

## Chapter 7

Los Angeles

Jess

Jess sighed as she wiped away the layer of sheer sweat on her forehead. She had just won a tennis tournament. Barely. It shouldn't have been that close. Jess knew that. She was distracted. At least that's what she told herself. She was supposed to be perfect at everything she did, which meant no room for loss. That's what her mother had taught her most of her life. Well, she wasn't even her real mother anyway. Jess had been abandoned by both of her parents, and raised by an extremely wealthy countess, who had made it her personal job to make sure Jess grew to become as successful as she was. Jess breathed in the fresh air, and walked towards her house. She was twenty-three, and she already had her own house. It wasn't really hers but the countess had given it to her when Jess turned twenty. She was met at the porch by the ever present countess.

"Jessica darling!" She called.

"Yes ma'am?" Jess responded hesitantly. The countess appeared a little exasperated.

"Jess, that performance I just witnessed..." she started, "you almost lost!" She exclaimed with frustration.

"I know I..."

she cut Jess off, "I don't want to hear any excuses. Go practice." She pointed back towards the tennis courts.

Jess turned back to the very place that she had just left and began to walk.

"And Jessica!" Jess froze, "This better not be about your brother. Don't forget what I've taught you."

Jess let out a sigh, one that she had been holding in for a long time. How had she known?

"One last thing!" She called again.

"Yes ma'am?" Jess answered.

"Keep your chin up and for goodness sake stop slouching! You're going to end up looking like the Hunchback of Notre Dame! And you don't want that do you?" The countess said with a flourish.

"No ma'am, I don't." Jess continued to walk away, and was left in silence as the countess was content in sitting in her chair, like a lady of course. As Jess walked, she thought of her brother. No, she thought of her dead brother. Stop. She told herself. Mother wouldn't approve. I have to stop thinking of him. He's in the past. She flipped her hair off of her shoulder and cleared her mind as she walked into the locker room. She pulled a small silver key out of her pocket and pushed it into locker number 1. With a click, the door swung open, and Jess was met with a small white box. It had a pink ribbon tied around it with a tag. The tag had her name inscripted on it in gold. It swirled the letters of her full name, reading, Jessica Angelina Lewis. Jess' full name. Angelina had been her mother's name. She sighed, it was most likely from the countess, as

a reminder of the game she had almost lost. She reluctantly pulled the ribbon, watching it unravel as it landed at her feet. The lid came off easily, and the contents surprised her. It was an odd-looking, Game of Life game piece. But...it was made out of amethyst. That couldn't be right. It had eight spots where characters could go within the car, as opposed to the usual six. Only one had a figure in it. The one in the backseat to the left. She tried to pry it out in an attempt to move it to the front of the car. It didn't budge. She gave up and began to put the piece back into the box when she felt an uneven surface on the bottom. She flipped the game piece over and read the information imprinted on the bottom. It encouraged Jess to join the sender at midnight, next week, at a mysterious location. Jess hadn't heard of the street it was on. She looked at the car in curiosity, before deciding to go. She would do anything and go anywhere to get away from the web of numbness that the countess had her trapped in.

## Chapter 8

Los Angeles

Campbell

"CUT!" A loud shout pulled Campbell out of the world he had been in, and back into reality. The lights went up. His director pointed to him,

"That was much better this time."

Campbell nodded his thanks in response, as the director addressed everyone.

"That's it for this week! Go home, sleep, run your lines, I don't care, just come prepared for the next time I see you."

He shooed them off, and as Campbell walked out of the dimly lit building he was hit with the blinding sun. He winced and paused for a moment, letting his eyes adjust. The parking lot was only partially full, and his bright red sports car was easily visible from where he was standing. He made his way towards the car and sat down inside. As he drove, he rolled his windows down, letting the crisp fall air blow across him. Suddenly, a small, withered blossom flew into the car, and stopped to rest on the seat next to him. Riley. Campbell had lost his younger sister just three years ago, and now that she was gone, everything that reminded him of her hit him hard. She had been his closest friend, but he also felt like he had a duty to protect her. All of this left with her when she died, and he constantly felt that he had failed her. Why couldn't you have been there, why couldn't you have protected her when that bullet- A loud horn honked behind him, making him realize that he was stopped in the middle of an intersection. Shoot, Campbell reprimanded himself as he put his foot on the gas and shot across the street. The moment he started to pull back into his garage, the blossom lifted, and was carried back out the window. Gone again, and he still couldn't save her. He got out of the car looking for the flower, the one that reminded him of Riley. It was nowhere in sight.

He walked to the front yard, not there, the street, still not there. He took one long look at the front of the

modern house, no blossom in sight. He walked up the front steps, defeated. He opened the door to find a skinny box sitting on his porch. He gave it a cursory glance. Probably fan mail. He sighed as he picked it up.

About to put it in his pocket, he gave it one last look, to see that his full name was written on it in golden calligraphy. Campbell Alastair Jenkins. Not fan mail. Could it have been from a director? No, he shook that thought aside, and carried the small package inside. Tossing his keys on the counter, Campbell tossed aside the lid of the box, and gazed at the contents. Inside sat a small, emerald, car. It looked almost familiar, with a small character sitting in one of the backseats, leaving seven spots open. An easter egg from a possible future director? He turned it over, in hopes of confirming his suspicions. On the bottom was written a date, time, and address. He checked his calendar to match the date. He had a charity event that night to attend, but he would be able to make it. Barely. Thankfully, the location was only five minutes from the event, but he would still be in his formal attire. It would be fine. It was probably just a meeting with a possible director. At midnight? He shook the worries away. People did things for all sorts of reasons, who was he to judge them for those decisions?

