

Not ever.

And suddenly it felt as though there was no safe place at all—no part of the world where she could rest without being on guard.

She felt exposed, as though there were no longer any barriers between herself and the world. Something inside her felt damaged—fractured in a way she couldn't see but could feel. Uncontained. As if something essential had been stripped away, leaving her raw and unprotected.

Control was gone.

Privacy had been violated.

Protection no longer existed.

And beneath it all was the certainty of being alone.

Alexandria Prescott moved through the house on instinct, checking each door, each latch. The motions were careful, repetitive, as if precision might hold the world in place. When she was done, she turned the phone off. She went to the bed and sank onto it, her body heavy, uncooperative. Pulled the covers over her head and shut the world out.

The police siren screamed by like it had a personal vendetta.

He dove for cover. Jermaine clawed at the gun on his hip—a piece he carried more for show than use—his hands jittering as panic set in. The siren became louder as though the police had stopped right outside. They dropped hard beneath the window in unison, backs against the wall, hearts hammering while the siren slid past and faded into nothing.

Silence. Then slow unsteady breathing.

Jermaine whispered, “Man, mi tink mi heart just stop beat just now.”

They scanned the room through the haze—air thick with smoke and spilled liquor. Four naked bodies lay strewn across the floor and couch, unmoving, trapped in a sloppy, drunken stupor. No one stirred. No one cared.

He peeked out the window, squinting like the glass might snitch on him. Nothing. Still, his gut twisted.

“Time to go. This place don’t feel safe no more.” He muttered, as he flicked the ganja spliff unto the floor. Jermaine didn’t argue. He nodded, already backing toward the door.

It was his day off, but rest felt impossible. The hours stretched ahead of him, empty and uninviting, with no plans to anchor them. Inside the house, the air was already tight with frustration. His sister and mother were arguing again in the living room, their voices sharp and overlapping—old grievances dragged out, accusations flung back and forth, each word landing heavier than the last.

He lingered in the doorway just long enough to feel the familiar knot twist in his chest—anger tangled with exhaustion, the kind that came from hearing the same fight play out too many times. He didn’t have the energy to pick a side or play peacemaker. Quietly, almost guiltily, he reached for his hat, pulled it on and slipped out of the house, using the soft click of the door to shut out the noise and everything that came with it.

At the front gate on Queen Street, he paused. Across the road, the William Knibb Memorial Baptist Church stood quiet and imposing, its presence calm but watchful. He glanced up George’s Street toward the back gate—the road that would lead him straight up to Falmouth Square. He considered it for a moment, then dismissed the idea just as quickly. That route held too many chances for conversation, too many familiar faces.

A man stepping out of Doctor Benris’ office—just a building up from the church—called out to him as he passed. He answered with a brief nod, nothing more and turned onto Duke Street without slowing. He wasn’t in the mood for conversation.

The sun pressed heavy on his shoulders as he walked, heat rising off the pavement in soft waves. He kept walking, letting the town unfold around him. The town slid past one landmark at a time: He passed the Methodist Church first, its quiet presence softened by age and sun. Then Falmouth Resorts, polished and detached, followed by Falmouth Parish Church, standing solemn and weather-worn. Farther along came the Seventh Day Adventist Church and, just beyond it, the old Jewish burial grounds—silent, shaded, heavy with history. Each landmark slipped by like a marker counting the growing distance between him and everything he was trying to leave behind.

At last, the town loosened its grip, giving way to the beach—an uninterrupted sweep of white sand meeting a wide, glassy stretch of blue-green sea that glittered under the sun. The air smelled of salt, raw fish and sunlight.

Near the edge of the beach, fishermen hunched over their catch, knives flashing as scales flew like confetti. He dipped his head in a quick, noncommittal nod and kept moving.

One of them lifted a string of bright parrotfish and pitched it as a “Real good deal,” grinning wide. He laughed softly, waved them off with an easy smile and walked on.

The day burst open with light—bright, sharp, alive. Sunlight poured down from a sky crowded with slow-drifting, cotton-white clouds, their shadows sliding lazily across the sand. The beach stood empty, untouched, as if it had been cleared just for him.

A cool breeze came off the sea and brushed his face, carrying the familiar scent of salt and water. The waves moved gently, folding onto the shoreline with a steady, patient rhythm, while the trees behind him whispered as the wind passed through their leaves.

Without quite meaning to, he walked to a spot he knew by heart—the place where everything between them had first felt real, uncomplicated, full of possibility. He sat down. The memories came fast and unbidden. For a

moment, the past pressed in on him as vividly as the sun on his skin. Thoughts of how it had been—how easy it once felt, how certain things had been assailed him. Time had changed things, thinned what was once solid, but sitting there, with the sea before him and the wind at his back, he allowed himself to remember without resistance.

He missed her more than he cared to admit. The thought settled in his chest, heavy and unwelcome. He looked down at his phone, thumb hovering for a moment before he found her name and pressed dial. Nothing. Straight to silence. Her phone was still off. Three days now. Something felt wrong, a thread of worry tugged at him, though he tried to brush it aside, reminding himself that this was her way— pushing people away before they got too close.

He lifted his eyes to the deep blue sea stretching endlessly before him. The sun glinted off the water in blinding flashes, and the salt-thick air filled his lungs. Out on the waves, fishermen guided their small boats forward, dark figures bobbing gently with the swell as engines buzzed and then softened into the distance.

He forced his thoughts away from her and fixed them on one white boat cutting steadily across the water. He watched it drift farther and farther out, its shape shrinking, edges blurring, until it became a faint mark against the horizon and finally disappeared altogether—swallowed by the vast line where the sea met the sky.

*October 8, 2011*

*Saturday - 1:41 am*

JUSTIN

It's weird that once one villain is out of the picture another steps in. As I grew, I encountered so many others like him. It was as though I was a magnet that drew all sexual perverts to me or was it that I was also one too and they recognized it.

At thirty-five years old I find myself once again dealing with things of my childhood that I thought I had already dealt with earlier on in my life. To be honest, I thought I had already faced these demons and had conquered them. I am sure I did. I got over these things when I was a child. But here I am again, trying to tell you what had really happened. As though it really matters to you. And trying my damness best to conquer these demons all over again. For the sake of continuity let me stick to the part about Justin.

So for three years we didn't really see Justin or Juleen. Dad would go visit them on occasions and would bring back their hellos. Then one day, Justin walked in the house with Dad and began living with us again.

He was now eighteen and I was thirteen. And so many things had changed. I was no longer a little girl of six, eight, nine or even ten but a budding teenager. I had grown breast, something that embarrassed me immensely, something Justin teased me about often and I had started menstruating. Puberty was far more confusing than those books I had been given to read by the adults around me told me it would be. It wasn't only my body that had developed, my mind had too. I now had developed a "conscience". I was now reading the bible on and off, once again as I had done when I was littler and believing in God on and off, you know how it is. I had been taught what was right and wrong from a Christian

perspective, so I comprehended that what Justin and I had done when we were little wasn't something we should have done or be doing now, so I had no intention of doing anything with him again.

Justin had grown taller, was now interested in the girls at the college he attended in Montego Bay – no one called him “homo” anymore. And now, he was just my brother who looked out for me and helped me with my homework. I liked it best when we studied together because that was the only time he talked to me. We mainly talked about his women friends and school stuff. But I still enjoyed listening to him, talking to him, having him pay me some attention as he use to when we were little.

At first, I was an awkward, shy teenager who was terrified of boys and men. I tried to avoid them as much as possible especially Justin's and Dre's friends who often tried to date me. Funny, here I am again, feeling awkward and shy, trying to avoid men.

Two years later, Justin was gone again, off to university in Kingston and I was only seeing him on the holidays when he visited. When he went away to university that is when I began to really miss him – there was no one to talk to, to listen to me talk and understand me as I talk. Then something happen when I was sixteen years old. That summer of 92 when I first saw Tristan. Justin had come home that summer. Although, he hadn't told anyone he was coming I knew several days before that Justin would be home soon. He and I had that sort of connection.

That year, I started noticing some strange stuff about me and I really needed someone to talk to about it - to see if it was really strange stuff or just teenage stuff. I couldn't talk to my mom and I have never

really been close to my Dad in that way. Aside from that, my parents and I were now always arguing. Teenage stuff. At that time, I didn't know what I was doing wrong why they were arguing with me but I seemed to always say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing according to them. I didn't consider talking to Sammy. We had stopped being good friends long before that; she was now just my cousin. Sammy had a tendency to tell her best friends everything I told her. And besides that, I didn't want them to ridicule me. Talking to Dre was out of the question. He didn't have any time for me. He had his friends, his girlfriends, his reputation to uphold, his teenage life living. Besides, Dre and I never had that kind of relationship. At that age, Dre and I were still often arguing and physically fighting on occasions. I began to feel that Dre didn't really want me to be a part of this family. That he saw me as his competition for our parents, relatives and family friend's affection and as such I wasn't really his friend but closer to his enemy. Well, maybe that's putting it too far but I don't know how else to explain our relationship, because even to this day, his actions towards me feels more like one of an enemy than a loving brother. Even though I am told by others that he loves me and I know he loves me in his own way. Anyway, in those days, Dre often complained that everybody compared him to me and he couldn't be me. Which is true, he can't be me. He didn't seem to see that on my side, it was done in the reverse. People also compared me to him and found me lacking. And I can't be him. So in those days I was often, even subconsciously trying my best to stay in the background so that Sammy and Dre wouldn't have anything to complain/talk about me about. I basically, didn't want to get in their lime light. I didn't want them to feel uncomfortable, it took me years to realize

this, that that was what I was doing, for you see I am not someone who really needs the limelight.

As you can see, I wasn't having a happy teenage life. And I was about to make my unhappiness and confusion worst.

Justin had always been the closest one to me when I was growing up. He was the only one I could talk to, who seemed to understand what I was saying or trying to say. Looking back, I now realize that I looked up to him. He was my know-it-all brother who I could count on to talk to me – be kind to me. I was looking forward to seeing him, to hear all about his university school life, about all the girls he had been with, all the parties he had gone to and about the stuff he was learning in school.

I didn't know how much I missed him, ached for him until I saw him walked through that door. I met him at the door and threw myself in his arms. My ever present sexual feelings rushed to the surface. At sixteen, I had romanticized all my sexual feelings, frustrations – needs, unto Justin. I think subconsciously I reasoned that Justin was safe, safe for me to think about in my mind, safe for me to feel something for because it could never be real. And even if it did become real, he wouldn't hurt me like other guys could or would because he loved me and always would. I was wrong about this, so wrong.

At twenty-one Justin had just started looking and acting like a man. His muscles were well toned, his skin soft and smooth. I held him close needing to feel his body pressed against mine. He pulled out of my embrace, held me at arm's length, looked me over, shook his head, smiled then quietly, gently, whispered, "From now on stop greeting me like that. No more

hugging, okay.” He walked around me and went to greet my mom, patted Dre on the back and began talking to all the cousins and aunts that we had staying for the summer. One thing with Justin, he knew well how to seem confident, self assured, articulate, carefree while he held so many emotions in check under the surface.

Once again, I felt that wall, the one that I had bumped into only a few days before when I had looked at Tristan and expected him to “know me”. Now, Justin had it surrounding him, shielding him from my view. And for the first time I looked at Justin and wasn’t sure I knew the man walking away from me. He was different somehow.

