

the
HIDDEN
HEIRS

PART ONE

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CHAPTER ONE

Ten minutes to go! I was excited for this day to be over.

‘Year sevens, before the bell goes, I want you to open your planners and put in your homework. I will be checking it before you leave for the day.’

I heard them all grunting and groaning before opening and doing as I said, as I looked over the room. Year sevens were always wonderful to teach; they were innocent almost, no attitude – that came later when adolescence really kicked in.

‘Miss, what are your plans over the weekend?’ Sarah asked. She had a doll-like face with her hair always in braids. Her bright blue eyes looked up at me. She had the sweetest nature. If one was to classify her, she was the teacher’s pet. Always the student who would fetch whatever a teacher asked and always helped to quieten the class even when the teacher never needed it. I smiled down at her before responding.

‘I am going away with some friends, what about you?’ I asked her while she followed me around the room as I checked that all the students had written the homework into their planners.

‘My history homework,’ she said with a smile and walked away. I was in desperate need of a mini holiday, especially on a

day like today. Today marked the one-year anniversary of when everything changed for me in a way that I had never expected it to.

I grew up in an orphanage run by nuns. No family ever wanted to adopt me. I wasn't an ugly child but for some reason, I was always looked over. Every weekend the orphanage would open its doors for wannabe parents to come in and view us like we were prizes. I remember once I was adopted but I was sent back after two months; they never gave a reason. I remember it well, the sound of the tyres screeching as they drove away and the feeling of the gravel flicking up and hitting the back of my legs as I looked up at the orphanage. Yeah, I had a rather sad life growing up but I tried to never let it get me down. I was glad the day that I met Toby; it changed the moment that I met him. Despite everything that happened in my life, I never stopped or looked for excuses or reasons to stop. Why did having no family mean that I could not find one in the future with someone else? I kept moving forward because I believed that my biological parents, whoever they were, would want that and especially Toby. In my mind, they were dead because why else would I be left with no answers?

The bell rang, which shook me from my current thoughts. I dismissed the class.

'Have a lovely weekend, year sevens, and don't forget to finish your homework or else you will be spending lunchtime with me next week,' I said to the class with a smile while I waved them out the door.

They left with smiles and laughs, talking loudly with excitement of their plans for the weekend. It was hard being at school today as I closed the door behind me and leaned against

it, sighing. It was the first time I had allowed myself to think when I heard my phone ringing. I walked over to my desk, which was messy as it always was after my lessons. I was a good teacher but I had a tendency to be messy. I disliked it but this was who I was. I sat down and smiled seeing the name as I picked it up to answer the phone.

‘Hey, Harley.’

‘FAITH,’ she screamed into the phone as I pulled it away from my ear as she continued yelling with excitement. That was Harley, she gave me hope and joy when I needed it in my darkest moments. When I heard her voice quieten, I put the phone back to my ear.

‘I am out the front when you are ready!’

‘Hurry up, woman,’ Annie yelled in the background.

‘Give me about five minutes to pack up and I will meet you guys soon,’ they mocked me on the other end of the phone, which made me laugh as I hung up.

I tidied up my desk before grabbing my work bags and my weekend bag. Harley and Annie were two of the most amazing best friends a person could ask for; we called each other soul mates because we were all as crazy as one another. I would not be standing here without them – I loved them, we did everything together. It was their plan this weekend to take me away and hopefully cheer me up and not let my brain overthink and go to the dark place that it had a tendency to do. I knew nothing about where we were going only that it was going to take two hours on the road to the mystery destination.

For the first hour after jumping into Harley’s little silver Toyota Yaris, I kept asking, ‘So, where are we going?’

I was pestering them about it consistently but they were

used to my annoying traits.

‘Just shut up. We are spoiling you for once. Can’t you just shut up and enjoy the drive?’ Harley replied with her voice showing she was getting annoyed with my pestering. I looked down at my work clothes, which were covered in ink and whiteboard marker.

‘Can we at least stop somewhere so I can change out of my work clothes?’ I responded with my usual amount of sass as Harley looked in her rear-view mirror at me.

‘Yes, Miss Bushanti,’ she teased, poking her tongue out at me.

I snorted at her. My name came from the nun who raised me; it was her last name before she married God.

Harley was the youngest out of the three of us. I liked to think she was the most innocent of us, the one with the least life experience. She was always hopeful and optimistic and I adored her for those traits. It was refreshing and helped me to remember what life was like before I became a miserable person and lost my optimistic nature. Harley was quite successful – she ran her own restaurant. She started as a waitress before working her way up to becoming the manager and saved the money to buy the restaurant from the owners. To think that I met her when she was eighteen and how much she had grown. I always felt like a proud big sister around her to see how much she had grown and how much Annie and I had corrupted her over the years.

Annie was the oldest and by oldest, I mean she was only two years older than me but she was the loudest. She was probably the smartest as well (as much as I hated to admit it); she had her master’s and was now working on her doctorate in archaeology. She probably had the most life experience. She

travelled and lived in Europe for over a year. She loved history as much as I did but her enthusiasm towards it was stronger than my own. I wasn't going to dig in the dirt to find it, I preferred to read about it. Even though she was older than me I still treated her like a little sister. I was the motherly figure of the group and I liked it that way.

We met when we were working at the same restaurant and clicked instantly and have done everything together since. You know how you meet people and you feel like your life would not be complete without each other? The one common element that made us all work together as friends was our immature jokes. It would not matter what type of comment was said, we could all turn it into something dirty and inappropriate. We each bounced off one another and all brought something different to the group: Harley was the optimist, I was the realist and Annie was always full of important information. We never made decisions without consulting each other first. They were my family and I would die for them. I knew they would do the same for me. I smiled as I sat in the back seat watching Harley and Annie talking about some nonsense.

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We finally pulled over only because we all needed to use the toilet. I was just grateful to get out of my work clothes, they were beginning to itch. It is not fun wearing pants on a summer's afternoon – I ran to the bathroom after grabbing a pair of floral shorts, a black tank top and a bikini top out of my bag in the boot. Walking back to the car, I heard Harley and Annie wolf-whistling. Harley was wearing a floral pink maxi

dress that complemented her pale skin and golden-brown hair which was braided off her face, which emphasised her deep brown eyes. We were all around the same height of five foot nine. Annie was wearing black yoga shorts and a green tank top that accentuated her slender figure. Her auburn hair was pulled back into a neat bun which highlighted her petite facial features and hazel eyes. We could all be considered beautiful in our own individual ways even with society's ridiculous standards on beauty.

'Who says we are going to the beach? We haven't told you where we are going. Huh?' Annie said, smugly nudging Harley.

'Well, considering the way we are heading, the only destination we are heading is towards the coast, therefore a beach and hence the bathers. DUH!' I said with a cheeky smile on my face and shrugging at them cockily.

'Yeah, yeah, just because you are a geography teacher, show off,' Annie responded.

'Always,' I said while laughing to myself and jumping back into the car.

Back in the car, we were as immature and fun loving as always. Singing and dancing in the car to the songs of the nineties: Backstreet Boys, Spice Girls, NSYNC. You name it and we were listening to it. Suddenly, Harley turned the volume down on the radio.

'Oh, oh, oh, I almost forgot. How was your date the other night?' she asked, looking at me in the mirror.

'Oh god, please do not remind me. Tinder is definitely not the best place to meet people. I mean, what happened to being a gentleman? Have men changed that much?'

'Yeah, but Faith, the question you need to ask yourself is,

is it the men that have changed or is it you? You have been through a lot and I hope – I am saying this with love, of course – that you are not comparing them to Toby. He was one of a kind and he was your soul mate. You may never find another man like him. He was your perfect match in every way.’ Annie always was the most insightful. I sat quietly staring at my fingers after she said that, wondering how much was actually true. It was hard to know how much I had changed and if I was subconsciously comparing them to Toby, which I probably was. Nobody would ever fill that hole and I knew that but I always knew he would want me to be happy despite everything, which was how I honoured him by getting up every morning and just continuing towards my goals.

I finally responded, ‘God, you are such a... a... a... a bloody cow, Annie! I don’t like how you are my rationality.’

We all started laughing because she wasn’t the rationality, we all were to each other. Harley turned the music back up. I didn’t keep singing but rather sat alone to my thoughts and processed what Annie had said while staring at the changing landscape around us. Toby left a hole that I struggled to fill and the date reminded me of that hole and if it could ever be filled again.

We finally arrived at our destination; of course, it was a beach. I knew them too well. We pulled up to our cabin, which was almost right on the beach. We all did the same thing: got out of the car and just breathed in the air. We all turned to each other, smiled and had a group hug.

‘Thank you, guys. You are awesome. I love you guys,’ I said, choking back tears. If there ever was a day I needed friends, today was that day and I realised how much I did mean to my

friends and what we did for each other. We started grabbing the bags and taking them into the cabin. It was your typical-looking cabin with dark wood on the outside, a tiny porch and an old rickety rocking chair. Harley found the key above the door frame and unlocked the door, pushing it open as we all peeked into the cabin from a safe distance.

Annie shrugged.

‘Fuck it,’ she said, walking into the cabin as the floor creaked under her tiny feet. I walked in after her with Harley following hesitantly; she did not like dirty places. I noticed there were three rooms with two beds in one room and one bed in the last room. We picked up the two little beds and brought them into one room. This is what we called a girls’ night – you cannot separate us. Annie opened the fridge.

‘Oh, Faith, there is another surprise. Come here.’

I walked over and the fridge was full of alcohol with our personal preferences. I liked my red wines; Harley was white and Annie was beer.

‘Yeah, I paid an extra two hundred for them to fill the fridge with wine. How much do you love me?’

‘Heaps,’ I said as I kissed her on the cheek and put my arm around her shoulder, smiling.

‘So, what shall we start with?’ Annie and I started laughing as we searched through the bottles of alcohol.

Harley yelled from the bedroom, ‘We need to eat first. Don’t make me be the adult this weekend. I am the youngest, remember?’ Annie and I looked at each other and made mocking faces at each other in front of the fridge door.

‘Alright, what are we eating then?’ I asked, closing the door on Annie and turning around to look for Harley.

We finished eating our juicy pizzas and finished a bottle of pinot noir as well. We were like teenagers again, not a worry in the world. We ventured out to sit down on the beach and watch the sunset. The soft sound of the waves crashing on the shore was relaxing as the colours of red, orange, yellow and some soft purples danced across the sky. It was beautiful. I watched the sun slowly departing with a soft smile. We huddled together as we felt the temperature dropping slowly with the sun descending. Annie started talking about her new dig in Western Australia. She found old Aboriginal tools and something unknown. She was so excited to keep researching and to find out what it was. I was listening but also focusing on the sound of the waves crashing into each other and the crickets chirping away.

They suddenly stopped and it became unnaturally quiet. I searched for a reason; it was strange.

‘Did you notice that?’ I asked them.

‘Notice what?’ Annie asked, looking around to understand.

‘It just got really quiet. The crickets stopped chirping.’ I stood up and looked around. The sky was clouding over quickly and I breathed out, noticing the fog on my breath. I felt a tingle down my spine – something was off.

‘I think we had better get inside, without sounding obvious. I think there is a storm coming. Come on, we can keep talking and drinking inside,’ I said, worried at how big this storm was going to be.

Seconds later, the rain came pelting down. We all started running towards the cabin. It was hard to run because the rain was coming down so hard and obscuring our view. I had never seen or felt rain this hard before; every droplet stung as it

landed on my skin. Thunder started rolling in and I could hear the waves crashing louder in the ocean. There were flashes of light. We all held hands and started running together. I was in front, running and dragging the others with me. Lightning struck within a metre in front of us. We all screamed but I kept dragging them to safety. I had never seen a storm like this before; it wasn't normal. I felt prickles all over my body. I knew what this was – static electricity as I moved quicker dragging the girls with me. The next strike was going to be very close to us. I felt it in my body before I saw the light and...