

Part Two

Mid-November

"Jackson, darling..." Mrs. Pierce came down the stairs, stopping behind him at his downstairs desk. "We'll return Sunday night. You're sure you'll be fine by yourself? I can send the babysitter, Jackson."

"I'm fine by myself." Jackson nodded without looking up from his notebook, tapping his pencil against the side of his glasses. "It's just two days."

"Alright, sweetie." Mrs. Pierce patted his shoulder, turning back to Mr. Pierce. "You ready, Johnathan?"

"Mhm. Watch over the house for us, Jackson." Mr. Pierce walked over to him, rolling the suitcases to the door. "And don't be afraid to order food or anything. We've left you plenty of money on the counter, and there's money on your card. Okay?" He ruffled his hair.

"Yes, Dad. I will not be afraid to order food." Jackson narrowed his eyes as his head was rocked around, turning back to look at him.

"Alright, man of the house." Mr. Pierce gave him a salute, heading towards the door. "We'll be back on Sunday night. I expect you to perform well."

Jackson watched as the two walked out and got into the Mercedes, fully turning and leaning onto the back of the chair. Sighing softly as it pulled off, he groaned and dropped his head, tossing his pencil onto his desk.

Standing slowly, he made his way to the counter, examining the wad of cash left on it. Picking it up, the brunette counted through it and started to sort the bills by their amount, muttering, "Another trip, another 400 dollars..."

As he finished, the sound of a light thump alerted him, causing him to look out the window.

Hearing it a second time, Jackson folded the money and shoved it into a drawer, localizing it to the back window. Approaching the window as the thumps continued, he leaned onto the couch and gently pushed the curtains open, peeking out of the window.

Jumping back once he connected eyes with someone, he nearly fell off the couch, grabbing onto the arm and recognizing the boy.

"I..." Jackson stood upright and opened the window, staring at the blonde. "Jasper! What are you doing here?"

"I told you we'd see each other again." Jasper started to climb through the window, holding his arms out to Jackson.

Pulling him in, the brunette helped him stand and stared at him. "I didn't believe you."

"You calling me a liar, Jax?"

"No. I'm not. I just-" Jackson stopped as the blonde gently pulled the glasses off his face, blinking. "Yes?"

"I didn't know you wore glasses, Jax." Jasper sat on the couch, crossing his legs as he examined them.

"I...yeah, I do. My-my parents are gone, actually." He sat next to him, nodding.

"I know. I watched them leave." The blonde looked up from the glasses, nodding back. "That's why I came over."

"So...you wanna hang out?"

"Yeah..."

"You actually could stay the night. You can get food or-" Jackson watched the expression on the other's face before shaking his head. "No? Okay, okay. We can just go hang. We could go eat at Orion's again. Or I could order it to here, and we could hang...here."

"We can hang here."

"Alright!" He pulled his phone out of his pocket, squinting his eyes down at it, turning back to him. "Can I have my glasses back?" Jackson looked down at them.

"Here." Jasper gently placed them back on Jackson's face, moving the other boy's hair out of his face.

Taken aback by the gesture, the brunette gave a small smile at the blonde, adjusting his glasses. "Should I order food to here?"

"Mhm." He stood, looking around the house. "Big house."

Glancing up from the online app he was using, Jackson nodded. "Yeah...we moved in a couple of years ago. We used to live in Pinedrivel, and then we moved up here. I don't remember why. What neighborhood do you live in?"

"It's downtown. Remember?"

"I do remember." Jackson tossed his phone aside after finishing the order, following him into the kitchen. "But where? There's a bunch of neighborhoods in downtown."

"You don't need to know all that. It's too dangerous for you."

"But what if I wanna visit?"

"I'll visit you."

"How will you know if I wanna see you?"

"I don't have to. You already wanna see me all the time."

"Yeah, but...I mean. What about specific days when I wanna see you?"

"You'll see me eventually. Isn't that enough?" Jasper sat on the counter, kicking his feet.

Jackson stopped next to him, leaning against the island. "That's no fair. We're friends. Why would I only get to see you when *you* think you should come over?"

The blonde tapped his fingers against the counter, humming to himself. "I guess that's not fair...well, what do you wanna do about that?"

"Tell me where you live. Take me where you live, actually. I promise I won't visit all the time, just-"

"Jackson, no."

Groaning, Jackson rolled off the counter, grabbing the edge to stop himself from falling off. "Well, how are we gonna meet up?"

"I'm not sure." Jasper turned to him, a blank expression on his face. "I don't have a phone."

"You...don't? Wait...!" The brunette ran to his room, grabbing one of his old phones from his desk. Dashing back downstairs to Jasper, he held it out to him. "Here. You...you could activate it and...and we could talk. We could text."

"I...how would I-"

"We could get you a phone card. Let's go right now!" Jackson grabbed his hand and started to pull him off of the counter, heading to the door.

"Wait, wait..."

"For what?" He pushed the door open, looking back at him. "Let's get you a phone card now."

"I...the food?"

"It'll be fine, come on." Jackson motioned for the blonde to follow behind, glancing around and heading towards the back path. "The dollar store sells them."

"I...you are so spontaneous, Jackson. I can never predict what you're going to say or do."

"It's fun, right?"

"What?"

"It's fun not knowing what's gonna happen, isn't it?"

"Yeah...I guess it is."

Slowing to a stop, Jackson looked back at him. "A piggyback?"

"What?" Jasper's eyebrows furrowed at the darker haired boy.

"Hop on my back, come on!" He bent down for him, smiling.

"Alright..." The blonde climbed onto his back slowly, wrapping his arms around him.

"Let's go!" Jackson held him up, starting to walk towards the store happily. "It's not far from here. You're not very heavy."

"I'm glad I'm not. Even if I were, you'd likely insist on carrying me anyway."

"I...you're very right, and that's kinda upsetting."

"Why is it upsetting?"

"Am I that predictable?"

"No...you're predictable in an unpredictable way. And that's charming."

Jackson smiled to himself, starting to sway as he walked. "Whooooo..."

"Careful. If I fall from up here..."

"What are you gonna do?" Jackson did a spin and started to pat his legs like drums.

"I know where you live."

"Haha. That's funny." Jackson chuckled, looking up at him. "You do know where I live."

"Yes, I do." Jasper laid his head against his, nodding.

"So what would you do if I dropped you?"

"I would come to your house at night...and plant a kiss on your forehead."

"Oh..." The brunette started to tilt to pretend to drop him. "Welll..."

"No, no! Quit." The blonde held onto him tightly, placing his hands on the underside of Jackson's jaw. "Stop it. Do not drop me."

"But I want a kiss on the forehead."

"You can have one of those without dropping me."

"Really?" Jackson looked up at him, giving puppy eyes.

"Yes." Jasper kissed his forehead gently before straightening his head out. "Pay attention to where you're walking, dummy."

"Ack!" The brunette exclaimed as he nearly walked into a pole, turning around it quickly and letting out a small nervous chuckle. "Whoopsies..."

"Please don't hurt yourself while you're with me."

"Why is that?"

"Because...I don't wanna have to patch you up or kiss your boobos better."

"Did you just call them boobos?"

"What do you call them, Jax?"

Smiling at the reappearance of his nickname, Jackson shook himself out of his momentary silence. "I call them ouchies."

"I...you what?"

"I call them ouchies."

"You're lying to me."

"Not at all."

"So when you get hurt...you say you have an ouchie?"

"I do...ow!" The brunette exclaimed as he ran his hand into a fence, shaking it and wincing. "Ow. Fuck."

"Aw...you have an..." Snorting to himself, Jasper covered his own mouth. "You have an ouchie. How unfortunate."

"Will you kiss my ouchie better?" Jackson held it up to him.

"I...guess so." Jasper kissed his hand gently, holding it for a moment before dropping it aggressively.

"Hey...why kiss my ouchie better if you're gonna drop it like that?"

"Store." The blonde climbed down from his back, putting his hands in his hoodie pockets.

"Oh yeah." Jackson opened the door, gently grabbing his hand as he walked in. "Let's go find what we need. First, let's get snacks. Get that basket."

"Don't spend all your money, Jax."

"I don't think I could do that if I tried, Jazz."

Jasper watched as Jackson grabbed armloads of snacks, his eyes widening. "Do you eat a lot?"

"A good bit, yeah. Sprite or Dr.Pepper?"

"Neither. Coke."

"Ewwwwwww...you like Coke?"

"I...yes."

"Ewwwww...those are all nasty."

Jasper grabbed a Coke, dropping it into the basket. "Are you gonna judge my food choices, or should I buy all my stuff myself?"

"Nevermind...I'm glad you have a favorite soda."

"That's what I thought."

Jackson started to walk towards the phone section, grabbing a couple of phone cards. "Perfect. We'll activate it before dinner, and then we can call and text and be buds!"

"Yes...yes, we can do all that."

"Listen, you don't know it yet, Jazzy. But you're gonna be my best friend."

"Me? I'm sure there are people at your school..." Jasper followed him to the self-check out, leaning against the bagging area.

"Nah. They're all uptight, beach-going, preppy assholes. They don't like me, and I don't like them. You're better. More fun." Jackson started to scan and bag the items. "Besides...I go to a private school. Those are known to be lame. Isn't public school better?" He questioned, examining one of the chip bags for its scanner. Focusing on the item, he glanced up at Jasper. "Jazz? Isn't public school better?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Hm?"

"I don't know if it's better or not."

"I...did you ever go...?"

"No. I didn't..."

"Did...you ever?"

"No..."

"What...? No way, you're just as smart as I am."

"I read and study a lot. Makes me seem smarter."

"You know...I...I could teach you." Jackson started to pay for the items, avoiding his eyes. "You know...we could find time, and I could teach you everything I know. I still have all my old workbooks and notes to teach you."

"Maybe...that's not a bad idea." Jasper grabbed the bags. "I do...I think that would be...I don't know. Maybe we should."

"Yeah..." Jackson finally looked up, smiling softly at him. "Maybe we should."

Jasper started out of the door, examining the contents of the bags before pulling out the phone cards. "Why did you grab so many?"

"Just wanted to grab enough for you to keep service." He grabbed one from his hands, starting to activate his phone for him.

"Mm." The blonde was silent for a moment, glancing at him after a moment. "Jax, do you think the food is there?"

"Likely...are you hungry?"

"Yeah. I guess I am."

"I ordered a lot of food, don't worry. Hey...how often...do you eat when you're not with me?" Jackson continued to work on the phone, purposefully avoiding the blonde's eyes once more.

"Whenever I can." Jasper turned to look at him, watching him for a couple of moments.

"How often is whenever?"

"I don't know...about once every day." Jasper stared at him, a small smile coming onto his face. "Why do you do that?"

"Do what?" Jackson glanced at him, still holding both the phone and phone card.

"You don't look at me whenever you ask me something serious."

"I...what?"

"You avoid my eyes whenever you wanna talk about something serious. You've done it twice now."

"I have?"

"Yeah, you have. Earlier when you asked about school and now when you asked me about eating. You avoided my eyes. Very visibly."

"I don't know...I guess it's just a habit."

"You're doing it on purpose."

"No, I'm not. I didn't even know I was doing it until you said. Like I never would have known until you said I was doing that."

"You're accidentally doing it on purpose, then."

"How would I accidentally do something on purpose?"

"Like that. It's like you're expecting something whenever you ask me about serious things."

"Maybe I expect you to say no or that you won't do it. Last time we met, almost everything I asked you about you said no to. The adoption center, walking you home, knowing where you live. All of it."

"But there are things I said yes to. I let you pay for my food, I said we could be friends, and I hung out with you."

"Well...I really like hanging out with you, and I really wanna help you." Jackson stopped, turning to look at him. "I'm surprised you let me do this, and I'm surprised you're even thinking about letting me teach you."

"Jax..."

"I try to ignore all the parts about all the little details of you being homeless...I notice them, though. The past two times we've met, you were super hungry, and you're thin, and you look so tired. It worries me. You're my friend. My only friend. I don't want you...I don't wanna just sit here and watch you suffer."

"I know you wanna help...but when I say no...it's out of concern. I don't mind you helping me, however...you're just a teenager like me. You can get in trouble, or even I could. I just want you...I want us to be careful."

"Us?"

"Yeah...we're a team now, Jackson."

"We are?"

"You said I was your best friend earlier, didn't you?"

Jackson stared at him in confusion before his face lit up with a smile. "You're saying we're best friends?!"

"Yes. Yes, we are."

"Really?!"

"Yes, Jax, don't make me change my mind."

"What would make you change your mind?"

"You...overreacting. Just a teensy bit."

"Oh...well. Can I hug you? Isn't that a thing best friends do?"

Jasper set the bags down, giving a small nod. "Yeah, we can-"

Jackson pulled him into his arms, hugging him tightly. "You're...my bestest friend. Like ever...and I never had one before."

"Well, I haven't either. So we're each other's first best friends?"

"I guess we are..." Jackson leaned back and smiled at Jasper, quickly planting a kiss on his cheek.

"Hey! I...why'd you do that?"

"I don't know. Isn't that a thing best friends do?"

"I..." Jasper pulled away from him as he turned a little rosy, punching him in the shoulder.

"Ow!"

"Let's go home." He picked up the bags, shaking his head as he started back walking.

"Hey, Jazz...friends don't do that!"

"Whatever, Jackson."

Jackson chuckled stupidly, dropping his face in his hands as he laughed to himself. "Wait up!" He started to jog to catch up to him, wrapping his arm around him. "My best bud."

"Yeah, my best bud." Jasper laid his head on his shoulder, nodding.