The ordeal caused us issues because the rumors were checked out by the authorities, but we were able to get through it. After the issue, I was removed from school. Since that time, a lot more has occurred, but I try not to think about it because it makes me angry towards people, which I'm trying to change. Now that I'm older, I now work full time at my uncle's home repair business so I can help him out and try to give back to my uncle for everything he's done for me. I could've easily been sent to an orphanage, but my uncle gave up everything for me, which I'll never forget.

"Jade, are you up?" I hear my uncle yell from down the hall.

"Yeah, I just got up!"

"Hurry up and get ready. Mrs. Abrams called and said that one of the pipes in her basement has developed a leak Overnight."

"Okay, let me get dressed," I say as I push myself up, so that I can sit and clear my eyes.

I quickly stand up and begin to get dressed because Mrs. Abrams will complain if we don't hurry up and get the issue fixed. I wouldn't worry about it too much, but she is very influential in our area, so her opinion matters to everyone. If she tells people not to use our company, people will listen so we must be careful about what we say or do, or we will lose our customers and our way of life. Mrs. Abrams has always been an issue for us because she is nosey and thinks that I should've been raised by someone else, which lead her to cause my uncle a lot of issues that almost caused me to be placed in a foster family. After that issue we have tried to stay on Mrs. Abrams's good side, so that she won't cause us more issues. I try to avoid her because she goes around telling people around town that I shouldn't be working for my uncle because it's a man's job, and that I should get married and learn my role within society. The funny thing is, if anyone really knew the truth about me, I wouldn't be accepted in this area because I don't fit into their traditional views of what life is supposed to be like. My uncle knows everything about me, and he has learned to accept me, but he worries about how I'll be treated within this town, so I keep my life a secret.

"I'm going to start loading the truck with the tools we'll be needing today," my uncle says outside my door.

"Okay, I'll be there in a second," I say as I quickly finish fixing my hair, then rush out to help my uncle.

Once I reach the garage, I find my uncle standing next to his truck holding his arm. He looks like he's in a lot of pain but once he notices me standing in the doorway, he brushes it off and resumes loading the truck. I look at him with concern because I don't know what to do for him. I've noticed that he has had a lot of pain lately, but he won't tell me what's wrong, and he won't go see a doctor. It worries me

because I don't want to lose him because he's all I have left in the world. Without him I have no one or nothing. The thought that one day that I'll lose him crushes me because I truly don't have no one else who cares for me in this world.

"Jade, are you okay?" My uncle asks as he looks at me.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I say as I walk toward the truck.

"Are you sure? You look really upset about something."

"I'm just worried about you."

"I'm fine. I hurt my arm last week and it's taking its time to heal. I've done it before and I'm sure I'll do it again, considering the type of work we do."

"If your arm doesn't start getting better soon, you're going to the doctor even if I have to force you," I say as I cross my arms and give him a stern look. My uncle looks at me with a smile and begins to laugh at me like I've said the funniest thing in the world.

"When did you become my mother?"

"When you stopped taking care of yourself."

"I didn't stop taking care of myself, I just have a lot of responsibilities that take up my time. I don't have time to go see the doctor all of the time."

"You haven't been to a doctor in ten years."

"That's because I stay busy."

"Yeah, sure," I mumble as I finish helping my uncle load the truck.

I hate that my uncle is hurt, but I also hate it when he tries to make me mad to get me to change the subject. He always does this to deflect the conversation because he knows how to make me angry. I shouldn't have let him know what makes me angry because he uses it to his advantage every time I turn around. I wish I could just get him to listen, but somehow, I don't think that will ever happen. My uncle is the most hardheaded person I know, and the most determined. I've learned to appreciate his determination and hardworking characteristics, but everything else has been challenging through the years. We are two completely different people in a lot of ways, but we seem to get along somehow. Well, most of the time anyway.

"Are you ready?" My uncle asks after the truck is loaded.

"I guess. I don't really want to go to Mrs. Abrams' house, but other than that I'm ready."

"I don't care much for her either, but we have a local company, and she is a local, so we have no other choice but to go fix her leak."

"I know. I just hope she doesn't start with me today."

"Just ignore her, and it will be fine."

I get into the truck and try to think positively about going over to Mrs. Abrams's house. The last time I was over at her house for a visit, her granddaughter was in town. That visit wasn't very pleasant, which caused her granddaughter to never be allowed to come back over to her house ever again. You would think that she would learn that no one likes her choice of communication styles. She lets her traditional views and beliefs get in the way of being a decent person. She believes everyone should still live like she did when she was growing up, but the world has changed a lot since then, which means that her past lifestyle won't work in today's world.

As soon as we pull up in the driveway, we can see Mrs. Abrams standing in her living room window looking out with her hands on her hips. She looks like she's been standing there for a while waiting, so her attitude is certainly going to be horrendous to say the least. I remember that stance and look from the last time I was here when she was yelling and screaming at me and her granddaughter in front of two other kids from across the street. Since that day no one from her family has come to visit her over her attitude. I don't blame them because she was acting very distasteful about the stupidest thing that never even happened in the first place. Her granddaughter tried to tell her, but she wouldn't listen, so her parents took her home and then that was it. They found somewhere else to move and left. I didn't

really care too much about them leaving because I wasn't friends with her. My uncle just dropped me off over here sometimes to try to get me a friend, but that didn't last too long because it wasn't long until she caused us problems. I particularly didn't like the way Mrs. Abrams behaved that day, and I certainly didn't like her causing my uncle trouble afterwards either. She accused me of doing something that I didn't do, which is what got the whole issue started in the first place.

"Are you ready for this?" My uncle says as he brings me out of the memory that played in my mind from that day.

"Not really, but like you said, we have to get this done or she'll trash your company's name and we won't have any money generating."

"That's true. She has everyone in the palm of her hand because they're afraid of what she will do to them."

We both get out of the truck and head over to the front door where Mrs. Abrams is now standing. She looks like she wants to say something hateful, but she is interrupted by Mr. Abrams who just came out of the house to shake my uncle's hand. Mr. Abrams has always been the nice one out of the two, but he was always told to shut up and let her handle everything. I don't know how he has put up with her all these years, but I guess he loves her. I don't think any amount of love could keep me in a situation like that, but who knows I could be wrong. If I ever fall in love, I might see things differently, however, I don't see that happening any time soon.

"Hello, how are you?" Mr. Abrams asks my uncle with a smile on his face.

Mrs. Abrams gives us all a glare, but Mr. Abrams is being nice, at the very least. Hopefully, he stays around us to keep her quiet. I know I don't have the patience for her attitude even on a good day, so today it will make it ten times worse if she starts. I try to stay standing on the bottom step of the porch, so I don't get in the way because I don't want to be yelled at for not minding my manners, as she used to always say to me.

"I'm doing good. It's nice to see you getting around so well after your surgery." My uncle says as he puts his hand on Mr. Abrams's shoulder.

"I've been doing a lot better lately. I've felt better than I have in over thirty years. I just wish they would've done the surgery a lot sooner, so I could've enjoyed my life a lot sooner. Now, my life is almost over, so it's time to enjoy it a little. I just can't do everything I wanted to."

"You still have a lot of time left to enjoy your life," My uncle says as he leans up against the railing of the porch.

"Not as much as I wish, but I'm still going to make it count. I called my son the other day and apologized for not taking his side all those years ago. He finally forgave me and agreed to let me come stay with him for a while, so I can work to repair our relationship. I was also able to speak to my granddaughter, but I don't think she forgives me yet, but I'll make it up to her when I get there."

"I'm happy to hear that you're able to make things right. I know it has been bothering you for quite some time."

"After my surgery, I told myself it was time to change things before it's too late, no matter if Helen likes it or not."

Mrs. Abrams takes a deep breath then stomps back into the house like a child that has just been scolded. I've never seen her look so mad at Mr. Abrams in my life, it's usually him looking upset. This is a nice change, considering how she used to do him when he tried to talk to someone or do anything in general. I wish I was able to tell her a few things myself, but it would harm my uncle's company so I can't.

"It's nice to see you to, Jade. I haven't seen you in a long while, how have you been?"

"It's nice to see you to. I've been doing okay. I've just been staying busy with work."

"I've heard from your uncle that you've been doing really good working on repairs."

"Surprisingly, I've been able to do everything he's thrown at me since I've started."

"I'm happy to see you finding your place in this crappy town. I was hoping you would go to college and escape this place, but I understand why you didn't."

"I couldn't leave my uncle behind. I tried to get him to relocate, but he said this is his home here."

"I don't think he will ever leave here, but maybe you can find some way of having a better life here. I'm finally leaving this place after fifty years, and I couldn't be happier."

"Is Mrs. Abrams going with you?"

"No. I decided until she can learn to become a better person, we should part ways. My son won't let me come to his house if I bring her, so I'm choosing my son this time."

"I'm happy to hear that you're finally getting out of here."

"Me to, but please don't let this place keep you from living your life. I know your life has been difficult, but life is too short to not to live it. I know your uncle means a lot to you, but don't let that keep you from finding happiness. This place seems to bring the worst out in people."

"Thanks for the suggestion, but I can't leave my uncle."

Mr. Abrams looks disappointed, but he nods and gives me a small smile before heading back inside. Once he is inside, Mrs. Abrams comes to the door and looks at me with her normal glare. I return the glare without noticing what I'm doing. My uncle clears his throat then offers Mrs. Abrams a smile to get her attention off me. I already know that he's going to be giving me a lecture later about giving her a glare. But, in my offense, I was just mocking her without realizing it until I saw her surprised look, and the angry look my uncle had. All I can say is that if she wouldn't have been so hateful, she wouldn't have gotten the glare back.

"Hello, Mrs. Abrams. How are you?" My uncle says as he tries to get her to change her train of thought.

"I'm fine. It's my basement that has a problem. Can you finally go fix it, or would you like to know how many times I've went to the bathroom this morning?"

My uncle looks surprised for a moment then regains his composure. I can tell that he is not happy with her statement, but he won't say anything because he knows that she can destroy his company and life within a second. I wish my uncle would relocate, but he refuses because he says that if he leaves it would be like abandoning my parents and grandmother since they are buried here. I understand that he doesn't want to leave because of that, but he is not happy, and neither am I. Every time I go somewhere all I'm reminded of is the fact that I'm the girl with the dead parents who lives and works for her uncle. Everyone blames me for my uncle's unhappiness, but they won't tell me why it's my fault. My uncle said it was just them being sarcastic, but I'm not so sure.

"Jade let's go down and see what we need for the repair," my uncle says as he puts his arm around my shoulder and guides me toward the front door.

I nod then walk past Mrs. Abrams who is looking surprised that he's taking me with him to the basement. I guess she wanted to direct her negative attitude towards me next, since she looked so surprised. I'm just glad he saved me from her wrath because her attitude is even worse today since Mr. Abrams is leaving her. I'm surprised that he is leaving, but I guess he can't take anymore of her crap.

"Are you okay?" my uncle asks as he walks down the steps beside me.

"Yeah, I'm just surprised that Mr. Abrams is actually leaving."

"I am to. He called me after his operation to apologize about Mrs. Abrams calling the authorities on me when you were little and told me that he was through with her conniving ways. He said that he was going to start over and suggested I do the same thing, which got me to thinking. I know that I'm not leaving here, but I think you should go even if it's only for a month or so. I've already made plans for you to go on a month vacation to your parents' favorite vacation spot. It's the same place they went before they died in the car accident. I thought maybe it would help you feel closer to them in some way. I kept in touch with your parents the whole time they were on vacation, so I was able to know everything they did and where they stayed, so I recreated their entire trip for you."

"You did what?" I ask surprised, and a little upset that he is sending me away.

"I think it's for the best. I want you to see how life could be outside of this town. I will always be here for you, but I can't abandon everything here. I might be able to come stay with you for a few days, but I can't just leave everything behind. I promised everyone I would stay here and make sure this town didn't get torn upside down."

"Why is it your job?" I ask hatefully.

"My father, before he got sick owned this town. He was going to leave it to me and your father, but he got to where he needed money for medical bills, so we ended up selling it. Even when my father no longer owned this town, he would get out and do things to better it because he thought of this place as his paradise. We all pitched in and helped him because it meant so much to him. So, after his passing I vowed to keep this town the way it was. I know that may not seem logical to you, but it's how I feel close to those I've lost."

"I understand, but why is it so important that I leave?"

"This place means a lot to me because it's where I grew up, I made memories here, and this is where everyone that I care about resides even in death. I have a lot that keeps me invested in this town, however you don't. You're young and can't seem to find your place here, which is fine because you're a lot like your mother. She didn't like it here either, she said that after she got back into town from the vacation that she was moving," my uncle stops talking and clears his throat. "But she never got the chance," he continues.

"If it will make you happy, I will go on this vacation. But I don't want to go until you get better."

"I'm fine. If something gets worse, I'll go to the doctor, then I'll call you. Your trip officially begins tomorrow morning."

"That soon?"

"Yes. After we get done here, we are heading to Pete's house so I can meet my potential new hire. Pete said that he found this guy at the hardware store trying to get a job, so I'm hoping he will know something about repair work."

"So, I'm getting sent away, and replaced by someone else?" I ask angrily.

"It's not like that. Now, let's see what we need to fix this," my uncle says as he locates the leak, then walks back over to me with a smug look on his face.

"Why do you look so smug?"

"The pipe doesn't even have a leak. The pipe isn't even attached. It looks like Mr. Abrams may have took it loose to get someone to come look at it, so they could charge Mrs. Abrams for it."

"Wow, is he that angry with her?"

"I believe so. If you'll tighten the pipe, I'll go speak to Mr. Abrams," I nod then head over to the pipe.

I can't believe that Mr. Abrams would do something like this, but I can see how Mrs. Abrams caused him to it. In my opinion, this is the least harm he could've done considering some of the things she's done to him over the years. I just hope he will find the happiness that he's looking for, because he deserves it after everything he's been put through. I also hope that this will be a learning experience for Mrs. Abrams because she needs to learn that you can't treat people like she does and get away with it without consequences. You would think that with her as old as she is, that she would understand that already, but some people don't learn their life lessons until the very end of their life. The thought of that is sad because most people could've had a lot better life if they would've understood things a lot earlier in their life.

I finish tightening the pipe, then I head back upstairs so that we can leave, but I'm met with the sound of arguing at the top of the stairs. I find my uncle who is standing in the kitchen doorway trying calm down Mrs. Abrams who is screaming. I quickly make my way to the kitchen, so that I can try to see what's going on. When I reach my uncle, I hear glass break and the back-door slam. I can only imagine

what's going on, since the pipe was intentionally loosened. I tap my uncle's shoulder to get his attention then he leans closer to me to whisper in my ear.

"Go wait in the truck, I'll be there in a few minutes. Mr. Abrams will be waiting for you when you get out there."

I nod then quickly head outside to the truck to find Mr. Abrams leaning against the front of my uncle's truck. He doesn't look very happy about the situation, but who would be considering the circumstances. I know he must be hurting because he has been with Mrs. Abrams for so many years, but yet she's unwilling to change to have a better life that he wants. I can only imagine what he must be going through right now. With that being said, I can also only imagine what Mrs. Abrams must be going through right now to. The sad thing is, she doesn't get it, which means she's going to have to learn the hard way, considering she didn't take the hint. I just hope they both can get through this because they both deserve happiness just like everyone else, even though Mrs. Abrams can be horrible most of the time.

"I'm sorry that you and your uncle had to be subjected to my problems. I was hoping to get Helen to realize how her attitude is affecting everyone around her, and how her attitude can push someone to act out of character. But just like I thought, she refuses to admit she is wrong," Mr. Abrams says as he looks down at the ground.

"I can see your point, and I get it. I know how hard it has been for you. I saw that the day your son took your granddaughter away. You tried to reason with her, but she wouldn't listen. All she did was tell you to shut up, and do what your good at," I say as I put my hand on his shoulder to offer him support.

"She used to say that a lot to me, and I would just let her get away with it over fear of losing her, but once you face death everything becomes clearer. That was what I was trying to tell you earlier. Sometimes you must make difficult decisions to be able to have a happier life. Even if you leave doesn't mean that you can't come back and visit your uncle," he says looking at me in my eyes.

"I know and I'm glad you're trying to help me. My uncle has made plans for me to go to my parents' favorite vacation spot for a month to get a sense of what it's like to be away from here. I'm not sure how happy I am about it, but I'm leaving tomorrow."

"How exciting. I hope you can find what you're missing out there. I know you've been having a hard time dealing with things," he says hopeful.

I try to think of a reply, but the front door flies open, and my uncle comes running out. As soon as my uncle's feet hit the ground, Mrs. Abrams begins throwing out Mr. Abrams's clothes on the front porch as she yells. My uncle begins to gather up the clothes after she's done throwing them, then he brings them to the truck. My uncle looks at Mr. Abrams with concern as he walks over to the truck because he is clearly upset by the situation. Even more so now than before over her act of pure hatred.

"I tried talking to her, but she wouldn't listen to me. She said she wants you out if you can't accept her with the way she is. I know this must be difficult for you, but you're more than welcome to come stay at my house until your son comes to get you. We have the space, and with Jade leaving tomorrow, I could use the company," my uncle says as he places Mr. Abrams clothes in the truck.

"I don't want to impose on you."

"You wouldn't be. You would actually be helping me out by staying," my uncle says as he looks at Mr. Abrams, which makes him begin to smile then nod in acceptance.

I can tell that my uncle has made Mr. Abrams a lot happier, which is good considering his predicament right now. I know he really doesn't want to leave, but I can tell he is also very tired of how things have been going. He has missed out on a lot over the years over that stupid fight a long time ago that costed him his son and granddaughter.

"Here is the last of your belongings. The rest of the stuff inside the house, I bought with my family's money, so they are mine now. If you come to your senses and want to come back, I'll give you the stuff

back, but until then they will remain here," Mrs. Abram says as she throws a few more items of clothing, and a picture down on the ground before storming back inside.

My uncle quickly grabs Mr. Abrams's things then places them in the truck. Mr. Abrams stands against the truck as he begins to shake his head in disbelief before getting into the truck himself. Mrs. Abrams stands at the window looking smug as we pull out of the driveway. I can imagine she used his belongings as collateral to try and get him to stay, but it didn't work because Mr. Abrams has his own plans to try and change her before it's too late.

The drive home is spent in silence because no one knows what to say to each other. I don't want to say the wrong thing and make things worse, so I just watch the trees go by the window as we head down our street. I'm not sure if we are just dropping off Mr. Abrams at home before we go to Pete's house, or if we are just going to stay home now. All I do know is no matter what I have to get ready to leave tomorrow. I never thought I would be saying those words, but now that I am, it feels kind of exciting. I thought it would make me a little more upset than it is, but I can't wait to see the last place my parents saw before they died. I just hope it's as amazing as my uncle made it sound, or I may want to escape before it's time to leave.

"I'm going to drop you two off at home. Jade show Mr. Abrams to the guest room and help him get settled in, then you need to start packing because I have to take you to the airport at five in the morning. So, make sure to get some rest. I'm going to go meet my potential new hire, so I'll be gone for a while."

"Okay, be careful," I say as I get out of the truck, and help grab Mr. Abrams's clothes.

"I will," my uncle says as he waits for us to get out.

Mr. Abrams and I finish grabbing everything out of the truck, then we head inside the house so that I can help him get settled in, so that I can get ready to go on my so-called vacation. I just wish it wasn't alone, but I've got to learn how to do things on my own, so this will be the perfect opportunity to do that. I just hope that I don't do something stupid to make myself look incapable of taking care of myself on my own. I would be the first adult to fail at taking care of themselves, which would be pathetic. The very thought makes me nervous because this will be the first time that I've ever been alone in my life. I've always had my uncle with me, so this will be like being a teenager that is left at home for the first time by themselves.

"Jade, I hate to bother you when you seem so deep in thought, but can you point me in the direction of the restroom?"

"Yes, of course. It's right down the hall, and to the left."

"Thank you," he says as he hurries down the hall.

I nod then head into the kitchen to grab me a bottle of water. I would get Mr. Abrams something, but I'm not sure what he drinks considering I don't even know the man that well. I've seen him in town a couple of times when I was with my uncle and went to his house when I was a kid a few times, but we never got to know each other. My uncle, however, knows everyone in this town personally. I tried to talk to people, but nobody really likes me too much because they see me as a burden still to this day. Maybe I am, maybe that's why my uncle is sending me away. The thought upsets me a little, but I try not to overreact because I don't know if that's it or not.

"Thank you again. I had drunk way too much coffee this morning, trying to stay up to see Helen's reaction to the leak. I know it was childish, but it felt good to make her upset after everything she's done to everyone."

"Sometimes we have to do things that seem childish to get others to realize certain things. Sometimes our efforts work and other times they don't. I'm sorry that in your situation it didn't work."

"It's fine. It might be nice to have some freedom. I got married right out of college to Helen. My father told me it was the best thing to do because she had a lot of money, which would allow me to pay off my debts, and help the family since we had been struggling. I knew I didn't really love her at the

time, but I married her anyway. After a few years, I started to love her. It wasn't like it should be, but I stayed with her anyway. It wasn't until Jason was born that I truly fell in love with her. At the time, I saw how loving and caring she was towards our son and I thought that becoming a mother would change her. It did for a few years, but then she fell back into the same attitude you see today once Jason started wanting to be with me instead of her. She took it the wrong way, which made her to believe that he didn't love her anymore. Once that happened it made her start treating us both like we didn't matter over her jealousy."

"That must've been hard on you both."

"It was. I should've left her way before I did, but I didn't have any money and I had to make sure Jason was taken care of, so I stayed in a relationship that costed me my one true love. I'm not going to lie, before I married Helen, I was with this young beautiful girl who lived about five miles away from me. I loved her more than anything, but her family moved away so I never saw her again. After that I gave up on the idea of ever finding love again, so I choose Helen. I know I shouldn't have listened to my father. I had my degree. I could've made my own money to pay my bills and help my family."

"It sounds like you had a hectic life?"

"I did. I grew up in a poor family who didn't always want to do things the right way to earn a living. They used me to make sure they had money. I don't regret it at all because I wouldn't have my son or my granddaughter, but I just wish I would've stood my ground a long time ago before everything got so bad."

"At least you still have time to fix things."

"And I'm going to make each day count. Now, young lady, go get packed then get some rest. I'll make myself at home here on the couch if you don't mind?"

"That's fine with me. If you want something to eat or drink the kitchen is all yours, also the guest room is right down the hall to the right. I believe it's the second door. If you need anything just knock on my door."

"Okay, thank you."

"You're welcome," I say as I head towards my room.

On the way to my room, I think about what Mr. Abrams said about how he gave up his happiness to ensure that his family was taken care of. The story is kind of upsetting, but I understand where he's coming from because I can relate to it. Although, my situation is not the same. I just wonder if my uncle is trying to tell me that he doesn't really want me here anymore, or if he just wants to make me see something I don't at this moment. Maybe, I should have a talk with my uncle before I go, so I will know what my next step should be.

I grab my suitcase from my closet and begin to pack. I had been wondering why my uncle had bought me a suitcase two months ago, but now I no longer need to guess. He was planning this for a long time, right in front of me and I never even realized it. I don't know if I should be happy, sad or mad about this because I don't know where this is all coming from. My uncle has been experiencing health issues lately so I'm afraid to leave him, but it makes it a bit easier knowing that Mr. Abrams will be around to keep an eye on him until he leaves.

As I continue to pack, I hear a car door outside. I look out and find that my uncle has come home. He has a man with him who looks kind of familiar. I continue to stare out my window until the man sees me looking at him, then I go back to packing. I wasn't trying to make him feel uncomfortable, I was just trying to figure out where I know him from. Maybe it was from my old high school. Back in those days, it wasn't a good time for me because I was trying to figure myself out at that point, which caused me to be even more awkward which generated a lot of bullying. I was called names and a couple of kids started fights with me then told the principal that I started it when I didn't. Everyone believed I was a troublemaker until one of the school's staff members saw that I was being bullied then went to the principal's office to report it. It didn't stop the cruel treatment, but at least I wasn't sent to detention

anymore. At that time, I stayed depressed because I was going through changes and was figuring things out about myself that I couldn't tell anyone because of the way our town is. It made me feel even more alone and ashamed to be myself because I thought there was something wrong with me, which made me go into the denial phase, which made me even more unhappy to be myself. My uncle had homeschooled me for as long as he could, but unfortunately, I had no other choice but to go to high school, which was my own worst nightmare. Especially for someone who already felt like an outcast then was made to feel even more ashamed and embarrassed by the other kids. The only thing that kept me going was my uncle who kept reassuring me that life gets better when you graduate. He was right, but the feeling of loneliness has never left, nor has the depression. I know that's probably the reason why my uncle wants me to go on this trip, but I'm afraid to be alone.

After a few more minutes of packing, I hear a knock on my bedroom window. I look out to find my uncle waving for me to come outside. I close the curtain then I head towards the front door. I'm nervous to go outside around the strange man because I don't know if he was one of the people who made my life a living hell. I know it shouldn't bother me, but a lot of bad shit happened to me while I was in high school. Most of which I don't care to remember. Once I get outside, my uncle walks up to me and puts his arm around my shoulder.

"Jade, I hope you remember Taylor. He used to go to school with you in kindergarten, but his parents moved away before you two became friends." I look at Taylor for a few minutes then I remember him. He was the little dorky kid that I liked spending time with.

"You've certainly grown and changed quite a bit," I say as I look him over.

"So, have you. The last time I saw you, you were shy and was afraid to be yourself."

"I still can't be myself in this town. They are still just as traditional as always."

"I say be yourself no matter what others think. Your secret isn't that bad anyway." My uncle looks at me shocked.

"He knows?" My uncle asks with one brow raised.

"He was the only kid in school that I liked, so I told him. He knew before you did."

"Don't worry, I didn't say anything to anyone, but I don't think it's right that she can't be happy over what other people think."

"Hey, Jade keeps that a secret because she wants to. I never once told her to. I think she should do whatever makes her feel comfortable. I just worry how people in this town will treat her."

"Okay guys, what did you want?"

"Oh yeah. I just wanted to let you get reacquainted with Taylor here, and to tell you that he will be staying here while you're gone and maybe longer than that."

"Okay."

"I'll tell you more later in private," my uncle says quietly.

I nod then I quickly head back inside to find Mr. Abrams standing at the window. Apparently, he could hear everything, but I don't care. I'm getting tired of hiding everything about myself anyway. Once I walk up to Mr. Abrams he smiles then walks over to the couch. He pats the seat beside him, so I go sit down so I can see what he has to say.

"I want to start off by saying, I hope you don't think I was eavesdropping because I wasn't. Your uncle wanted me to hand him something, so I was waiting for him to take it. And secondly, I already know about what you were talking about, and it doesn't make me think any less of you. I've always thought you were a good person and I still do. You just need to become comfortable with yourself and everything will start to become easier."

"How do you know?" I ask surprised.

"Well, that's simple. I know the signs because my sister was also like you, and that was in a time when people weren't as accepting of that sort of thing. However, she didn't let it hold her back, she lived the life she wanted even though she didn't have the same rights as others or the ability to get married

back then. She lived with her partner and fought for people's rights, so that everyone would someday be accepted like they should be no matter who they love. She didn't get to see how the world turned out because she died when some man shot her over her trying to bring acceptance within the world, but I like to think that her efforts helped to shape a better world, so her death isn't in vain. Luckily, for you and others today, you don't have to go through the same irony. I understand that it's still not as easily as it should be today because you still see people getting bullied, killed and harmed over their differences but at least it's not as hard. With that being said, I believe that you should live your life the way you want to and don't let others stop you. As long as you're happy it doesn't matter what others think."

"Thank you for trying to help me, it means a lot. But I'm sorry to hear about your sister."

"Thank you, but it's fine. It was a long time ago now. Don't get me wrong, I miss her, and I love her, but she did what she felt was right even though it ended up being the cause of her death. With that being said, I'm also extremely proud of her because she was brave even though she knew the dangers. It gives me hope for the future."

"I never really thought about things like that, so thanks for sharing your sister's story with me. Who knows what might happen, I'm leaving for a month in a complete different place?" I say optimistically.

"There you go. Now that's what I like to hear. Make me proud," he says as he pats me on the shoulder.

I smile then I give Mr. Abrams a hug before heading back to my room. His words helped me feel a little more comfortable about being myself around others. I now realize how hard it has always been on people who are different. I knew it was bad, but Mr. Abrams helped me understand another side of the issue. If I keep myself hid, then it won't help to make the world a better place. I guess it does help to talk and share experiences to get a better understanding of the past, present and how the future could go if we all can be truthful about ourselves and work towards a better future together.

Once I finish packing, I head out to the living room where everyone is sitting. They're all so deep into their conversation that they don't even realize that I'm standing at the couch. I don't want to bother them, so I go back into my room. That's the happiest I've seen my uncle in a very long time, which makes me happy. Maybe this trip that I'm taking will do us all some good and allow us to find our own way. I may even learn how to be myself for once, so that I'm not so depressed all the time.

"Jade, it's time to get up. Your plane is scheduled to leave within the next two hours." I hear my uncle say as he shakes my foot.

"I'm up," I say trying to open my eyes.

"Good, because we need to talk before you go," my uncle says as his words sends a shock through me. I sit up and look at my uncle. He seems a little uncomfortable, but he continues. "As you know, I set this trip up for you. I don't want you to think that I'm sending you away because I don't want you here because that's not it. But there is something you should know. I recently found out that my company will be going out of business soon due to new licensing requirements that I'm not going to be able to do. That's why I chose to give you this trip now, while I can afford it. Your parents always wanted to take you to their favorite location so that they could share the experience with you, so this is my way of giving them what they wanted. And who knows, you may find what you've always been looking for up there. I want you to really try to have fun, instead of worrying about me. I have two people here with me who will keep me company," he says sincerely.

"I don't know what to say but thank you for trying to give me an experience I should've had with my parents. I just wish they were still here, but I do love and appreciate you, and all that you've done for me. I hope you know that?"

"I do, and I'm proud of you. I want you to know that I support you, and I don't care what people think. If you find someone who makes you happy, I want you to bring them to meet me."

"Okay, that's a promise," I say with a smile.

"It needs to be a promise. Now go get a shower and get dressed, you have a long plane ride to prepare for."

After my uncle exits my room, I quickly head into the bathroom so that I can get a quick shower. I know I don't want to sit next to other passengers without having a shower first. And I certainly don't want to give the wrong impression off to the people within the area that I'm going to. It's weird to know that I will be going to a destination that I don't even know the name of, but at least I'll get to be in a new place for a little while to see how other people live. I've never been out of this town so this will be an experience that I need.

Once I'm done showering, I quickly get dressed so that my uncle can drive me to the airport. I'm not sure how I'm supposed to get around once I'm there, but I guess I'll figure it out. I just wonder why my uncle doesn't want me to drive my car to my destination unless it's somewhere that I can't drive to. I just wish my uncle would tell me my destination, so I will know what I need to prepare for.

"Jade, are you about ready? You don't have long to finish getting ready until we have to go, in order to be able to make it to the airport on time.

"I'm getting ready to come out," I say as I finish fixing my hair.

"Okay, I made you some breakfast, but you'll have to eat it on the way."

"That's fine. Thank you for making my breakfast, it means a lot."

"You're welcome. Now let's go."

I quickly make my way out into the living room where my uncle is standing and waiting with a plate of food. He hands me the plate then takes my luggage from me, with a smile. I hope I packed enough for this trip because I don't have a whole lot of money, since I've been helping out with the bills, which means I can't just go out and buy everything I will need. I usually don't worry about things like that, but since I'm going to be alone for a whole month, it makes me terrified. I just hope that I can do this alone without having a panic attack or something. I can handle a lot of things, but this is one thing I've never had to do on my own before so it's frightening. But I guess this is something that everyone goes through when they leave home for the first time.

"Did you make sure you packed enough clothes?"

"I hope so, but I'm not completely sure. I've never had to plan a trip before."

"I'm sure you've done fine. However, if you find that you're running short on anything you can use this, just don't overspend." My uncle says as he hands me his company credit card.

"Are you sure you want me to take this?"

"Yes, but like I said don't go crazy or we'll be out of business before time."

"I won't. In fact, if I ever need to use it, I'll call and confirm the purchase before I make it."

"Okay, if that works for you," My uncle says as he gives me a small smile before heading out his truck with my luggage. As I'm about go out the front door, I hear someone coming down the hall.

"Good morning. I just wanted to say goodbye and to wish you luck. I'm not sure if I'll be here when you get back, so I thought this was the best time as any," Mr. Abrams says with a smile.

"Good morning and thank you for giving me some advice yesterday. I hope that if you aren't here when I get back that you'll either come back to visit or let me know where you are so I can come see you?"

"I will definitely be seeing you and your uncle again. I know I never had the chance to really get to know you over Helen, but I've enjoyed hearing stories about you from your uncle and watching you grow. It helped me remember when my son was growing up," he says deep in thought.

"Jade, I hate to break up the goodbyes, but we have to go." My uncle says as he stands in the doorway, sipping his coffee.

"Bye, have a safe trip." Mr. Abrams smiles then pats me on the shoulder.

I wave then quickly head out to the truck. I know we're going to be late if we don't leave now, and that will make my uncle very upset. I know I'm kind of excited for this trip, but I'm also not wanting to go

because I don't want to leave my uncle here. Plus, I'm kind of terrified to be on my own, but I know it's something I must do in order to fully be the strong person I strive to be. I need to prove to myself that I can overcome anything and be independent because no matter what, I'll be on my own one day. That's one thing about humanity, our lives never last forever, that was proven the day my parents died.

"Are you nervous about this trip?" My uncle asks as we head towards the airport.

"Yes, kind of. This is the first time that I'm going to be alone. What if I can't do this on my own?"

"You're not the only one with that fear. I remember the first time I left home. I thought that I would end up running back home to my parents, but once I started meeting new people and found that I enjoyed spending time alone, it made all the difference. I could go out when I wanted, I could go to bed when I wanted, and most importantly I was able to have as many friends over as I wanted over," he says smiling.

"I hope that I can be as strong as you were. I know I talk a big game at times, but I'm as scared as a mouse most of the time," I say looking at my uncle who is watching the road contentedly.

"Everybody goes through that and believe me you are strong. I know this because I've had a chance to watch you grow into a strong young woman. Your life has been one disaster after another, so I know you can overcome anything that is thrown at you."

"How can you be so certain?" I ask hopeful for some advice.

"Because you pretty much take care of the house. You are the one that ensures that the bills are paid, food is bought, and that I stay on track. If it wasn't for you, I don't even think my life would run as smoothly."

"Really?" I ask amazed.

"Yes. You don't realize how much you do. Sometimes I think you are more put together than me, but don't tell anyone I said that because I will deny it," he says smiling.

The rest of the drive is in silence because the closer I get the more nervous and upset I get. It's not about the trip anymore, it's about saying goodbye to my uncle. I really don't want to say goodbye because I don't know if this will be the last time, I ever get to see him or not which makes this even more difficult. I know people normally don't think of things like that, but after losing my parents it taught me to savor every minute you have with the people you love because you never know when it will be the last time you ever get to see them. The very thought runs through my head constantly every day, which makes me not want to leave him.

Once we arrive at the airport my uncle stops in front of the airport entrance so he can get out and help me unload my luggage. He doesn't seem like he's too excited that I'm leaving either, but I'm sure he'll be okay, since he has help that will be living with him for a while. My uncle gets my luggage out of the back of the truck then he throws his arms around me for a hug.

"I'm going to miss you," he says before he clears his throat.

"I'm going to miss you to. Are you sure you can't come with me? We could enjoy this trip together," I ask hopeful.

"I wish I could, but I have to finish out our contracts and prepare for my company's closure. Taylor is going to help me, starting today to get everything done as fast as we can. If we can get done in time, I'll see about coming to spend some of your vacation with you."

"I wish you would've let me help you, so you could've come to," I say disappointed.

"Well, the problem with that is, if I would've waited you wouldn't get to go on this trip the same time as your parents did, which means you wouldn't get to do everything they did on their trip. It's now or next year, but I won't be able to afford the trip next year," he says as he touches my shoulder.

"I understand. I just think you deserve a vacation to."

"I'll make sure to go fishing or something with the guys this weekend to have some relaxation time while you're gone. Then when you get back, we can go together. We haven't been able to do that since you were a kid."

"I would like that," I say as I give my uncle a small smile.

"Well, I guess this is it. Your plane will be boarding in fifteen minutes. Here is your ticket, and your passport. I've already got everything arranged so you don't have to do anything when you get there besides check in at your cabin."

"Thank you for everything. I don't know what I would do without you. I love and miss you already," I say as tears try to escape from my eyes.

"I love you to. Now get going before you're left behind." My uncle says as he gives me a quick hug before he gets into his truck to leave.

I quickly grab my luggage then head toward the gate area before it's too late to board the plane. I have no idea where I'm supposed to go, but the woman over the intercom just said that some of the planes are already boarding. I haven't even had a chance to look at my ticket yet, so this is an interesting situation to be in. I quickly scan over my ticket to find the gate number, so I can head to the correct line. There's a lot more people at the airport than I would've ever imagined considering it's this early in the morning, but I've never been to an airport before, so what do I know.

After I find the right gate, I quickly get in line then wait until I can enter the plane. Luckily, there's still a lot of people in line, which gave me time to find the right gate. I would've hated to have to call my uncle to tell him to come get me over missing the plane, since he worked so hard to plan this trip. That would've let us both down because I'm curious to see this mystery destination. Once I get up to the attendant, I hand her my ticket, so that she can allow me to enter the plane. I'm a bit nervous since I've never been on a plane before, but it's something I've always wanted to do, so I'm also kind of excited at the same time. When I was a kid, I wished that I had wings so that I could fly away to escape my life in times of trouble. I know that it wouldn't have solved my problems, but it would've been nice to find an escape every now and then. Now I get to fly to a new area and hopefully have an amazing experience. I'm looking forward to getting to see where my parents went, and what they did before their tragic accident that took them away from me way before they should've been took.

Once I enter the plane, I quickly look for my seat which is in first class. I'll have to remember to thank my uncle for this because the seats in coach are way too close together, which would make this trip unbearable. At this point, I don't even know how long this flight is going to be because I forgot to check my ticket before I put it in my bag, which is in the overhead compartment. I would grab it, but I can't get up to get it right now because we're about to take off. I just hope my uncle is doing okay, he should be about halfway home by now, but I can't call him until I'm off the plane which sucks.

"We're about to take off, so everyone ensure that your seatbelts are fastened," the pilot says over the intercom.

I quickly double check to ensure that my seatbelt is still fastened then I prepare for the initial takeoff. I'm not sure what to expect because all I've ever seen that come close to an actual plane taking off is from movies, and I'm not sure how factual that information is to the real thing. Once the plane begins to move, I hold tight to the armrests of my seat. The man that is sitting next to me is doing the same thing, so I guess he is as nervous as I am. I try not to look too freaked out because I don't want to cause a disturbance on the plane. The last thing I want to do is get kicked off before the plane can completely takeoff the ground.

Once the plane reaches its intended altitude, the passengers begin to move around the plane to socialize with other passengers. There's a couple of teenagers that's sitting further up from me who keep on causing a ruckus. The flight attendant doesn't look very happy about them horse playing, but she doesn't say anything to them. She just keeps watching them closely to ensure that they don't break anything. A couple of the other passengers are not liking the teenager's behavior, so this may end up being an interesting flight. I personally don't care that their messing around. I'm more worried about them getting hurt or them hurting someone else, but I'm a lot younger than most of the other passengers, so I understand how that type of behavior could get irritating after a while.

"Excuse me, miss. Would you like anything?" I look up to find a flight attendant standing above me.

"I could use some water, if it's not too much trouble?"

"No, not at all. That's what we're here for. To ensure that each passenger is comfortable during their flight," she says smiling.

The flight attendant heads toward the middle of the plane, behind some curtains before she brings me back some water. Apparently, a lot of passengers are asking for water because none of the flight attendants have any on their serving trolleys. Bottled water is about the only thing I trust to ask for from the flight attendants because I've heard horror stories on the news about the quality of the food and drinks that airplanes offer passengers. I'm not really sure if the stories are true or not, but I like to be cautious considering I'm not too knowledgeable about airplanes. I'm not even sure if I know anyone who has ever been on an airplane, so I don't have anyone to tell me about these things. Plus, I didn't have any time to research any information before my flight.

The flight attendant smiles at me as she hands me a bottle of water. I wonder if she's genuinely being nice or if she's just pretending in order to keep the passengers happy. I can imagine that this type of job can be very demanding and nerve racking at the same time. I know, I don't think I would have the patience for this type of job considering everything I've seen so far during this flight. It's one thing to be on a plane with difficult people for an entire flight, but it's a whole different thing when you have to be around this constantly, all the time. I know that viewing different situations like this can help give you a new perspective about people and their jobs. This experience has made me understand why so many people complain online about how rude people are at their jobs. From the short time I've been on this flight, I've already seen two people be completely rude to a flight attendant because they weren't happy with the cups they were given. I understand complaining can be necessary if there's an actual problem, but there's a right way to complain and a wrong to complain. I guess I've worked for my uncle too long because now I've got no patience for people being rude when someone's trying to do their job right to make their customers happy. I know I wouldn't want someone to act like that towards me every day. Although, through the years, I've had to deal with a lot of people like that. However, the experience taught me a lot of life lessons about how to treat people. Most of the time, people don't even think before they act, which is why the world is so screwed up today.

Now that we've been on the plane for a few hours, the plane is beginning to quieten down. The teenagers have stopped being rowdy, and the rude passengers are watching some type of movie, which has made the flight more bearable. I'm not usually the type of person who likes to stay seated, but I've been trying to keep my attention occupied by watching the people on the plane. It's strange watching all these different people from all the different areas, because they are completely different from the people back home. I know most of these people are just as rude, but there's a difference in them that I can't pinpoint at this moment. Maybe it's the way they carry themselves, but who knows. All I know for sure is, I hope that we're about to arrive soon. I was finally able to view my ticket, which said that my destination is a place called Mystic Falls. I hope that it's as amazing as my uncle made it sound because this trip has been very difficult. I don't think I've ever sat down for this long in my life or been around so many people at one time. I'm grateful for the experience, but I want to be able to move around soon.

Once the pilot makes an announcement that everyone needs to take their seats for landing, everyone runs back to their seats and fastens their seatbelts. I quickly check my seatbelt then prepare for the planes landing. I'm not as frightened now that I've been on this plane for a while, but it's still a little scary considering you don't know if the landing is going to go as planned. The thought freaks me out a little, but I try to keep calm by taking deep breaths and letting them out slowly. I keep focusing on my breathing until the plane lands safely.

Once the plane lands, the flight attendants begin directing passengers toward the exit. I carefully get up and remove my luggage from the overhead compartment, then I wait for my turn to head toward the exit. The line is long, but I try to stay patient. Once the line clears a little, I make my way toward the exit,

where a flight attendant is waiting to look at my ticket before she'll allow me to leave the plane. I quickly allow her to look at my ticket, then I quickly head toward the terminal so I can try to figure out how I'm going to get to the cabin I'm staying at. My uncle didn't tell me how I was supposed to get anywhere once I got here, or the exact location of the cabin. He just told me that he had it all planned out. I hope he does, or he'll be getting an unpleasant phone call from me very shortly.

Once I reach the terminal, I begin to look around to see who is standing by the baggage claim. I scan each person standing, holding up signs of last names of people that they're waiting for. I keep looking until I come across a beautiful woman who is standing with a sign that says, Compton. I scan her over then I take a deep breath before walking up to her. The closer I get, the more nervous I get because I've never seen anyone so stunning. Once I'm standing in front of her, she looks at me and smiles the most beautiful smile I've even seen in my life. Just looking at this girl makes me weak, which causes me to stumble into her. She quickly catches me and helps me to stable myself. Once I'm able to stand on my own, she quickly picks up my ticket and luggage that I dropped on the floor. As she stands up, she looks at my ticket then hands it to me with an even bigger smile.

"I'm Leslie, by the way. From what I saw on your ticket just now, you're the one I've been waiting to arrive. Your uncle said that your flight was supposed to arrive an hour ago."

"Sorry, but he must've told you the wrong time. If you look at my ticket, it says the correct time," I say as smoothly as I can to try to hide the fact that she's having a serious effect on me.

"Let me see your ticket again," she says smiling as she takes my ticket from my hand to look at it. "It does say that your flight was supposed to arrive now, you're not wrong. I just can't believe he didn't tell me how gorgeous you are," she says blushing. "Did I just say that out loud?"

"Yes," I say smiling and blushing.

"I'm sorry. Sometimes I say things without realizing I said it out loud."

"It's fine. I think everyone does that," I say blushing.

"Maybe. Do you have any luggage that needs to be claimed?"

"I do," I say as I walk over to claim my bag. I quickly grab it then go to grab my other luggage, but Leslie stops me.

Leslie quickly takes my luggage then begins to head towards the exit. I follow behind her, so I can continue to check her out without her noticing. I never thought I would see anyone as beautiful as her in my life. I know there are beautiful women on television that are photoshopped to look perfect, but this woman is real and looks even better. I wish she would've lived around my area and would've been interested *in* me because life would've been a lot better. What am I saying? If things would've been the same, I would've been too scared to even talk to her in school?

"This is my truck. I hope you don't mind that I didn't bring a car to pick you up. I know some people don't like to ride in trucks," she says as she turns to look at me.

"I don't mind. I ride in my uncle's truck all the time when we go to work."

"What type of work do you do, if you don't mind me asking?"

"I work with my uncle doing home repairs at his company."

"Wow. I didn't expect you to say that" she says amazed.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I ask curiously.

"Nothing. I just never thought I would meet another woman that does the same type of work I do. Although, I do construction work and repairs," she says as she looks in the back of her truck.

"So, you can actually build an entire house or office if you wanted to?" I ask wanting to know more about her.

"I actually can. I went to college for architecture, but I wasn't happy with just making the blueprints, so I began building what I create. I've always been a person who enjoys doing everything I can, plus I like working with my hands," she says as she scratches her right cheek with her right index finger.

"Maybe you can show me a few things while I'm out here?" I ask hopeful.

"Maybe if you have time. My parents manage the place that you're vacationing at, which is why I know your uncle. I wasn't supposed to tell you that, but I like you. My parents told me to keep my distance because I'm not supposed to interfere with your trip, but you're old enough to make your own decisions," she says as she looks me from head to toe.

"Why don't your parents want me to know that you're their daughter?" I ask curiously.

"They don't want anyone to know that because I'm the maintenance woman. But I trust that you won't say anything about it to anyone."

"I won't. So, how long have you been working as a maintenance woman?"

"Since I got out of college. My parents thought I should've taken something more suitable for a woman, but I've never been someone who does something because I was told to. I've always been more like men. I guess it's because I'm a lesbian, which is something else my parents don't like about me. I'm pretty much just classified as a worker, instead of their daughter. Your uncle said that the people in your town act like my parents about people who are gay. He never gave me any other details about it, he just said that if I wanted to know more, I would either have to ask you or visit your town."

"The area I grew up in isn't very openminded, they are mostly older people who have traditional views and beliefs that make it difficult to be different within the area."

"So, did you have a hard time growing up there, or did you fit into their traditions?"

"I was considered an outcast, which meant I was bullied and harassed in high school. The horrible treatment started when I was in kindergarten, which resulted in my uncle pulling me out of school, so he could homeschool me. He was only able to do it up until high school then I was required to go back to regular school over education requirements that he didn't have."

"Sounds rough. So, why were you getting bullied? It certainly didn't have anything to do with you being ugly."

"When I was young, my parents died in a car accident on their way home from being here on vacation here. After their funeral, my uncle took me in because my grandmother went into a depression that ended up claiming her life shortly after. The towns people believed that I was a burden on my uncle, so they started to cause him trouble so I would be taken away to an orphanage or foster care. Once that occurred, the other kids in the area caught wind what they were doing, which caused them to start bullying me and harassing me."

"That's horrible. Luckily, I never experienced that type of behavior, and I was an out lesbian at school."

"It sounds like you grew up in a much better place than I did."

"It's not much better, but a little considering everything that happened to you," she says as she puts my luggage into the back of her truck.

Leslie helps me get into her truck before she shuts the door. She quickly runs around to the driver side, so that she can get in. She looks at me from the corner of her eye, with a smile on her face as she starts up her truck and pulls away from the front entrance of the airport. The drive to my cabin is spent in silence as we look at each other, trying not to let each other notice what we're doing. I wonder if she knows that I'm a lesbian, or if she's just hoping I am. She could just be trying to figure me out to see what type of person I am. All I do know is, I'm in so much trouble. Now, all I'm going to be able to think about is her, and I'm not even sure if she likes me or not. Thanks a lot, dear uncle for not warning me about her.

"We're almost at your cabin. I hope you don't mind that it's right next to mine. It was the only one available when your uncle made your vacation arrangements last month?" she asks with a hopeful tone.

"I don't mind it at all. I think I'll like having someone I'm familiar with close by. This is my first time officially on my own," I say nervously.

"It's understandable. When I first left home, I thought I would freak out, but not being disowned all the time helped me adjust rather quickly to my new environment and life."

"If you don't mind me asking, what made you come back?"

"I don't know. I guess I thought I would find something that was missing, so I came back."

As Leslie pulls into the driveway of my cabin, I notice that Leslie doesn't look very happy after I asked that last question. I hope I didn't bring up a bad memory that she's been trying to keep from remembering. I know that method isn't exactly healthy, but I can't say anything because I do the exact same thing. My uncle doesn't even know half of the things I keep secret, because if he knew, he wouldn't act the same towards me. I can't have him treating me different over something that happened to me so long ago.

"Are you ready to see the inside of your cabin?" She asks as she looks at me with a worried expression.

"I'm as ready, as I'll ever be," I say nervously, because this is supposed to be the same exact cabin my parents stayed at before their accident.

As I walk up to the door, I see a plaque on the side of the cabin that catches my eye. It is dedicated to the Compton's. I stop and put my hand over my mouth in astonishment as I continue to read.

"Oh, you found it. I didn't know if you knew about that or not, so I thought I would let you find it on your own."

"This was my parents' cabin?" I ask as tears start to form in my eyes.

"Yes, it was. Like I said, there is a lot of things you don't know."

"What else don't I know?" I ask sobbing.

"Hey, calm down. I will tell you, but let's get you and your luggage inside first," she says as she opens the cabin door.

I quickly look back at the plaque one more time before I head inside. I wonder why my uncle never told me about this, or anything about my parent's owning a cabin here at this resort. I also wonder what else I was never told about my parents.

"Okay. I guess if you want to know, what I know, then we should sit down and relax," she says as she sits down on the couch. I sit down next to her, then I turn to face her so that I can look at her in her eyes. This is making me a little nervous, and a little scared to finally learn everything that I was never told.

"As you found out from the plaque, your parents owned this cabin until their accident. Your uncle has been sending my family money since your parents' death to keep this place up. He didn't want it to become condemned, since it was so special to your parents. Your uncle said that once you got here, to let you see this place for yourself to see if you like it. He also wanted me to tell you that, this cabin was inherited to you by your parents. They set it up, so that if something happened to them, you would be the one to get the cabin."

"Okay. Let me get this straight. This cabin is mine? I can do what I want with it?" I ask shocked.

"That's not all. This entire resort was owned by your parents, so the whole place is yours. There's just one problem," she says as she scratches her neck.

"What kind of problem is it?" I ask nervously.

"We have an inspection coming up, and there's a lot of issues that we haven't been able to afford to fix due to funding."

"Who's been paying for the repairs up until now?"

"Your uncle had some investors that helped with paying for the repairs, but after we started to see less customers booking to stay here, they pulled out of helping with the repairs since their return on investment was dwindling."

"So, what you're really saying is, is that I just found out that I inherited an entire resort, that's getting ready to be shut down. Due to the fact that we aren't able to make repairs. Is that all?" I ask as I get up and begin pacing back and forth.

"Unfortunately, that's all I can tell you. I was instructed to give you this information, and to let my parents and your uncle tell you the rest. Please, don't hate me?"

"I don't hate you, it's just that this is a lot to take in, all at once," I say as I pace the floor feeling overwhelmed.

Why didn't my uncle tell me about this? Why did he keep everything from me for so long? Now, I'm going to end up losing what was supposed to be mine. I could've tried to save this place by trying new things. I could've tried to get new investors, but no, he just kept this from me so that I wouldn't know anything. For the first time in my life, I'm officially pissed at my uncle for not allowing me to have any say in my own inheritance.

"Are you okay? You look a little more upset than I would've imagined," she asks as she watches me pace in front of her.

"I'm sorry. I'm not upset at you, but I am mad at my uncle because I may've been able to do something to save this place, if I would've known about it sooner," I say as I clench my teeth together.

"If it will make you feel any less angry, the will states that you weren't allowed to know about this place until you turned twenty-five-years old."

"So, this was my parents' idea?" I ask as I try to calm myself down.

"They wanted you to have a normal life away from business, so that you could go to college and have some freedom to live your life."

"How do you know that?" I ask curiously.

"You will find out tomorrow when you met my parents, and your parents' lawyer. I wasn't supposed to know anything about the last part, I just overheard their conversation when I was replacing a window in an upstairs room above their office."

"Thanks, for telling me what you know. That's more information than what my uncle told me after living with him for twenty years. I guess I should've known that something was up, from the way he was acting when I left."

"Are you going to be alright here by yourself tonight?"

"Yes, thank you for asking though," I say as I give her a small smile.

"No problem. If you need anything, I'm in the cabin that's right down the walkway from the back door. You can't miss it. I'll leave the lights on down the pathway in case you need anything," she says as she gives me one last look before she heads out to her truck.

A part of me wants to let her stay to see where things will go, but I can't let myself get distracted from figuring out how to solve this issue. I wish I could get the money, but I don't even have that much money saved up, because all of my saving went for bills back home. If I had known, what I do now, I would've kept my money. Although, I can't let this get to me because I need a clear head, to be able to figure this out. I need to stay positive because my uncle raised me to be logical, which will help me figure this out. I just can't believe he kept this from me, even though my parents specified that he should. I thought my uncle and I had more trust than that, but he's always thinking about them, so this must be important to him.

I take a deep breath, then I grab my phone from my pocket so that I can call my uncle. I pull up my uncle's number, then I press call. I'm not sure if my uncle will still be awake or not, but he said to call him when I arrived. Plus, I really want some answers. As I wait for my uncle to pick up the phone, I hear someone knocking at the back door. I quickly go over to the door and look out of the peep hole to see who it is. Once I see that it's Leslie, I quickly open the door to see what she wants.

"Hey, sorry to bother you again, but you left your bag in the floorboard of my truck. I thought you might need it tonight, so I thought I would bring it to you in case it contains something important," she says as she holds up my bag to show me.

"Thanks. I don't know how I forgot it, but I appreciate you bringing it to me," I say as I smile and look her over as I take my bag. I've never seen someone so beautiful. She has long, brown hair that she keeps

pulled back, and the most beautiful green eyes that I've ever seen in my life. She captivates me in a way that I've never been before, which excites me and scares me at the same time.

"Goodnight. I'll see you tomorrow morning," she says as she walks towards her cabin.

I stand in the doorway, watching Leslie as she walks back to her cabin. I can't help but to stare at her because she's so beautiful. A part of me wants to keep my distance, but the other part wants me to go up to her and kiss her to see how soft her lips are. I know I shouldn't be feeling this type of feelings for someone I just met, but she sparks something in me that I've never felt before. She makes me feel hopeful for the future I could have with someone.

My phone begins to ring, which distracts me from my thoughts about Leslie. However, the ringing attracts the attention of Leslie, which makes her turn around to look at me. I begin to blush as Leslie looks back at me, knowing that I was watching her walk back over to her cabin. I quickly try to regain my composure, so that I can answer my phone. As I answer my phone, Leslie smiles and waves before entering her cabin.

"Hello," I say awkwardly, trying to hide my thoughts.

"Jade, are you okay? You just called me, and when I went to answer it, you didn't say anything?"

"Um, yeah. The girl who picked me up from the airport brought me back my bag that I left in her truck."

"Oh, Okay, so how do you like the cabin?"

"I like it a lot. It's nice to know that it's mine, but why didn't you tell me about it before this?" I ask kind of upset.

"I couldn't tell you because it would've gone against your parents' wishes, and you know I couldn't do that. I wanted to so many times, especially when you were getting bullied in school. However, it was written in your parents' will, and letter that you'll get to read tomorrow. I'll be coming to see you in a few days. Taylor and I have been working hard to finish up the last few contracts, so that I'll be able to come see you."

"That's good. How is Mr. Abrams doing?" I ask worried.

"His son came and picked him up this morning. He was so excited when his son arrived. He told me to tell you that he wishes you the best of luck in finding your place in the world, and that he expects a lot of visits from you."

"I wish I could've said goodbye."

"He gave me his son's number and address before he left, I'll bring it to you when I get there. How was your flight?"

"It was fine at first, then a couple flight attendants started becoming hateful after we was in the air for a while. I'm going to turn it in because they were being rude for nothing." I say slightly agitated from remembering the last couple hours of the flight.

"You remind me of your mother a lot. She also wouldn't let people get away with anything either," he says laughing.

"I guess it's a good thing that I'm somewhat like my mother if that's the case. I guess I'm going to get off of here, so that I can get ready for bed."

"Okay, let me know if you need anything?"

"I will," I say as I hang up my phone.

I sneak one last peek at Leslie's cabin before I return back inside, so that I can shut and lock the door. I hope that there's some good news tomorrow because I really don't want to lose my parents' favorite vacation spot, and business. Maybe, I should've took my uncle's advice about going to college for business. I guess he was trying to tell me something without actually telling me about my parents' company. All I did was ignore him because I didn't want to leave him by himself. I guess the real reason that I did that was because I didn't want to leave, because I was afraid to be on my own. Maybe, this

whole time I've been telling myself that he's the one that needs me, so that I could make myself feel better about not trying to find my own life.

I try to push all of my thoughts and feelings out of my head, so that I can be at peace. I need to try to enjoy my night, so that I can enjoy my time here at my parents' resort. I know it's too late to explore, or to have fun, so I'll have to stay in. I'll have to try to wind down, so that I can try to get a good night's sleep before tomorrow. I take a minute to look around the cabin before I find the bedroom to settle in for the night. I'm shocked to find that the Bedroom is huge and has a king size bed. I've never had one before, so this will be a big change. I just hope that it's more comfortable than the bed I have back home. The room is filled with pictures of mountains and wildlife, along with a picture of my parents. I stop and take a closer look at the picture of my parents, as I put my hand up to touch the picture. It looks like the picture was taken out front by the porch. I just wish that they were still living, so that we all could be here together having fun. However, life never goes as we plan, which is why everything gets messed up.

I lay down on the bed and look up at the ceiling before I eventually close my eyes. Somehow, I feel more at home here, laying in my parents' old bed. I guess it's because this is the closest, I've gotten to them since I've been old enough to remember. I sometimes set and try to remember my parents, so that I can have a sense of peace, but it never gets me anywhere. I've even tried to create memories about them, but it never works because it brings me too much pain. I never got to experience anything meaningful with my parents, so it hurts to even think about it. The thought of my parents always brings tears to my eyes because I desperately want to get to know them, but that's one dream that will never come true.



Brittany Earnest is a self-published author that published her first book Finding Hope in February of 2021. She spent most of her life searching for what she wanted to do with her life, which lead her to self-study different subjects. Through her years of self-studying, she studied everything she could about business, with the help of her mother, who holds a business degree. After studying business for five years, she finally decided to publish Finding Hope because she understands the demands of publishing and marketing. Brittany is an avid researcher and reader, who enjoys learning new things. Brittany likes to learn everything she can because she likes to keep her options open. Brittany is a lesbian and a LGBTQIA+ supporter, which is what influenced her to write Finding Hope. She felt that she wanted to write a story that was a thriller that had lesbians in place of characters that would usually be portrayed by heterosexual characters. She wanted to create something exciting for her readers.

Amazon buying page https://www.amazon.com/Finding-Hope-Brittany-Earnest/dp/B08WJLY6ZW/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

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Thank you for reading.