

The Dark Doctor
A Dark Romance Novel
By JB Duvane

Cover by Kasmit Covers

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About The Dark Doctor

Abby thought she was running away from her problems, but she wound up running into the arms of her worst nightmare.

"...from this point forward your will is no longer your own. You belong to me."

I thought I had found the perfect guy. Jake was handsome and sexy and had eyes that could get me to do just about anything. The problem? The thought of being in love scared the hell out of me, so I called it quits and ran before I got in any deeper, driving off into a crazy winter storm. When I woke up the next day I was in a strange hospital and slowly came to the realization that I was being drugged and held there against my will...by my ex-boyfriend Jake. He claims he's someone else though...a doctor in this dark, creepy private hospital in the middle of nowhere...but I know it's him, and I don't know how I'm going to get out of here.

This is a standalone novel of 44,000 words with gothic elements, dark sexual themes, kidnapping, nightmares, insanity and has a HEA.

Chapter 1

Abby

I gripped the steering wheel tightly as I wove my way through the last bits of rush hour traffic at twilight. Steady streams of tears poured down my cheeks.

Streams that mirrored the drops of rain that danced in miniature rivers down the windshield in front of her.

"Oh, Jesus Christ! Shut the hell up with that nonsense." I said out loud to myself. The rain had just started coming down heavier as the daylight faded away and headlights lit up in long strings in front of me. I'd hoped that leaving would make me feel better, or maybe just relieved somehow. That running away would alleviate the panic that was building inside me every time I kissed Jake. But that wasn't the case at all. I already missed him and at every exit I passed I wanted to turn back and run into his arms. I was too scared of my own feelings, though, and the dreary weather and darkening of the sky were really very appropriate at that moment, considering that there was no way I was going to be able to stop crying anytime soon.

The irony of the situation I was suddenly finding myself in was not lost on me, though. Here I was, a 24-year-old girl most people would consider an adult, yet for some reason, I wasn't able to feel good about anything in my life that really mattered to me. And I still wasn't sure when I was going to start feeling like an adult. I had been writing since I was a kid and selling my books online for years, yet I could never admit to myself, or anyone else, that I was a writer. I would tell people that writing was a hobby, and I would always qualify it by saying that they were *just* romance novels, which somehow made me feel less like a big old liar than if I were to just come right out and say that I was a writer. My soul sucking day job in retail was somehow more appropriate to refer to as my *real* job and when people invariably asked "what do you do?" that's what I told them. As if retail sales were my life. And there was just no way I could even begin to see myself as an adult. I looked at my parents and people their age and just didn't understand how or when I was supposed to resemble anything remotely like them.

When am I going to actually feel like an adult, goddamnit? I thought as I fought back full-on sobs.

And then there was this thing with Jake. I loved him. And he loved me. At least he told me he did. But the more I saw those incredible eyes of his and felt the shivers that his kisses sent coursing through my body the more I

wanted to bolt out the door. The sex was incredible if somewhat confusing at times, but we were just figuring each other out. And besides, I was an adventurous girl and I was willing to try anything once. The real problem was his eyes; the way they looked at me like I was the only thing on this entire planet that he could see. He could give me one look and send me into a fit of passion that left my jeans soaking wet. It just scared the hell out of me the way his eyes seemed to look inside me and make me believe that he loved me. I told myself that's what I was really running away from, those eyes of his and the way they could manipulate me, and I think I was actually starting to believe it.

She let the tears fall and wash black streaks of mascara down her cheeks, hoping that those same tears would wash the sorrow out of her heart too.

"Ugh, stop being so pathetic, Abby!"

But I am pathetic. I'm ruining my own freaking life with every mile I drive away from Jake, and no one's gonna feel sorry for me because of that.

"So go ahead! Feel sorry for yourself. Live it up!" I said out loud as I burst into tears again.

"Can't you just stop it for a little while, Abby? Can't you just grow up and stop being a basket case for like ten seconds?"

The traffic thinned out gradually as I drove north, out of the city and towards an unknown place that seemed a hell of a lot safer right now than the arms of the man I loved. God, he had great arms too. I felt so safe when we were in bed together and he wrapped them around me from behind. It felt like nothing bad in the world could touch me when we were together. Nothing but my own stupidity. But here I was again going back and forth about Jake. One second I was confident of my decision to leave him, and the next I was mooning over his eyes and arms and remembering how safe he made me feel. I was going to give myself mental whiplash if I didn't stop this. I really needed to find a nice, quiet place where I could relax and take some time to think. I was sure that after a few days away I would be able to see things more clearly, but the thing I wasn't sure of was which part of me would win out. The part that was running away from him or the part that was missing his strong, safe arms.

"Goddamnit, I need something to get my mind off him." I turned the radio on, trying to find some upbeat music or anything that might distract me from the incredibly sad image of his face, and those eyes when I told him that I couldn't do this anymore.

"Do what? What do you mean?" he asked, his voice more serious than I had ever heard it. He knew something was wrong and I avoided his eyes by staring down at my hands. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to

explain to him that I loved him too much and it was all too scary and I had never let a man get this close to me, ever. It seemed plausible when I made the final decision an hour ago, but it suddenly all sounded so ridiculous and childish to me when I was trying to explain it to him.

"I need space, Jake. I think I just need to be alone for a while. This is all moving so fast and I had never planned on a serious relationship," I said as my voice trailed off to almost a whisper. I was losing my momentum fast. I felt like I needed a stronger argument, but those were the first things that popped into my head that didn't sound completely idiotic. I guess it just seemed easier to lie to him and give him a string of cliches straight out of some TV show dialogue, because telling him that I was terrified of what I was feeling just sounded so overly dramatic. What idiot left a guy because she thought she was starting to love him too much?

When I looked up at him I could barely open my mouth, let alone summon up the strength to tell him the truth. How could I tell him that every time he kissed me it made me wish that a hole would open up in the ground underneath me. I couldn't take it anymore because it was getting to the point that I needed his kisses too much. I craved them and I felt like my heart was going to explode every time his lips were near me. But then what if the kisses from those incredible lips went away? What would I do then? I just couldn't face that possibility, and I kept thinking that, no matter what, I couldn't let him kiss me one more time. Leaving seemed so final, but I just didn't know what else to do.

"This is just great, Abby. Run away and find a rock to hide under while the man of your dreams slips through your fingers, why don't you."

I continued to cry as I drove through the pounding rain and thought about the image that I just couldn't get out of my head. The sad look in those deep, dark, eyes as I turned and walked away from him. He had one of those classically handsome faces with a strong, chiseled jawline and a gorgeous mop of two-days-past-needing-a-haircut shaggy, dark brown hair - which were definitely some awesome perks for sure. But his eyes...my god, did I mention his eyes? I pictured them as I drifted along in my driving daydream, trying desperately to replace the sadness that I had caused in them with the lust that had previously been there every time he looked at me. Before tonight, that is. I tried as hard as I could to visualize the mesmerizing, swirling lust filled stares that had always made my head swim. I knew it probably wasn't the best idea to keep thinking about him, but since I couldn't stop myself right now I figured it was better to picture him at his most glorious than dwell on the miserable. I had never seen eyes as dark and incredibly intense as Jake's before. They almost felt like they were not only seeing into my soul...

...but were talking to it, whispering sweet things to it. Telling it secrets that my brain didn't even know or understand.

"Good lord, Abby. How much more melodramatic can you get?" I said as I rolled my eyes at myself. But to be completely honest, even though I was prone to romanticization, I wasn't really exaggerating in this case. From the very moment I met him I hadn't been able to mask my feelings when his hypnotic eyes met mine. The world dropped away and all I could see were those deep, dark pools of moonlit water. Even as he walked towards me, before we met, it was as if I could feel the energy of his stare boring into me and through me. I was frozen in place until he touched my hand and smiled, and my mouth may as well have been full of food for all the good it was to me at that moment.

"Hello. My name is Jake. Jake Lewellyn."

"Uh..."

"You must be Abby."

"Uh huh..."

I'd just climbed out of the swimming pool when this man with laser beam eyes approached me. If he hadn't said my name I would've thought he was talking to someone that was standing right behind me, but there he stood, just inches away from me, holding his hand out and smiling. He was easily a foot taller than me and as I looked up at his face and shook his hand I had shift a little to block the late morning sun that was peaking up over the country club roof just behind his head.

"Maxwell went inside to use the club's phone. She asked me to tell you where she was if you got out of the pool before she came back," he said with a sexy smile.

"Oh, she did?"

"Yes, she did. She also told me to have you join me at my table. She said she'd meet us over there when she was done on the phone."

Maxwell had brought me to the club with her for a day of full-on rest and relaxation after a night of wallowing and crying over being dumped by the guy she had been seeing for almost two months. I looked around the pool patio to see if I could catch a glimpse of her, but it sounded like he was telling me the truth. The thought of a gorgeous stranger at a country club lying to me to convince me to sit at his table made me smile to myself, and through my giddy haze I realized that he was smiling back.

What an incredibly sexy smile, I thought as I continued to stare up at him. And I had a really hard time not staring at him, especially since he was easily the most gorgeous man within a twenty-mile radius. But it may also have had to do with the way he looked back at me. His eyes seemed to get

bigger and darker the longer we stood there, and he leaned toward me like he was about to say something, or do something. It was very unnerving, but in a way that made me almost swoon.

"Why don't you grab your things and we can head over to my table," he said, gesturing to the far corner of the patio but never taking his eyes off me. I immediately wrapped a towel around my body, hoping that he hadn't already seen the worst of it when I was hoisting myself up the pool ladder. Even though I had recently lost some weight I was so used to feeling insecure about my body that it was just a reflex now. I knew I would never have the skinny arms and legs and flat stomach that Maxwell had, but I was working on just feeling good about being me, and it had been going pretty well until this handsome man started picking me apart with his eyes. At least, that's the way it felt.

We walked in the direction that he had pointed, then stopped in front of a table that was littered with a variety of glasses with bits of different colored liquids in the bottom and a small cordless speaker that was playing some super bassy song.

Hmmmm...Mr. Popular, obviously. He's just talking to me because he's friends with Maxwell, I'm sure.

A waiter walked up and asked Jake if there was anything we needed.

"Yes, just take all these away please and...would you like anything to drink, Abby?"

"No thanks." I was still barely able to form full sentences around this guy, but anything would have been better than the self-deprecating jokes I could feel bubbling up inside me, just waiting to get out.

"Do you want anything to eat? Are you hungry at all?"

"Well, that's a silly question," I said as I laughed, trying to make a joke and failing miserably. Jake smiled and told me that the food there was very good, but I just shook my head and tried to sink as far as I could into my chair.

"No, really, I'm fine. Thank you," I said to the waiter and he nodded back at me.

Jake told the waiter to come back when the rest of our party had joined us, then settled into his chair while the table was being cleaned off.

"So Maxwell tells me you're a writer."

I stopped breathing for a few seconds and looked around the patio, avoiding his eyes and laughing like he had just told a joke.

"I'm sorry. I feel like I'm missing something. Isn't there a supermodel orgy around here you're late for?"

Oh God, I can't believe that really just came out of my mouth! I thought as I laughed, trying to make light of my ridiculous comment. I was overreacting like crazy, and I guess I was a little on edge because I hadn't talked to a guy,

let alone a really hot guy, in forever. But the way this guy was looking at me was kinda unsettling. And I didn't know if he was flirting with me or what the hell was going on, but figured I couldn't possibly be his type so I told myself to just get a grip. Plus the comment about me being a writer really threw me for a loop. Where did Maxwell get off telling him I was a writer? But even through all of my idiotic insecurities, I knew that comment was just lame.

Just chill out Abby. He's not into you so stop acting so silly. He's just a really nice guy.

I laughed weakly again to indicate that it was a joke, but I really felt like crawling under the table for the rest of my life. And, of course, Jake was still looking at me with those eyes and that damned expression, and I was pretty sure he was laughing *at* me, or that he had just realized I what an idiot I was.

"Oh, brother. Andrew just called me on the club phone cause he couldn't get me on my cell. And he kept me on there for like fifteen minutes. Ugh. It's hard to hate him when he sounds so sorry."

Maxwell looked from me to Jake and back to me.

"So! You two got a chance to get to know each other a little?" she asked as she flopped down on a lounge chair and put her feet up.

"Yeah, we've gotten to know each other. I now know that this is Abby and that I am apparently late for a supermodel orgy that I didn't even know was happening. I feel so out of the loop," Jake said as he winked at me. And oh God could he wink. I couldn't believe I had been so rude to him.

"I'm so sorry about that. I really don't know why..."

"Don't worry about it," he said with a smile as he put his hand over mine on the table.

My face flushed as I looked down at his hands.

God, is he for real? He seems so incredibly sweet, but hot guys aren't sweet. At least not to me.

He let his hand linger over mine for a few seconds then pulled it back, but when I glanced back up at him his eyes sucked me into a vortex and held me there.

"Miss?"

There was a silence at the table and I realized that everyone was waiting for me to answer a question. I tore my gaze away from Jake's eyes and blushed furiously as I looked around the table. I had no idea how long I had been transfixed by his stare.

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Can I bring you anything, miss? A beverage, perhaps?"

The waiter was patiently waiting for me to mature by about ten years when Jake took control of the situation and saved me from further embarrassment.

"Just bring us a pitcher of Bloody Marys and a pitcher of iced tea, that way no one has to make any rash decisions right now."

While Jake gave the waiter a few more instructions Maxwell grabbed my arm and pulled me over to her so she could whisper in my ear.

"He likes you, Abby. He asked me about you while you were in the pool," she said as she pulled away slightly and gave me a big evil smile.

I quickly looked at Jake, who was now talking to a friend of his, then moved closer to Maxwell so I could keep my voice at a whisper.

"That is not even within the realm of possibility, Maxwell. Stop being stupid. I am not anywhere near his league!"

"Abby, get over yourself. You're beautiful and funny, and you're also the sweetest person I know. Just because you can't see it doesn't mean he can't," she said as she glanced back up at Jake and immediately sat back in her chair, smiling at him behind her sunglasses. Jake looked back and forth between the two of us, then smiled as he settled his glance on me. And there was that look again. It was almost like he was laughing at me, but not at me really. Like he was leaning in to whisper to me about our own private little joke that I didn't even know about. And let me tell you, I really wanted to know about it. I wasn't going to be able to stay here much longer if he kept looking at me like that. I was starting to feel giddy again and was a little worried about another stupid comment flying out of my mouth. And I was also starting to get worried that I could really like this guy.

I had finally stopped sobbing, but I just kept right on driving away from the lights of the city and into the quiet of the forest. I wasn't sure where I was going or how long I would stay away, I just knew I needed to get out of there for a while. The rain was coming down harder and the visibility was getting worse, but there were very few cars on the road, and only one set of headlights a good distance behind me, so I started to relax a little. But of course, I still couldn't stop thinking about Jake. I kept torturing myself by playing the first few months of our relationship over in my head, wondering if there was anything I could have done back then to make things turn out differently. It may seem like running away was an easy decision for me, but it wasn't. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life. I had never met someone I clicked with so quickly and, of course, that made things even more scary.

No one was more surprised than I was when he called and asked me out, but he did, and I said yes. And it was no time at all before I was trapped... trapped between him and a wall, that is. Or any hard surface, really. He had a very quiet but commanding way about him when we were alone together, and

I started to see it even before we became fully intimate. He would start out by kissing me softly on the lips, and those incredibly gentle caresses would work their way up to deep, hard, passionate kisses that made me melt in his arms. The contrast between his hard grasp and his soft lips drove me wild as I melted into him, giggling and screaming and moaning his name. It took my breath away, the way he would grab me by my shoulders or waist or hips and push me up against a wall or a counter or a table, slowly nibbling his way down my neck and holding the back of my head while my body involuntarily curled up against his. My entire body sang with electricity whenever he would come near me, but he didn't even have to touch me to send shivers of delight out to every limb. The very second he looked into my eyes my panties were left soaking wet and my head was left swimming with thoughts of him prying my legs apart.

I don't know how long I had driven in my trance state, enveloped in thoughts about Jake's lips trailing down my body, but I finally snapped out of it and looked around. I was driving down a dark road with enormous trees on both sides and the ground was covered in snow. It was so beautiful and serene up here in the mountains but still a little worrisome to be driving all alone on this dark, mountain road and I was comforted to see that there was still a single set of headlights a few miles behind me. I couldn't make much out ahead of me except the light flurry of snow that had replaced the rain and the narrow road and lines of trees that disappeared up ahead into the darkness.

I had finally stopped crying during the sexy segment of my Jake flashback festival, and now I couldn't stop thinking about the rest. Another wave of sadness came over me as I thought about all the fears that haunted me during the times I wasn't with him. I wanted so badly to believe that he was for real. That he wasn't lying to me or trying to trick me. And no matter how many times I turned everything around in my head I couldn't come up with a single motive he could have for making me think he loved me...

Other than that he's a man, I thought, gloomily. But still, no amount of trying to convince myself kept me from doubting him...or doubting myself, really.

I was starting to get sleepy, most likely due to my self-imposed emotional turmoil, and I decided I would stop for the night at the next town I came to - whatever that was. I hadn't ever driven up this road, even though I had meant to for years, and I wasn't even sure how far I was going to have to drive before I got to the next town.

Suddenly something small and gray jumped out in front of my car and I swerved a bit but managed to keep myself from skidding off the road. As I gripped the wheel and slowed down I looked in my rear view mirror, hoping I

hadn't just killed some cute little forest creature. From what I could tell there was no small body lying in the road behind me, so I figured we were both lucky and I missed hitting him. I shifted my glance back to the road in front of me just in time to watch a fully antlered elk tumble up onto the hood of my car and crash into my windshield. I remember hitting the brakes and seeing trees and snow covered ground spin around and around in front of me, but then everything went black.

Chapter 2

Abby

"The hospital entrance is around back. Just follow the driveway as it curves to the left up ahead."

"Ok ma'am."

What movie is this? It seems so familiar to me. Have I seen it before? I feel like I know what's going to happen next, but I don't remember.

"Room two, down the hall, first door on the right."

What happened to her? The girl on the stretcher. Her eyes are open but she's not moving or talking.

"We need to intubate! Stat!"

Intubate? Is that really necessary? They always need to intubate on these TV shows. She looks like she's breathing fine to me.

"Grab the head! Quick we're losing her! I can't get a pulse!"

Can't get a pulse? But I'm fine. I'm right in front of you with my eyes open. Didn't you see the part where I was wandering around in this big dark mansion all alone...

I shook my head from side to side and slowly opened my eyes a tiny bit. The light streaming in through the small window was too much for me to take so early, so I closed my eyes again and tried to think for a minute, but my thoughts came slowly, and I felt like my head was in a fog bank.

Ok, where am I? I'm laying in bed...and the light is really bright. Too bright. I don't remember it ever being this bright before.

I kept my eyes closed tight as I studied the reverse image of slatted lines of light and shadow that were burned into the blackness of my field of view.

Wait, that looks like the pattern of light streaming through venetian blinds. I don't have venetian blinds in my bedroom. Where the hell am I?

I rubbed my eyes and temples to try and alleviate the dull ache that sat like a hat on top of my head and slowly opened and closed my eyes.

Am I hungover? My god my body is so sore. I feel like I've been hit by a truck. What did I do last night. Did I get drunk? I hardly ever get drunk. I've been drunk maybe twice in my life! What the hell did I do last night?? Wait. I remember. I watched a movie. Or wait, was it a dream? It was...about a woman...and she was in an ambulance. No a girl? A girl in a nightgown in a big dark mansion...and there was an elk...and a car spinning. What on earth?

I opened my eyes and stared at the millions of holes in the large white tiles in the ceiling and then at the slatted venetian blind shadow on the wall in front of me.

What, am I in a doctor's office? I feel like I should have my feet up in stirrups or something.

I slowly moved my hands up to the top of my head and winced at the pain in both my arms. I realized that I must have some sort of head injury because

when I reached up all I could feel were bandages. I looked at my arms as I brought them back down to my sides and noticed that I had scratches and bruises all over them.

What on earth happened to me?

I looked around the room and tried to figure out where I was. From what I could tell I was in some sort of hospital that apparently hadn't been renovated since it was built, which looked to me like the 1950s. The walls were covered halfway up with dingy white tiles and the floor with off-white linoleum. Behind the bed and up towards the ceiling was a small, rectangular window where the stripes of light and shadow came from that appeared on the wall in front of me. It was the kind of window that was usually reserved for the basement floor, where the majority of the walls of the room were below ground level. The antiseptic smell from some sort of strong cleaner filled the room, as well as a faint musty scent that made me wonder when this room had been used last. It was sparsely furnished with a very institutional grey and wood veneered side table that stood against the wall to my right with the requisite TV suspended on an arm above it. There were two doors in the room, one directly in front of me and one on the wall to the left. That door stood open and I figured it was probably the bathroom, but I wasn't capable of getting up to investigate yet, so I hoped I wouldn't need to use it anytime soon. I looked to my left and noticed a table with a pitcher of water and a glass, as well as a machine on a tall skinny stand that was making green zig zags and beeping out the sound of a heart beat, which I assumed was mine.

What in the hell happened?? Think, Abby! God, it hurts to think. Ok, ok, what the hell did I do last night? I'm pretty sure that stuff about the mansion and the elk was a dream or a movie. But was it? Did I watch a movie last night?

I looked up at the ancient TV on the wall and could easily imagine an old, weird movie set in a hospital mansion playing on the out-dated screen.

Ok, if I'm in a hospital room then maybe the car spinning and the ambulance and the ER were all real. So, if those parts weren't a dream then maybe the mansion stuff was real too? Ugh. Don't be silly, Abby. You're not in a hospital mansion. This isn't one of your far-fetched storylines where a woman gets rescued from a madman in a mansion by a handsome stranger. But, seriously, where the hell am I?

I rubbed my temples, pretty much the only unbandaged part of my head, and closed my eyes again.

Ok. Ok...just calm down. I kind of remember now. I was with Jake earlier last night...

"Jake," I said as the door opened in front of me. I threw my arms around his neck and smiled as he picked me up by my waist and carried me through the doorway, closing the door to his house with a flick of his foot. That's one of the things I loved about Jake. He was an incredibly sweet guy and

kindness was on the top of my list of what I wanted in a man, but he could also be so smooth and sexy and that made me want him even more. He set me on my feet and brushed a stray hair out of my eyes, smiling down at me like he always did, as if he knew some wonderful secret about the two of us that I didn't, and it always took my breath away.

"Abby. You look absolutely beautiful."

I smiled up at him but quickly looked away. I knew what I was going to have to do that night, what I had planned to do, and I wasn't very happy about it. Jake lifted my chin then grabbed the sides of my head with both hands and gently touched his lips to mine. They lingered on the surface of my skin for just a moment, then pressed into me, his tongue darting into my mouth and tickling mine as he pulled me hard against his body and held me in a mesmerizing embrace. My legs turned to jelly as the kiss became more passionate and intense and I used my grip on his neck to hold myself steady. I was starting to question my motives for breaking up with him, but I had come to this decision after a lot of thought. Not that I truly bought any of my own arguments as to why I would be better off alone, though. In fact, the more I thought about it, and the longer I let Jake kiss me, the more ridiculous my motives all sounded. But the insecure, anxiety-ridden part of me always won these internal discussions and my mind was made up. And this kiss was definitely not helping my thought process, so I summoned all my strength and somehow cut the kiss short, then gently push him back a little.

"Jake, we need to talk."

"Ok, but I have a surprise for you," he said with a sly smile as he turned me around and nudged me towards the dining room. He had a modern home that was tastefully decorated in earth tones and black leather furniture. It wasn't my taste, but it suited his strong, confident demeanor very well. I tentatively walked ahead of him through the double door entry of his dining room that was now filled with dark pink peonies and was lit by candlelight in every corner of the room. I clasped my hands in front of me and stood there, my eyes filling with tears as I felt Jake's hands wrap around my waist.

"Happy Anniversary, Abby," he whispered in my ear as he buried his face in my hair.

No! No! Don't do this to me, Jake! I thought as I forced the tears back and clutched my tightening throat. Everything in my peripheral vision started to turn to black as it narrowed down to a small tunnel in front of me.

"Anniversary?" I asked with a shaky voice. This wasn't going as smoothly as I had pictured last night when I cooked up that silly fantasy about us hugging and parting as good friends.

"Yeah, I know it's not a real anniversary, but we've been together six whole months. Maybe I'm a total sap, or maybe I just wanted an excuse to

celebrate...with you," he said as his lips met the inner curve of my neck and shoulder. Tears were streaming down my cheeks now, but I didn't want Jake to see that I was crying. The thing is, though, the tears were falling for more than one reason. I knew that I loved him and I knew that he was the most wonderful man I had ever known, but I also knew that I was terrified and the only thing that made sense to my crazy brain at that moment was to get out of there as quickly as possible. I wiped the tears off my cheeks and wheeled around, pushing Jake away from me.

"I can't do this anymore, Jake."

One of the doors in the room opened and a nurse walked in carrying a metal tray.

"Good morning, Ms. Scott. How are you feeling?" She set the tray down on a side table near the head of the bed and took a thermometer off the tray. I hadn't been in a hospital since I broke my ankle playing soccer in grade school, so I didn't really know what nurses were wearing these days, but I was a bit startled at how archaic this woman's uniform looked. Like something out of an old movie...*Like my dream about that movie last night in that old hospital mansion place*, I thought as I stared at her white dress and the little winged hat perched on top of her head.

"I'm just going to get a few vitals right now, dear. I'll bring in some breakfast in a little while, but you'll be needing a lot of rest after your accident," she said as she plunged the thermometer into my mouth. I tried to ask her what happened to me, but she shushed me and proceeded to wrap a blood pressure cuff around my arm. I was still in a fog and was still contemplating, and cringing over, everything that happened the last time I saw Jake, so by the time I remembered to ask any questions the nurse was already out the door. I looked around my bed and found nothing to call her back with.

"What the hell kind of hospital is this?" I said out loud as I tried to sit up and look around, hoping to find a cord with a call button somewhere near the bed. My head was pounding and the room started to spin a little so even though I had barely lifted my head off the pillow, I sank back down into the soothing softness and closed my eyes.

I'll ask her where I am when she brings my breakfast, I thought as I drifted back into a fitful sleep where dreams were interspersed with half-awake memories that all blurred together. I vaguely remembered a conversation on the telephone. One of those old telephones shaped like a handle with the big round parts you listen to and talk into, and a long dark hall. There was a voice on the phone and it was talking to me. At first, the voice was very far away, and every time I strained to hear what it was saying it slipped further

and further away into the darkness.

When I finally opened my eyes and looked around the room again it was completely dark except for the faint slatted shadow and light pattern on the opposite wall that the moonlight cast through the venetian blinds. I must have slept all day, or maybe even longer. I had no way of knowing since there was no clock in the room or any way for me to tell how many days I had been there. I wondered if the nurse would be back in anytime soon. I wasn't hungry yet, but my throat and mouth were incredibly dry and I remembered the pitcher of water I had seen the last time I was awake. The water was still there on the table next to the head of the bed, thank God, but the machine that was measuring my pulse was gone. I guess that meant I was doing ok, but how long ago had they taken it away? I also noticed that the bandages I'd had on my head were gone too, and I didn't know if I had been in here longer than I realized or if my injuries were not as bad as I had imagined. I just wished someone would tell me where the hell I was, and how I got there.

I closed my eyes and let the cool water rush down my throat as I thought about Jake again, about the way he held me in his arms right before I pushed him away and walked out on him. He was always so incredibly gentle and patient with me and I felt terrible for doing what I had done. Tears fell from my eyes again as I felt a crushing sense of doom sweep over me; that familiar feeling that would always come in the middle of the night and was impossible to shake. The feeling that I had done something terribly wrong and there was no way it would ever be made right again. I wondered for a moment what would have happened if I had decided to stay with him. I wondered if Jake would have been patient enough to deal with my ridiculous insecurities, or if he would have gotten as fed up with me as I was with myself at that moment. But it was no use wondering because I had left him and I doubted he would even want me back.

As I lay there in a foggy haze, thoughts about Jake kept creeping back into my brain, and one thing I couldn't stop thinking about was his amazing ability to taking things slow. His patience was something that had always struck me and was something that had made its way into my head every time I'd thought about running away. He almost seemed inhuman in his ability to wait for sex. And I don't mean fooling around, I'm talking about full-on intercourse. He always seemed fine, more than fine really, with just touching me, or looking at me, or watching me. In fact, he really seemed to love watching me. He would ask me to undress in front of him and pleasure myself in front of him and most of the time he never even touched himself. He said he was happy to just watch me, or to take things into his own hands and give me pleasure himself. I had never been with a man like that before, someone so forcefully giving. He always put my needs and desires before his and made

sure that I was beyond satisfied. But eventually, what I wanted more than anything was for our naked, sweating bodies to be pressed against each other after whatever had gone on. And I don't know why, but he never seemed comfortable with that. The two times we did wind up with our clothes all the way off and with him inside me, it was...different. It was still very good, but it wasn't quite what I had expected. I'm sure sex between us would have continued to get more and more amazing, but I was just too scared to stick around and find out.

Many of the nights we would spend together consisted of dinner alone at his house where we would talk and kiss and eventually get worked up to the point where he would bury his face in my hair and whisper incredibly sexy things into my ear. Sometimes he would be laying on top of me when we were on the couch together, all sweaty and out of breath, and he would hold my wrists down and graze his lips across the sensitive skin of my ear, then slowly go over each and every one of my body parts, one at a time, and describe what he liked about them and what he wanted to do to them. His descriptions always involved his tongue and his lips and always drove me to the brink of insanity, leaving me soaking wet.

Other times he would stand behind me, just like the last time I saw him, and as I would lean back against him, his arms wrapped around me and my head resting on his shoulder, he would tell me what he wanted me to do to him. He would whisper everything in detail into my ear. The way he wanted to look at me across the room and watch me remove my clothes, turning around when I removed my panties so that he could watch as my ass cheeks spread in front of him when I touched my hands to the ground, revealing everything that was hidden between my legs to him. He would tell me that he wanted to watch me get on my knees in front of him and look up into his eyes as I removed his hard cock from his pants, then slowly slide it into my mouth. And every time he would tell me these things it would send wave after wave of intense tingling through my entire body. Then he would watch me make myself come with those deep dark eyes that looked like they could never get enough of me. Everything he did made my head spin, even when he wasn't even touching me.

I shook my head and snapped out of the memory trance that I had just drifted off into. I sullenly looked around the room slowly remembering where I was. In a dark hospital that was dead silent and very creepy at night. I realized as I set the glass back down on the side table that I hadn't recalled hearing a single sound the entire time I'd been there, other than the nurse talking to me briefly while she took my blood pressure, and the infernal beep of the heart rate machine that was now gone. I got up out of the bed and shuffled over to the door I had seen the nurse come in. I was still very shaky

and had to hold onto the bed and the table under the TV as I made my way the short distance across the room, and when I opened the door enough to poke my head out all I saw was a long dark hall. I shivered as I shut the door again and groped my way back to the bed, sinking in and pulling the covers up over my head as quickly as possible to recapture some warmth.

This place is more like a mausoleum than a hospital, I thought as I rubbed my feet together under the covers, willing them to stop resembling ice cubes. As I lay there I thought about the dream with the phone call and Jake whispering into my ear and was surprised by how similar the two events felt when I thought about them together. I suppose the memory of Jake's overwhelming effect on me was just really strong in my subconscious right now and that's probably what caused the dream. But for some reason, the dream reminded me of something else that I couldn't quite put my finger on. Something from a long time ago.

I drifted in and out of consciousness with thoughts, or dreams, of Jake whispering in my ear, that then turned into Jake calling me on an old fashioned phone and telling me all the things he would do to me when I got better and got out of the hospital. He told me he liked to watch me walk around the big dark house in my nightgown and that he was always watching me, even when he was talking to me on the phone.

I woke up the next day to the sound of the nurse setting a domed tray down on a rolling table next to the bed. It was one of those hospital tables with legs on only one side that pushed across the bed in front of me so that I could eat where I was sitting. She used a button on the side of the bed to move the head up, then moved my pillows around behind me so that I straightened up.

"Where am I?" I asked, taking the cover off the tray in front of me and revealing a cup of coffee, a glass of orange juice, scrambled eggs and toast.

"You're in the hospital, young lady. You were involved in a bad accident and you've been asleep for days." She still had the old fashioned nurses uniform on and wore an old lady scowl with it.

"I've been asleep for days? How many? What happened to me? In the accident, I mean?"

"You were brought here in the middle of the night, oh it's been 5...no, 6 days now. I can't tell you anything about what happened before you got here, though. That would be something to talk to the doctor about."

"The doctor? When will I see him?"

"Oh, he's very busy. You'll be seeing him soon, I'm sure. But what you need to do right now is rest. Go ahead and eat your breakfast and when you're done I'll be back in to get the tray."

"But how will I let you know that I'm done? I can't find a call button."

"I'll know," she said as she slipped back out into the hallway. I sat there for a moment staring at the door. I had asked her all the questions I had intended to, but I still didn't know a goddamned thing about where I was or how I got there. I pushed the rolling table away from the bed and tried, once again, to go out into the hall and find out where I was. I got myself into a sitting position, but after a few seconds of woozy swaying and a feeble attempt at standing, I got back under the covers.

Maybe I'm worse off than I realized, I thought as I inched my way back into bed and covered myself up. I pulled the rolling food table back over the bed and decided to give the eggs a try. They weren't bad, especially when shoveled onto the buttered toast, and the coffee was actually pretty decent. I ate everything in the eerie silence I was getting used to, then put the cover back on the tray and pushed the table away from the bed. My eyes started to get heavy and my head fell back and to the side. I closed my eyes, thinking it would just be a few minutes until the nurse came back and that I would just rest them a bit. I wanted to ask her more questions and see if I could, at least, turn the TV on and break the overbearing silence for a little while.

The next thing I knew I was laying on my back again and the nurse was standing over me.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Scott. How are you feeling today?"

"Today?" I asked, rubbing my eyes and trying to get the face in front of me to come into focus.

"But I saw you this morning. I ate breakfast and..."

"That was yesterday, dear. You fell asleep after breakfast and haven't been up since."

"What? I slept for a whole day? What time is it?"

"It's just after one o'clock, dear. You must be hungry by now. I'll bring in a tray of lunch for you."

"Wait. When can I see the doctor?"

"Oh, he's already been in to see you today, dear. He was in yesterday afternoon as well. He took all your vitals and said you're recovering very well. You just need your rest and you'll be fine," she said with an awkward smile that looked like it took a bit more effort than it was worth.

"Can't he come back in so I can talk to him? I'd really like to know what happened and when I can expect to leave here."

"I'll put a call in to him and let him know that you'd like to see him. I can't promise anything, though. He's a very busy man. And I wouldn't be worrying too much about leaving here anytime soon if I were you. What you need to be concerning yourself with right now is eating and resting and getting yourself good and healthy. I'll be back with your lunch in a bit."

And before I could get another question out she was gone. I just lay there,

staring at the thousands of holes in the ceiling and wondering how it was that an old lady like that could get in and out of this room so goddamned fast. *Maybe she has roller skates on that I can't see*, I thought as I fought the foggy feeling in my brain.

I had drifted off again but woke to the sound of the metal food tray being set down next to me. The nurse elevated my head and pushed the food table in front of me like before, and managed to make it out the door again before I even had a chance to collect my thoughts and find out what hospital I was at.

I picked up the domed lid and set it to the side of the tray. The shiny metal lid somehow felt heavier today than it had yesterday on the breakfast tray. I didn't see how I could be weaker today though and thought I really should talk to the doctor and find out what, if anything, was wrong with me. But I also figured I should probably just eat and rest like the nurse had suggested, even though I wasn't very hungry. Lunch was a brothy soup and a ground meat sandwich of some kind, which seemed like tuna, but didn't have any kind of tuna flavor. I ate slower than usual partly because I wasn't very hungry, and partly because I wasn't particularly excited to put the unidentifiable sandwich meat in my mouth. About halfway through lunch, I started to feel extremely tired again. I was even having a hard time getting my hand up to my mouth and that's when I started to wonder if my food was being drugged. It wasn't even a normal tired feeling where you think maybe you'll close your eyes for a minute or two and rest. It was a full on, room-tilting, eyes-closing-against-my-will tired that I had only ever felt since I had been in this crazy hospital.

But that's preposterous, I thought as my eyes started to close. *Why on earth would my food be drugged...*

Chapter 3

Abby

The dream came after I drifted into what felt like a drugged stupor. The telephone was there again, ringing that weird old ring that for some reason always sent chills down my spine. I guess because the only place I'd ever heard that kind of shrill ring was in old black and white movies, and mostly horror movies. Usually, in those old movies, the phone seemed to ring forever, probably because everyone knew that there was some creepy killer on the other end. And when they did finally answer the phone it was in a creepy voice with some strange old-fashioned accent.

I was in the same hospital bed in the same dark room I'd woken up in that first day, only the room was much bigger. For some reason I was afraid to move, but when I finally got up the courage to look to the left and then to the right, I realized that the room was enormous. It stretched on and on in each direction and became two long, dark hallways, each narrowing down on both sides until they came to an inky, blacked-out end. I turned my head to the nightstand and saw the big, black, old-fashioned phone that had been ringing for at least a full minute, then took the receiver off the hook. It was almost too heavy for me to pick up, but I dragged it to my ear and let it lay next to me on the pillow my head rested on.

"*Hello?*" I asked, but my mouth hadn't moved. My eyes were opening and closing very slowly as I waited with dread to hear who was on the other end. It had been ringing for a very long time so I hoped that whoever was calling had decided to hang up because I didn't feel strong enough to hang the receiver back up myself.

"Hello, Abby. This is your doctor. I need you to perform some tests for me."

The voice was dark and far away and almost had a sing-song quality to it. Like the person attached to it was smiling.

"*Test?*" I said...or thought. I'm still not entirely sure which.

"Yes. Now, listen to me carefully. I want you to pull up your hospital gown and place the mouthpiece of the telephone receiver on your pubic hair. I want you to rub it around so that I can hear it."

"*What?*"

"No more questions, Abby. Do as you're told."

This didn't seem right, but I didn't feel like I had any choice. He was the doctor. I pushed the covers down and lifted my gown. The air in the dark room was cool, but it didn't bother me. I decided to try and fool him, though, because I didn't believe that he would know whether I touched the receiver

to my pubic hair or not.

"Are you doing what I asked, Abby?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you can fool me, Abby? Do what I asked. Now."

The voice was so firm and commanding, and yet so eerie and mocking. It scared me and I knew that I didn't have a choice. I knew that I had to do what the doctor told me to do. I dragged the receiver down and rested the mouthpiece on my pubic hair. I could have sworn I heard someone walking toward me in the dark hallway at one end of the room, but I was too terrified to turn my head and look. I closed my eyes and prayed that this would all be over with, that if I just did what he said, the doctor would leave me alone.

"Good girl. Thank you for cooperating, Abby. Now I want you to put your fingers inside yourself."

As I listened to the voice and contemplated what it told me to do I realized that I didn't have the receiver up to my ear anymore. I didn't understand where the voice was coming from or how I was still able to hear it so clearly, and my breathing became more erratic as I started to feel panicky.

"Did you hear what I said, Abby? Spread your legs and put your fingers all the way inside yourself. Now."

The voice sounded like it was closer now, but I was too scared to open my eyes and find out if someone was standing near me. I did what the doctor told me to do and ran my hand down my stomach and over my pubic hair, then opened up the lips with my fingers and slid them inside my already wet vagina.

"Yes, that's right. Now move your fingers in and out."

The voice sounded like it was right next to me now and the combination of the fear I was feeling and the sensation of my fingers thrusting inside me sent tingles coursing throughout my body. I held the mouthpiece of the receiver in place so it wouldn't fall away and I continued to thrust, hearing the sounds I made and knowing that the doctor was listening too.

"Yes, Abby. Keep going."

The voice was becoming distorted, like on a phone with a bad connection and felt eerily dark and far away, but I could still somehow hear it right next to my head. Goosebumps ran down my spine as I felt someone's hot breath on my neck, then a surge of warmth spread through my body. I opened my eyes and arched my back and as I came my head turned in the direction of the voice. I gasped and screamed at what I saw. There was Jake crouched down next to the bed, smiling the creepiest smile I had ever seen in my life.

I woke up completely covered in sweat, still feeling the scream in my throat, and once again the room was completely dark. I looked around and was relieved to see that it appeared to be its normal size, but felt paralyzed in

the darkness that made the room look exactly the same in every other way as it had in my dream. I kept expecting to turn my head and see Jake, crouched and skulking around the side of the bed, with that creepy smile on his face. My mouth was dry and my eyes weren't focusing properly and it took me a minute or two to bring everything together in my head. I thought about how I had felt like I'd been drugged before I fell asleep and between that and the horribly creepy dream I had just experienced, I started to panic.

Oh God! They're drugging me! I know they are! I have to get out of here!

I pulled the covers to the side and swung my legs off the bed. My head was still woozy and every time I moved the room started to spin, but I just took it slow. Now that I knew something was wrong I was determined to get past that damned door and see what was out there.

I made it across the room by hanging on different pieces of furniture again and used all my strength to pull the door open. The hallway was dark and silent like it had been the other night, but I didn't let my cold feet turn me back. I shuffled out into the hall and heard the door close behind me with a click. I steadied myself against the cold wall and slowly looked in both directions. In one direction it looked like there was nothing more than a bunch of doors to patient rooms and a small window at the end. But when I looked to the left I noticed that there was some sort of desk area not too far away, and I hoped that that might be where the exit was located. As I made my way down the hall, clutching and leaning as I shuffled along, I heard a faucet dripping off in the distance, which only added to the ominous atmosphere of the hallway.

All I need is for an old phone to start ringing and it'll be like I'm in my very own horror movie, I thought as I walked around an old empty metal cart that was up against the wall in my path. The dream I had just woken up from flashed into my consciousness again as I crept down the hall and suddenly I remembered something from my childhood that I had not thought of for many years that made every hair on my body stand on end. When I was in grade school I did get a weird phone call. I was at my grandparent's house in the country and they had one of those old phones. I stood completely still in the dark hallway as I was suddenly taken back to that time when I visited my grandparent's house. They were in the garden and I was playing on the patio just outside the door to my grandfather's den. I'd heard the phone ringing for a very long time and decided that I was old enough to answer it, and besides, it sounded so sad just ringing in an empty room like that. All I really remembered about the phone call was that there was a man on the other end and he asked me to do some things with the phone under my clothes. Then my grandmother came in and asked me who was on the phone with a concerned look on her face, but when she took the receiver from me and asked who it was he hung up.

She kept asking me over and over who it was and what he had said to me on the phone and I just burst out crying, but mostly because *she* was scaring me. The way she was acting made me feel like what I had done was very bad and I never told a single person what he had asked me to do.

My memory of that event and the realization of what the man on the phone said to me sent chills down my spine. It was something I hadn't thought about in years, but what that man on the phone and what the voice in my dream told me to do were the same crazy thing. They both asked me to put the mouthpiece of the phone on my pubic hair so that they could hear it. And in both cases, I lied and said I was doing it when I wasn't. I tried to fool the doctor in my dream the same way I tried to fool the man on the phone. But the man on the phone way back then in my childhood never realized that I was lying. The doctor in my dream knew, though, and he scared me so much that I finally did what he told me to. But the thing that startled me the most, the thing that had my head reeling, was how what they both asked me to do made me feel. I had never admitted it to myself back then and I almost couldn't admit it to myself now, but being told what to do by both of them really excited me.

I couldn't understand why I was having this dream now, though, and why Jake had been in it.

Maybe that was why I loved it so much when Jake whispered in my ear, I thought.

Even though I was fascinated by my memory and the dream, it was also incredibly creepy and unnerving and it wasn't making the walk down this dark hallway and more pleasant. And what I needed to do right then was get out of there.

I came to the first doorway past mine on my side of the wall and the door was open. I looked inside and the room was dark and empty. I kept walking and glanced into the room just across the hall to find the exact same thing, another empty room. I kept inching along the wall and, as I got closer, I realized that the desk that I had seen in the dark was, in fact, a nurse's station and that there was an elevator across the hall. I wondered why no nurses were manning the station, why there were no lights on anywhere, and why there seemed to be no one around at all. I didn't know if there were any other patients, but the two rooms that were closest to the nurses station that I had passed were empty and I still had never seen this doctor that was apparently feeding me drugs to keep me asleep. I didn't really care what was going on in that crazy place, though. I just wanted to get on the elevator and get out of there and I was glad there was no one around to stop me.

Just as I approached the nurses station a door behind it opened and a silhouette of the nurse in the old-fashioned hat and dress appeared in the doorway.

"What are you doing out of bed, Ms. Scott?" she asked with a flat voice that made it sound more like a threat than a question. "You're going to catch your death on this ice cold floor." She walked toward me and as she stepped into the moonlight streaming through the window at the end of the hall, deep shadows made her stern face look like an evil mask.

"I want to see the doctor. Now," I said with as much conviction as I could muster with a shaking, weak voice.

"That's not possible, Ms. Scott. The doctor isn't in the hospital right now. Please let me help you back to your room..."

"Don't touch me!" I backed up and almost fell over, but grabbed the counter of the nurse's station and stayed upright.

"Ms. Scott, I can see that you're upset, but I think you'll feel much better if you just let me help you get back to your room. You've been in a terrible accident and you really do need to stay in bed." I reluctantly gave up fighting and leaned against her as she put her arms around my shoulders and ushered me back down the hall.

Was I really that out of my mind? I can't have imagined everything.

But as I made my way into the room and back under the covers I suddenly couldn't even remember the things that had upset me.

"Maybe it was all the dream," I mumbled as I watched the nurse take the pitcher of water next to my bed into the bathroom to fill it.

"Was it a bad dream, dear?" she asked as she filled my water glass and handed it to me.

"Drink this and you'll feel better tomorrow."

I took the glass from her and drank half of it. I had been incredibly thirsty ever since I woke up and the water felt like a cool, clear, glistening stream as it slid down my parched throat. I was suddenly grateful for the nurse helping me back into bed and bringing me water. Maybe I had been wrong in suspecting her of drugging my food intentionally. Maybe it was just the awful dreams that had me on edge. My eyelids got heavy not long after I drank the water and I drifted off to sleep with a slight tingle between my legs as I thought about the weird phone call dream.

I woke up the next day as the nurse set a tray down next to the bed.

"Up and at 'em, Ms. Scott. The doctor wants to see you in his office today."

I rubbed my eyes as the head of my bed lifted underneath me, pushing me towards the table that stretched across the bed in front of me with the domed tray on it. I expected to find eggs and toast when I lifted the lid but instead I found that same brothy soup and unidentifiable meat sandwich that I had had for lunch the other day. I didn't even remember what day it was when I last ate lunch or even what day it was today for that matter.

"What time is it?" I asked as I stared in disappointment at the tray in front

of me.

"It's noon, dear. You slept all night and half the day again. I'm sure it's nothing to worry about, though. The body knows what it needs to recover."

She slipped out the door and left me alone to choke down lunch and contemplate the events of the last few days. I was still having a hard time holding thoughts together in my head and the images and feelings from the dreams were the most persistent. But the thing that kept creeping into my thoughts as I remembered the last dream was how turned on I was by the whole thing. How the voice in my ear on the phone and the voice that felt like a whisper in my ear both made me want to just close my eyes and follow whatever directions they gave me. I closed my eyes as I sat in bed and remembered that feeling throughout my body, that I was compelled to do whatever the voice told me to do. That I wanted to do it.

Chapter 4

Abby

I sat on a brown leather couch that the nurse gestured to while I waited for the doctor. He sat behind a large mahogany desk in a very high backed chair, which was turned away from me towards the window behind the desk.

"Please don't be concerned in the slightest. We have everything under control here," the doctor said into the telephone receiver. After he hung up the phone he remained sitting with his back to me for a moment or two, then slowly swiveled his chair around. As he turned towards me and I saw his face my whole world suddenly felt like it had crashed down around me.

It couldn't be him! It's not possible! I thought as I stared in complete shock at the man in front of me.

"Jake? Jake, what are you doing here?" I asked, barely able to compute what I was seeing.

He looked at me with what appeared to be a combination of amusement and cold, calculated glee. He almost seemed to be enjoying watching me come undone as he stared at me with those incredibly intense eye - *Jake's* eyes - and rested his elbows on the desk, touching the fingertips from each hand together. The corners of his mouth curled up slightly and looked as if they were fighting off a full blown laugh. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I couldn't understand why Jake would do this to me. And why did he seem to find this situation so funny?

"Ms. Abby Scott, please allow me to introduce myself. I'm Dr. L..."

"Jake, I know it's you. What the hell are you doing?" I said as I continued to stare at him like he was out of his mind.

"If you are more comfortable doing away with formalities we can address each other by our first names, by all means. You may call me Jeffrey if that makes you more comfortable."

I stared at him, not having the vaguest idea what to say. It *was* Jake. It had to be. He had the exact same...well, everything. Thick dark hair parted in the exact same place and clipped in the exact same way over his ears. I mean, it was a pretty run of the mill men's hair cut, but still. It was *exactly* the same. He had the same sexy, well-defined lips with beautifully raised edges. I could never forget those lips, goddamnit! I knew every single curve and peak of them. He had the exact same pattern on his darkened jaw and upper lip that came with afternoon facial hair growth. Plus, those eyes. How in God's name could I mistake those eyes? The eyes that had pinned me into place and slowly scanned me from head to toe, then told me without words exactly how to peel my clothes off, piece by piece, exposing every inch of myself to them,

much to my overwhelming shame and delight.

"Abby...may I call you Abby?"

I tried to speak but nothing came out. Instead, I refocused my gaze as I looked down at the floor and shifted in my seat on the couch. I couldn't believe he was doing this to me.

"Abby, you've just been in a terrible accident. What we're trying to provide for you here is a place to recuperate from any physical and emotional damage that may have occurred during the accident, or perhaps before the accident."

My head was swimming and I was having a hard time comprehending any of the words Jake was saying. And every time I looked at them, it felt like the walls were moving in closer and the room was getting smaller. I swallowed hard and tried to control the panic that was rising in me as images of the last few days flew through my head. I tried to wrap my mind around what was going on here with the accident and the drugged food and that horrible nurse, and how Jake was involved in all of it.

"I realize that you have been through a lot, Ms. Scott, and I want to help you work through any issues that may be coming up for you right now."

"I'm not sure what you mean. What issues?"

"Well, you do seem to be under the impression that I look like someone you know."

I looked up in his eyes and I could have sworn he still had an amused look in them. I didn't know what kind of game he was playing and I had no idea what to say. It was Jake sitting in front of me, I knew it was, but he was obviously trying to get me to believe otherwise.

"So, you're saying I'm *imagining* that you look exactly like my ex-boyfriend because of the accident I was in?"

He flinched slightly when I said *ex-boyfriend* and I knew then that it wasn't my imagination. Was he doing all this just to get back at me? Was he really that fucked up that he would pretend to be someone else even though it was obvious to me that it was him sitting right in front of me? There was no way that this couldn't be my imagination or a reaction to the accident I was in.

"The mind does play powerful tricks, Abby. Usually, it's in an effort to protect us from something that is too hard or scary to contemplate in the present moment. But since we've just met and I have just begun this first session with you, I hesitate to give you any firm conclusions as to what you are experiencing. I would like to find out as much about you as possible so that we can figure this out together."

"Figure what out? There's nothing to figure out! There's nothing wrong with me," I said as I stared defiantly into those deep, dark eyes. Normally my knees would be wobbling and my panties would be dripping wet after just ten

minutes in their presence, but today I was obviously not in the mood. I was beyond irritated that I was being blatantly lied to and apparently held captive by the man that I had, less than a week ago, run *away* from. It may not have been the most mature move on my part, but it had been my decision, goddamnit, and it did not make me unstable or whatever he was insinuating. Who the hell did he think he was?

"Well, *doctor*, this is all very fascinating, but I'm not interested in hearing your theories or figuring anything out with you. I'm leaving today. Right now. Where are my things?" I stood up from the couch, keeping my gown wrapped around me and making absolutely sure that my ass was not hanging out the back. I needed at least a shred of dignity in front of those eyes today. I gave him my best tough chick in a hospital gown stare and wilted a little when I saw the corners of his perfect mouth curl up into another barely perceptible smile.

"Please sit back down, Abby." His eyes burned into me as I stood there, slowly dismantling my remaining resolve with every second they held me in their gaze. I didn't make a move to sit back down or look away from his stare or even blink. I wasn't going to let him intimidate me. After what felt like an hour, but in reality probably only amounted to less than a minute, I decided to try and talk my way out of there instead of arguing with him. Maybe he would listen to reason if I pointed out how ridiculous this all was. He hadn't struck me as an unreasonable man before. But that *was* before. Before he apparently turned into an insane person who was holding me against my will in this creepy old hospital.

"You can't keep me here, Jake. This is starting to feel pretty fucked up. What do you want from me? Couldn't you just have texted me or sent me an email if you wanted to talk? I told you I needed some space but if you'd asked me I would have talked to you, you know that don't you? I mean this is all kind of elaborate isn't it?" I said as I gestured towards the door and the hospital ward that lay just beyond.

"Ms. Scott. I'm going to have to insist that you sit back down or you will have to be sedated and restrained."

My mouth fell open and my eyes grew wide as I stood there with his words ringing in my ears.

Sedated and restrained? Is he fucking kidding?

I didn't know what to do or say. I just continued to stare at him in shock as he slowly tapped his fingertips on the desk with a slight smirk on his face.

"Please," he said as he gestured toward the couch.

I slowly sat back down, clutching my gown like it was some sort of life raft. It was literally the only form of a security blanket I had since I didn't even know where my own clothes were.

And holy shit where's my car? I don't even know what happened to my car.

Up until I walked into this office, I had thought I was in a relatively normal, small-town hospital. Maybe with some renovation issues, but still, it seemed like a legitimate hospital. I'd had my doubts about the odd nurse and the food being drugged, but I had also written all that off to the effects of my nightmares and the creepy atmosphere. Now, I suddenly realized that this was all a lie or a game that had been carefully constructed by this lunatic sitting in front of me. I realized that talking to him as if he were Jake was getting me nowhere, so I figured I'd just go along with the doctor and patient game for a while. I didn't feel like I had many other choices and was having a hard time concealing the fact that I was starting to feel like I was coming unglued.

"Ok, so what happened to me? Can you tell me that?" I said with an edge to my voice that gave away the fact that I was on the verge of tears.

"Do you mean the accident that brought you in here, or are you referring to your mental state before you arrived?"

"Of course, I mean the accident! I didn't have any problems before that! Mental or otherwise!"

Oh God, Abby, get a grip! Don't let him see that he is getting to you, I thought as I tried to regain my composure after raising my voice. I really didn't want to lose control in front of Jake, in a hospital gown no less, while he literally held the key to my freedom. I took a deep breath and unclenched my fists then continued.

"I...I mean...yes, that's what I meant. I would just like to know what happened in the accident that brought me here. Were there any other people involved? Is my car ok?"

"From what I understand, Abby, there were no other parties involved in the accident. You hit an elk on a dark, country road and rolled several times before coming to a stop up against a large tree. You were brought here in my private ambulance and I believe the county highway patrolman took care of your car."

Well, I guess that explains my confusion when I woke up here, I thought as I recalled that first morning, with flashes of an elk and paramedics and a woman on a stretcher. That was obviously me and I was being brought into this infernal private hospital.

"Can I talk to the highway patrolman? Do you have his name or phone number?"

"I'm sorry I don't have that information in my records."

"Well, someone here must have it? The nurse that was on duty when I was admitted?"

"I'm afraid no one is on duty at the moment, but I will check with the staff

tomorrow."

"There's no one else but you in this entire hospital right now? Not a single person? Not even that nurse that has been drifting into my room and feeding me..."

"I'm afraid I haven't been clear enough with you about where you are, Abby."

"I'll say."

I wished he'd stop saying my name. I'd loved hearing Jake say it before, but now it just sounded mocking and hollow.

"This is a private hospital. The wing you have seen since you've been here is the basement level of my house. We are capable of catering to up to four individuals here at the clinic, but seldom have more than one visitor at a time and only part-time staff. We are located about twenty miles from the nearest town, and I own all the land for those twenty miles in each direction. I have created this place as not only a sanctuary for myself but also as one for patients that need the rest and recovery that can only be brought about by controlled isolation."

Controlled isolation. What the hell?

My feelings of irritation and bewilderment with this game of his were turning to full-on panic.

Did he actually think he could get away with holding me here against my will? I thought as I sat there and felt my heart sink into my stomach. I realized that I hadn't said a word to anyone about going anywhere. I wanted to be alone and I didn't want to be bothered by questions or gestures of sympathy. I figured maybe my boss at work would wonder where I was and call my cell phone a few times, but they sure as hell wouldn't send out a search party. And Maxwell might wonder where I had disappeared to but I didn't know if she'd take any action into her own hands since she was pretty preoccupied with her own life most of the time. I barely talked to my parents more than once a month so I was sure that they wouldn't miss hearing from me for quite a while. I was notorious in my family for not being very good about phone calls or emails.

Oh my God, no one knows where I am and no one's going to come looking for me. This man is crazy. This man that I thought I knew is fucking out of his mind.

I tried to think of anything I could say to him to get him to let me go?

"Well, doctor, as you can see I've recovered from the accident. I don't know what other recovery you have in mind, but I do need to get back to my job. I'm sure they will be wondering why I haven't shown up or called for a week. Perhaps we could make an appointment to see each other on an outpatient basis."

The corners of his mouth started to curl again and my heart sank even

further when I realized he wasn't going to play the game my way. He had it all figured out in his head. It was his game, after all. He stood up and walked around his desk, stopping to lean on the front edge a few feet in front of me. He crossed one arm over his chest and rested the elbow of the other on it while rubbing his chin.

"Your place of work has already been contacted, Abby. They've been told that you're taking an indefinite leave of absence."

"Contacted? By who? They won't just take a stranger's word for it. That's ridiculous!"

"I had my nurse fax a letter from my office and they accepted it without question. I'm sure they'll be happy to hear from you when you've recovered, though," he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

I couldn't look at his horrible face any longer. He just seemed to be standing there, mocking me and laughing at me.

"According to my records, you were suffering from a breakdown when you were admitted, Abby. It's my understanding that the accident was a direct result of your breakdown."

"According to your *records*." I looked up at him again incredulously. "What records? Where are your records? Let me see the re..."

"*And*...it is my recommendation that you stay here for further observation and recovery."

"Your recommendation? So, if it's just a recommendation then I'm free to leave, right?"

He held my gaze with the coldest look I had ever seen in my life. He wasn't going to let me go.

"I'm afraid you don't understand, Abby. It is my professional opinion that you could be a danger to yourself or others if you were to be released. I'm sorry, but I can't allow that at this time."

The silence that filled the room as I looked into his eyes came crashing down on me. I couldn't even hear a clock ticking or a faucet dripping or a whisper of the breeze that might have been rattling the leaves on the tree just outside the window behind the desk. I started to experience the same tunnel vision that had slowly blacked out everything in the perimeter of the room the night I left Jake. Everything was closing in on me and narrowing down to a small circle so that all I could see were those dark, gorgeous, cold, calculating, terrifying eyes. I could barely breathe. I was so furious and terrified and stunned that I was actually surprised that I was still sitting up at all, or capable of making a coherent thought or sentence. And on top of everything I pretty much wanted to kick myself all the way to China for *still* having a reaction to those fucking eyes. My mouth was dry and my head was swimming with everything that was happening, but I had to try one more

time.

"Look, Jake..."

"That's actually a topic we could start with right now, Abby. This ex-boyfriend of yours, Jake, is that his name? Tell me about Jake," he said as he uncrossed his arms and rested them on the desk he was leaning on. He was still mere feet in front of me, towering over me as I sat there and stared at the floor, completely worn out and deflated.

This was infuriating. Why was he doing this to me? Was he getting off on this? I was suddenly realizing that I had dodged a major bullet by breaking up with this psycho. But, what did he do that night? Did he follow me when I left his apartment, then bring me here to his hospital mansion in the woods after I got into an accident? I didn't even know he had a fucking hospital mansion! Or did he cause the accident just so that he could bring me here?

Good lord, this is really starting to sound like the plot in one of my romance novels.

My head was still swimming and all I wanted to do was go back to my room. That horrible, creepy, cold-floored room was starting to sound pretty good to me. There was no way I could reason with this lunatic. All I could do at this point was hope that I would be able to talk some sense into him after a night of sleep, and that meant spending another night in this damned place, but I didn't have a choice. I looked up at him and shrugged, asking with my body what the hell he wanted with his insidious stare.

"We were talking about Jake. You were about to tell me about him. Please continue."

I laid my head back on the couch and closed my eyes. If he wanted to play this ridiculous game I was just going to have to go along with it for now. I needed some time to figure out how I was going to get out of here and I was just too weak to argue at this point.

"Ok, what do you want to know?"

"Why is he your ex-boyfriend?"

"Because we broke up."

"Would you care to elaborate? I can't really help you if you won't let me, Abby."

I lifted my head off the back of the couch and narrowed my eyes at him.

"Can you, at least, quit hovering over me like this?" I said, gesturing at his standing in front of the desk just a few feet away from me.

"Am I making you uncomfortable?"

I didn't say anything and he got up from the edge of the desk where he had been leaning and walked around to sit in the chair behind it. I sighed deeply and looked at the books on the bookcase to the right of the couch. I would rather look at anything but him right now, even books with titles like *Psychoneuroendocrine Dysfunction* and *Sin, Science, and the Sex Police: Essays on*

Sexology e3 Sexosophy. I didn't really understand what kind of doctor this guy thought he was. He apparently took care of me after I got into the accident, but now he's acting like he's some kind of psychotherapist. But what if there never actually was an accident? I didn't even know what to think anymore.

"We broke up because I didn't want to be in a relationship anymore. I was the one that broke it off. It was me, my problem. It had nothing to do with you...I mean him. Is that enough information?"

"Can you tell me why you didn't want to be in this relationship any longer?"

I sighed deeply and closed my eyes.

"Relationships end. There's no mystery to it."

"Has this sort of thing happened to you before?"

"What do you mean happened to me?"

"Have you broken off a relationship before? Is that a common denominator in many of your previous relationships?"

"I...I don't know."

I felt his eyes on me as I continued to stare at the books on the shelf. I was suddenly getting very tired of talking about my private life with this lunatic. Not that I had enjoyed it earlier, but now he was starting to hit a nerve and I didn't like it one bit. Yes, I had broken up with a couple of previous boyfriends, but I most definitely hadn't ended every relationship, that's for sure. I knew I had issues and had a tendency to leave when things started to get serious, but everyone had their flaws. I was still young and I didn't think there was any reason for me to tie myself down just then. And I didn't need to explain my actions to anyone, especially not this asshole who thought he had the right to kidnap me and pretend to be my doctor just because he hadn't gotten his way. I finally got the courage to look at him in the eyes again.

"I'd like to go to my room now. I had a suitcase with me in my car. It has my clothes and things I need in it. Is it here in the hospital?"

He smiled that barely perceptible smile again and looked down at his hands.

"I'll check with the next shift nurse when she gets in. Is there anything I can bring you in the meantime?"

I glared at him for a few seconds longer than was necessary, then stood up to leave.

"No."

"Then let me show you back to your room..." he said as he came around the desk and reached for my arm. I pulled away from him and backed up a few steps.

"I can find my own way back, thanks."

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to insist, Abby. I can't have patients just

roaming the halls on their own. There are many things that can pose significant danger within these walls," he said as he moved closer to me, reaching his hand up to the side of my face. I froze for a moment as he moved his head down closer to mine, running his thumb over my lips and cheek and gripping my head like he was about to kiss me. I was suddenly paralyzed by his gaze and couldn't move away. His dark eyes were boring into me as his face grew closer and I felt his hot breath close in on my lips. I tried to take another step away from him but the couch was right behind me and his towering body seemed to have me surrounded. Just then I felt a sharp pain in my arm and the room slowly dropped away underneath me.