



Busted (A Barnes Brothers novel)

By Shiloh Walker

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Fate is indeed fickle. When the two meet again at a conference, this time the attraction is too powerful to resist. But is their connection and passion strong enough to survive Trey's deep inner torment?

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Wrecked*:

“The sexy surprises...send their comfortable relationship into uncharted (and utterly hot) territory...Walker ably demonstrates her skill with a contemporary scenario.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“A touching romance about best friends finding out that love was right in front of them the whole time. It has plenty of sizzle...We get to see the interior feelings of both leads in this lovely little contained look at two people that any reader would love to call friends. A beautiful story!”—*RT Book Reviews* (4 ½ Stars)

“A sweet and sexy story that...was charming and fun to read.”—*Smart Bitches, Trashy Books*

“A successful romance and a good read...Sexy and poignant.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Made my heart beat out of my chest.”—*Fiction Vixen*

“Full of love, humor, and a passion that burns brightly.”—*Joyfully Reviewed*

About the Author

Shiloh Walker is the national bestselling author of romance, paranormal romance, and romantic suspense novels, including *Razed*, *Wrecked*, *Fragile*, *The Protected*, and *The Reunited*.

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Prologue

There was, at times, only one way to completely lose yourself.

This was a fact that Trey Barnes knew all too well.

He'd spent a great deal of time losing himself to books, for instance—first as a reader, and then, as he'd gotten older, as a writer. He found other ways to lose himself, too. He liked to dabble in photography, although he was a bumbling amateur compared to his oldest brother, Zane. Still, it was a good way to while away an afternoon.

And he had loved to lose himself in the arms of his wife, Aliesha.

Now, though, all he had of her were memories . . . and that small infant on the other side of the glass, struggling for every breath.

“Mr. Barnes?”

He didn't look at the nurse.

“Sir, why don't you go home and get some rest?”

It was creeping up on ten. He'd been here since . . . hell. He'd come straight here after the funeral. Yeah, it had been a while. He'd taken every precious moment he could to be as close to his baby as possible. Not that he could do much more than stroke one small, frail hand.

Clayton Barnes, a mere three days old, was a tiny, little miracle from God. He'd been born more than two months early. Without the ventilator that was doing the breathing for him, he wouldn't be alive.

"Mr. Barnes."

Slowly, he looked away from the window and met the compassionate gaze of the nurse. She was older, her round face softened by time, and her eyes held his steadily.

She reached out and rested a hand on his shoulder.

"You need rest," she said gently. "You have to take care of yourself now . . . for him, if nothing else. You're all he has."

A knot settled in his throat, then he nodded. "Can I have another few minutes with him?"

"Of course."

* * *

Once he left the neonatal intensive care unit and the hospital behind, he didn't go home. Not yet.

There was no way he could sleep in their bed.

Their bed.

Aliesha . . .

Tears burned his eyes and he blinked them away as the road blurred in front of him.

His phone buzzed—it was still on silent mode from the funeral. It had too many ignored phone calls, too many unanswered messages and he planned on letting them go ignored. Unanswered. The only people he'd care to talk to were his family, and all of them knew where to track him down. He'd be at the hospital sixteen to eighteen hours a day for the foreseeable future.

For now, he didn't want to be around anybody he knew. Anybody . . . or any place.

Taking the interstate downtown, he found a hotel. Somebody came out from behind the valet parking stand but Trey already had the door open. "Will you be checking in, sir?"

He gave a short nod and moved to the back, grabbing the bag his mother had packed so he could have clothes for after the funeral. He'd never changed. They'd come in handy now.

"Do you have any other luggage?"

"No." He turned his keys over and went to head inside, but then looked back at the man. "Where's the nearest bar?"

"There's the hotel lounge, although it closes at eleven."

“Aside from that?”

The man cocked his head and gestured west. “Take a left at the next block. You’ll find quite a few. Plenty of places open til midnight, some even later.”

Trey gave another nod and passed over a few of the bills he’d shoved inside his pocket earlier. He’d meant to get coffee, or something from the vending machines at the hospital. Meant to—forgot. Again.

Check-in was a short, silent affair. One thing about some of the more upscale hotels—they seemed to realize when somebody wasn’t in a mood to chat.

The lady at check-in apologetically told him the hotel was rather full due to an upcoming convention, although she did have a single open for only one night. The word *convention* had his gut turning—

... *an accident . . . hospital as soon as possible . . .*

Shoving the memories aside, he said hoarsely, “I just need it for the night.”

He’d figure something else out tomorrow.

Trey barely remembered the walk from the desk to the elevator to the room.

He barely remembered throwing his bag on the bed and stumbling back out.

It was all a blur, and then he was sitting down at the bar, his hand closed tightly around a glass.

It was a dive. He’d asked for whiskey, a double, neat, and it had come in a smudged glass, the fumes of whatever horse-piss they’d brought so strong, it might have doubled for rocket fuel.

He tossed it back and tapped his glass.

The bartender slid him a look but served him up another before disappearing to tend to everybody else jammed in at the bar, elbow deep.

“You look like you want to drink away your sorrows.”

Sighing, Trey lifted the glass and pressed it to his head. He closed his eyes and said, “Go away.”

“Aww . . .” A hand stroked down his arm. “Don’t go being like that.”

Jerking his arm away, he tugged his wallet out and fished out some bills—how much did whiskey cost in a dive like this? He didn’t know. He caught the bartender’s eye and held up two twenties.

“Get your change in a minute—”

“Keep it,” Trey said sourly as the woman on his left leaned in closer. The feel of her breasts, the scent of her, had something inside him going cold.

Aliesha—

He half stumbled away as days of grief, of guilt, crashed into him. He found a bare space of wall near the back of the bar, a painted-over window tucked up over his head. He rested there, taking another drink of whiskey, slower this time, grimacing at the almost painful bite of the cheapest, shittiest whiskey he’d ever

had the misery to experience. Appropriate, he decided. Today was the most miserable, shittiest day of his life.

A tear squeezed out of the corner of his eye. He swiped at it with the heel of his hand, not giving a damn if anybody saw it. Then he tipped back the glass and had another sip.

“Hey.”

Cracking one eye open, he bit back a groan. It was the woman from the bar. At one time in the past, he would have given her a thorough look. Her hair was done in long, thick plaits that hung almost to her waist, while her hourglass curves were poured into a belly-baring shirt and a skirt that just barely skimmed the legal limit. A gold ring flashed from her navel and there was a piercing in her nose.

She looked like a woman capable of wicked things.

No doubt about it, she could make a man’s cock stand on end.

Now, though, all she did was angle her head to the side. “Look, I’m sorry if I came on too strong. You . . . hell, you look like you’re having a rough day. You want to talk about it?”

“No.” He closed his eyes again and had another long, hard pull of his drink, realized it was empty.

His head was also starting to spin. Usually two drinks wouldn’t do it, but he hadn’t eaten since the toast his mother had forced on him that morning. Not exactly the ideal dietary intake.

Didn’t matter. He could still think. If he could think, he wasn’t drunk enough.

Shouldering up off the wall, he went to cut around her.

She caught his arm and when he tried to pull away, she just gripped him tighter. “Come on,” she said, her voice firm. “If you’re going to get plastered, at least do it sitting down.”

He might have argued, except he was damn tired.

A few minutes later, he was in a booth.

She sat across from him and he watched listlessly as she picked up his glass and sniffed at it. “What is that, Old Grand-Dad? You trying to kill your stomach or what?” She flagged down one of the servers and Trey snorted.

She wasn’t ever going—

Well, scratch that. Some sort of blurry amusement worked its way free in his mind as somebody sidetracked to their table, shooting the woman across from him a hard look. “Yeah?”

That look was meant with an equally hard smile. “Get him something that isn’t going to kill his gut,” she said, her tone all sugar. Sugar, but the gaze was steel.

Too many undertones there for him to process.

Trying to juggle his way through all of that and deal with the noise in his head was making his brain hurt. He still wasn’t drunk enough. Maybe what he should do was hit that liquor store he’d passed . . . yeah.

He liked that idea. He could grab himself a bottle of whatever was closest to the door, lock himself in his room, and get plastered. The headache he'd have in the morning would keep him focused on something other than what he'd done today—

Something thunked down in front of him, hard.

Blinking, he stared at it.

He went to reach for it but before he could, a hand tugged it out of reach.

“Give me that,” he demanded.

She kept her hand over it as she slid into the booth next to him. He'd settled in the middle and he wasn't exactly a small guy, so that didn't leave her a lot of room. She didn't seem to care.

Alarms started to screech in his head.

“You wanna talk now?” she said, managing to make that low purr of a voice audible over the din in the air. She stroked a finger down the glass.

“No.” He took the glass and the scent of it hit his nose before he took the first swallow. He almost sighed in appreciation. That was more like it. He couldn't quite recognize it—some sort of bourbon, he thought, but a damn sight better than whatever swill he'd been tossing back. Slumping in the seat, he rested his head on the back of the booth.

The fog in his head crept in closer.

“So what has you looking so miserable today, handsome?” Her hand settled on his thigh, dangerously close to his crotch.

He picked it up and slowly, carefully, deliberately settled it on the table. That right there was enough to have the fog in his head clearing.

Even when she started to lean in closer, Trey found the energy to get his leaden legs moving, forcing his too-fogged brain to function. Her eyes—he studied her eyes through a haze of alcohol and realized something was off.

“I buried my wife,” he said. His gut went slippery cold as he said it, and then, he said it again. “I buried my wife. She went into early labor and died during the emergency C-section. My son almost died, too.”

She went to open her mouth and he leaned in, ignoring the absolutely lovely breasts she displayed as she reached out to touch his arm. “I’m not interested. You’re better off looking elsewhere.”

Something flashed in her eyes and then she inclined her head. “Pay for your own whiskey, then.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way.” He nodded toward her and looked around, tried to figure out where the fucking hell he’d *put* the damn whiskey. He’d had a drink, hadn’t he?

“Son of a bitch,” he mumbled, barely even noticing that he’d banged into the wall on his way out of the bar. Lights blurred together and shadows swayed in and out of the focus, coming alive on him.

There were voices.

Then a shout.

The one last clear thing he remembered was trying to remember where the hell he'd put his damn phone.

* * *

A harsh pounding noise split through his head, like a cleaver striking through bone.

Trey jerked upright and immediately wished he hadn't so much as moved.

Nausea churned inside and his belly revolted.

He shuddered, braced an arm over his gut as he looked around.

No light.

Couldn't see—

“You awake there, sunshine?” Lights flashed on.

He flinched at the sound of that voice, as familiar to him as his own. It was quiet—logically, he knew that, but it sounded as loud and booming as a fucking gong.

He groaned and rolled over, grabbing for his pillow so he could drown out the too loud sounds and the too bright lights.

Hearing his twin's sigh, he thought maybe Travis would take pity on him and let him sleep off this hangover from hell. Trey couldn't remember the last time he'd been this wasted.

“Come on, man,” Travis said a moment later. “You need to wake up.”

The sound of his brother's voice was too loud, too harsh and he groaned pitifully.

“Mr. Barnes?”

He jerked at the sound of the new voice.

A hand pressed down on his shoulder.

“Easy there, Trey. I'll take care of it. You just . . . try not to fall out of the bed.”

That made him crack open one eye—immediately, he wished he hadn't, because the lights were harsh and bright and unforgiving. Anybody who had ever painted hell as a dark and smoky place was out of his mind. Hell was pure, unrelenting, blinding light and there was no escape from it. Trey flinched away from the searing brightness, feeling like his eyeballs had been singed.

He heard low voices, a hushed, hurried argument and he decided he was going to have to brave that hell. Cracking open his eye once more—just a slit—he looked around.

The place was disturbingly familiar.

Too bright. Yeah, he didn't like that. Aseptic smells—

That tugged at something—immediately, his mind went on a sideways lurch and he rolled into a seated position and found himself on the edge of a bed that was most certainly *not* his own. He was bare-chested but wearing pants that he thought probably were his, although they were torn at the knee and dirty. His knuckles were bandaged—bruised.

What the—

“You okay there?”

He flexed his hand as Travis came around to stand in front of him.

Looking up, he found himself looking face-to-face at a disheveled mirror of himself. Then he glanced down at his wrecked trousers, his bare chest and his torn-up fists. Maybe *he* was the disheveled reflection this time around. Swallowing the nasty taste in his mouth, he eyed the wrinkled button-down Travis was wearing with a pair of trousers. He looked like he’d slept in them.

Then he looked down at himself, eyed the identification bracelet on his wrist. His head was an endless void—nothing but black stretching back—an awful pain settled at the base of his head and he slid from the bed, half stumbled, half shoved his way past his twin.

“Why am I in the hospital?”

“You . . .” Travis paused, taking his time before he said anything else. “You were at a bar. There was a fight. The bartender ended up calling the cops—you were all but unconscious in the parking lot.”

Trey ran his tongue across his teeth. “A bar.”

“Yeah. Ah . . . you lost your wallet. Whatever cash you had. I already shut down the credit cards, although I think whoever had them might have already tried to use them—I heard some talk from the cops. You can . . . we can talk about this later.”

“There was a woman,” he muttered as he flexed his aching hands. “I . . . I almost remember.”

“The doctors here, they ran a few blood tests. Ah . . . nothing happened. Just so you know—apparently you defaulted to fight mode and some . . .”

“What aren’t you telling me?” Trey asked, studying his brother’s face.

Travis came to stand closer, only a couple of feet away. “It looks like somebody slipped you something in your drink, Trey.”

“Slipped . . . what?”

He stared at Travis, confused.

“Somebody gave you drugs—you’ve got Xanax in your bloodstream.” Travis’s mouth went tight.

Trey’s head continued to pound and it only got worse as he studied his brother. “You didn’t need to come here for this, man. I can . . .” He swore and reached up to rub at his head, hoping it wouldn’t fall away. A memory tried to work free.

Voices . . . shouting . . .

Misery.

Abruptly, his throat started to ache.

“Why are you here?” he asked, his voice rough. “You were working some stupid-ass case in Toledo, last I heard. Wouldn’t be able to visit for a while.”

“Trey . . .”

The compassion in his twin’s voice almost shattered him.

“No.” He shook his head and spun around. The movement almost sent his aching head crashing off his shoulders and he welcomed it. He banged into the bed, almost fell down—would have—if Travis hadn’t steadied him.

He threw his twin’s hands off. “Get out of here!” he shouted. “You got a fucking job to do! Ain’t no reason for you to . . .”

He almost hit the floor when he tried to take a swing at Travis, his aim off. Just that movement had nausea pitching through him.

“Easy,” Travis said, steadying him once more, ignoring the anger as if it had never existed. “Come on, Trey. Just sit down. Just sit down . . . and breathe. This . . . some of this, it’s just the drugs. Once that shit is out of your system, you’ll feel better.”

“Drugs.” He latched onto that, desperate to think of anything but the knowledge that had started to work free in the back of his head. “Why would somebody spike my drink?”

“Yeah.” Travis eased him back onto the bed. “The bartender saw you talking to a woman, but he can’t really describe her.”

Trey’s lids drooped down. There was an echo of a laugh, but even as he tried to grab that memory, something else snuck up, grabbed *him*.

Aliesha’s memory. Warm and soft and wonderful. Out of the gaping void of his mind, something ugly crept up. He saw himself, gripping a phone.

“Mr. Barnes, I’m afraid there’s been an accident . . .”

“Travis?” he whispered.

“Yeah?”

He swallowed, the words trembling on the tip of his tongue. He didn’t want to say it—didn’t want to think it.

No, what he wanted to do was go back to those few moments when he’d only had the hangover from hell to deal with.

Those few moments when he’d forgotten that his wife was dead.

Chapter One

Week One

The first time Trey Barnes saw her it caught him by surprise.

Not because he knew her.

Not because of anything she did.

But because it had been almost six years since a woman had caused this kind of reaction in him.

Six years.

So it was a punch in the gut when he walked into the main branch of the Norfolk library for the kid's reading program and saw *her*. His tongue all but glued itself to the roof of his mouth and his brain threatened to do a slow meltdown.

The woman was kneeling down in the middle of a circle of kids, a smile on her face. Her mouth was slicked wine red, and he suddenly found himself dying of thirst.

It had also been almost six years since he'd touched a drop of alcohol, but in that moment, he found himself imagining a glass of wine. Wine . . . wine red lips, wine red sheets and the two of them stretched out on a bed as he ran his hands over that warm, lovely brown skin.

"Come on, Daddy!" Clayton jerked on his hand. "Let's go! I want to go play."

His son's voice dragged him out of the fantasy, rich and lush as it was, and he shook his head a little to clear it. A heavy fullness lingered in his loins and he was glad he'd gotten used to looking like a bum. The untucked shirt had fit him well enough when he bought it years ago, but the weight he'd lost after Aliesha's death had stayed off, so the shirt hung loose on his rangy frame. Loose enough that he figured it would hide the hard-on that had yet to subside.

A few minutes surrounded by chattering preschoolers ought to do it.

Clayton let go of his hand as he got closer and Trey reached up, nudging his sunglasses firmly into place. As he'd retreated further and further into hermit mode, fewer people recognized him, but he rarely went anywhere without something to hide his face. Between the hair he rarely remembered to cut and the sunglasses, people often looked right past him these days.

A shrill shriek split the air as two kids started to fight over a book.

That's going to do it, he mused. Blood that had burned so hot a minute before dropped back into the normal zone.

Only to jump right back up into the danger zone.

Miz Sexy Librarian had crossed to the kids and now stood in front of them, her back to him.

And *fuck* . . . her voice was a wet dream.

"Now I *know* you two weren't raised to treat books that way. Do you do that at home?"

Two pint-sized little blond heads tipped back to stare up at her. Trey barely noticed them, because his gaze

was riveted on the plump, round curve of her ass. How could he *not* notice that ass? She wore a long, skinny skirt that went down a few inches below her knees and her stockings were the kind with a seam that ran up the back of her legs.

He passed a hand over his mouth.

Hell of a way to realize he could still get aroused—in the middle of the children's section of the very public, very busy, Norfolk library. Gritting his teeth, he focused on the ceiling. Would counting sheep help?

“Hello.”

That whiskey-smooth drawl was like a silken hand stroking down his back . . . or other things. He cleared his throat. *Speak, dumb-ass.*

“Hi!”

Saved by the Clayton-meister.

Mentally blowing out a breath, he watched as his son rocked back and forth on his heels, smiling up at the woman.

“Are you here for the program?” she asked.

“I am!” Clayton stuck out his hand. “I’m Clay. I love books. My dad tells me stories. All the time. Sometimes he even makes them up. He gets paid to do that, too.”

Despite the total insanity of the moment, Trey found himself biting back a laugh.

That boy, in so many ways, had been a bright and strong light in what would have been nothing but a pit of misery for far too long.

* * *

Oh, honey . . . come to Mama.

Ressa Bliss would have been licking her chops if she had been anywhere remotely private.

Long, almost too lean, with a heavy growth of stubble and a mouth made for kissing, biting . . . other things . . .

He wore a dark pair of glasses that hid too much of his face and she wanted to reach up, pull them off.

Because she wanted so much to do that, she focused on the boy instead.

She shook his hand, much of what he’d just said running together in her head. She’d caught his name, though. “Well, hello, Clay. It’s lovely to meet you.”

He grinned at her, displaying a tooth that looked like it might fall out at any second—literally—he thought it might be hanging in there by luck alone.

Clay caught the man’s hand in his and leaned against him. “This is my daddy.”

She slid Mr. Beautiful a look. “Hello, Clay’s daddy.”

He gave her a one-sided smile. "Hi." Then he crouched in front of his son. "So. Program lasts for fifty minutes. I'll be over in the grown-ups area if you need me."

"That area is boring." Clay wrinkled up his nose.

"Well, if I stay here, I'll just play." A real grin covered his face now and Ressa felt her heart melt. Since he was distracted, she shot a look at his hands—ring? Did he have one?

Crap. Some sort of gloves covered his hands from knuckle to well up over his wrists. No way to tell.

Clay leaned in and wrapped his arms around his father's neck. "Love you."

And her heart melted even more as he turned his face into his son's neck. "Love you, too, buddy. Have fun."

A man like that was most certainly *not* unattached.

But she still stole one last, quick glance as he walked away.

The back was every bit as fine as the front.

Chapter Two

Week Eleven

Just breathe, man.

That had become his mantra any time he was even in the general area of the library.

Trey sometimes felt like Pavlov's dog or something, but instead of salivating every time he heard a damn bell, he got hard every time he was close to the library. Didn't matter if he went inside, didn't matter if he knew she was here.

Because he was used to *seeing* her here.

Which was why he was now in the condition he was in. He'd gone for a run, but not anywhere around home. No. He'd come downtown. Close to the library and as he crossed onto Ocean View, he caught sight of the sun shining off the glass and, right on cue, his gaze locked in on the second floor, the children's library, where she worked.

And predictably, his blood started to pump harder and hotter. It didn't have jack to do with the fact that he was two miles into his run, or that it was barely ten o'clock and it was already pushing up on ninety degrees out.

He found his feet slowing down, an idea spinning through his mind.

He could go inside.

The air conditioning would feel good.

No, he didn't have Clayton with him, but he could wander around. Maybe wander upstairs, say hi . . . let one thing lead to another.

If the opportunity presented itself, would it hurt to ask her out for coffee sometime? Maybe dinner?

If he had an hour or so alone with her, maybe he could take a chance and see if he could do the one thing he'd been dying to do for almost three months now.

Take that lush, sexy mouth with his, tug that amazing body close—

Feel her moving against him . . .

And then the same thing will happen that happens whenever a woman touches you. Your brain is going to lock down and your dick is going to play dead, just like always.

Closing his eyes, he turned away.

Yeah.

Better to just keep things in fantasy land.

But hey, at least he *had* fantasy land back.

That was better than nothing . . . right?

* * *

“That *is* him, right?”

All but pressing her nose to the glass, Ressa jabbed her elbow into Farrah's . . . err . . . boob? That's what happened when your best friend kept jabbering on in your ear and stood about four inches shorter than you. “Hush,” she said irritably, watching as the muscled back, barely covered by a threadbare, heather gray tank top started to pound down the sidewalk, the runner moving at a sharp angle—*away* from the library.

“Ress!”

Heaving out a sigh, she looked over at her best friend.

“I couldn't see his face.”

“Nobody can *ever* see his face. The man seems to have *two* looks. Either his hair is in his face or he's hiding behind those glasses.” Farrah pursed her lips. “Maybe he's a criminal.”

“Get out.” Annoyed, Ressa nibbled on her lower lip and went back to looking out the window. Not that she could see him any longer. But man, what she wouldn't give for another few minutes to stare.

That man had a body on him, for real. Skin stretched tight over long, rangy muscles, and while she had a weird need to feed him a sandwich—or ten, that long and lean look fit him. And the tattoo . . . She hadn't been able to make out what it was, but it was something dark and dense and it appeared to cover his entire back.

Echoing her thoughts, Farrah murmured, “You saw the tattoo, right? I wonder what it is.”

“Hmmm.” Out of habit, Ressa traced the triquetra inked on her chest between her breasts. “Oh, yeah. I saw it.”

Farrah snorted. "So, let me guess, you *still* haven't gotten his name, have you?"

Ressa moved away from the window. "Don't you work? You're the big gun around here. You should be doing whatever they pay you the big bucks for, not bugging me."

"How is it possible that you *still* haven't gotten his name?" Farrah ignored her completely.

"I don't know!" She winced as several of the kids in the area looked up at her. Lowering her voice, she shrugged. "I don't know. It's like he . . . he . . . he's *tormenting* me. I've tried every way *other* than just outright saying, *Buddy, just what is your name?* Nothing subtle works."

"Why *don't* you ask him outright?"

Ressa moved to the cart. "You know, even if *you* don't have work to do, *I* do. I *like* my job." She sniffed. It was summer and that meant more kids in the library, more kids reading . . . the summer reading program . . . man, if she survived another summer of it, she considered herself lucky.

"Obviously. That's the only reason you're *here*," Farrah said, lifting a brow. "It's not like you *have* to be."

Ressa ignored that comment.

"You didn't answer me. Why don't you ask him? And hey . . . just bite the bullet and ask him out on a date?"

It's too obvious. She kept that answer behind her teeth. Then, with a sidelong look at her boss, she lifted a shoulder. "I just . . ." She grabbed a couple of books and went to shelve them, pausing as she studied one. "I can't explain it. He's crazy hot. He's crazy sexy. But something is holding me back."

"You're not a timid woman, Ressa. What gives?"

Unable to explain, she displayed the book to Farrah. "Did you read these as a kid?"

"*Boxcar Children.*" Farrah smiled. "Oh, yeah. That was more my speed than the crazy psycho bunny you love so much."

"I'll have you know that the psycho bunny is *very* popular with a lot of readers."

"Yeah." Farrah picked up a few books. "The weird ones. And you're in dodge-mode, girl."

"No. I'm in *I don't know what's up* mode. There's a difference. But since I haven't been able to find it in me to make a move, then I'm not going to push it." She slid the first two books in the series up on the shelf. They were probably only going to go out another few times before they had to be replaced. They were getting pretty worn. "If it ever feels right, I'll know."

"If you say so." Farrah heaved out a sigh. "I've been wondering . . . Mr. Hot and Sexy—"

"Mr. Hot and Sexy?" Ressa cut in, amused.

"He's gotta have a name," Farrah said, a smile curving her lips. She wore bronze lipstick today—a bronze that almost perfectly matched her silk shirt, and the color glowed warmly against toffee brown skin. "Tell me, does he look at all familiar to you?"

Ressa stopped and stared at Farrah. "You, too?"

Arching a black brow, Farrah pursed her lips. Then she nodded. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

“Yeah. That’s a yes.” She huffed out a breath and grabbed another book, slid it on the shelf below the *Boxcar* books. “I just can’t figure out why. You?”

“Nope. I was kind of hoping you’d tell me he reminded you of some hot football player or something.”

“As if.” Ressa snorted out a laugh. “Like I know the Cowboys from the Orioles.”

“You moron.” Farrah bumped her with her hip. “The Orioles play baseball.”

“See? That’s just what I mean!”

“Hopeless. You’re hopeless.” Farrah sighed. Then she pushed away from the cart. “So . . . anyway. The main reason I came here?”

Ressa glanced over at her and then turned, recognizing that glint in her friend’s eyes. “Yeah?”

“I just got this, right when I was getting ready to head to lunch.” Farrah brandished her phone.

The name practically leaped from the screen. It was a book cover—she knew that because she recognized the author’s name.

The cover was pale green. The woman on it was mostly naked, save for the minuscule panties that covered the important bits, and her breasts were covered by her arm.

She also wore a tie. One incongruously patterned with bright pink smile faces that matched the bright pink font of the author’s name.

Exposing the Geek Billionaire.

Muffling a squeal, she tapped on it.

Nothing.

“What?”

Farrah chortled as she nabbed the phone back.

“It’s just the cover . . . there was a big reveal on one of the romance blogs, Ress. It’s due out in early fall. But I thought you’d wanna know. So you have something to check out on your lunch break. Maybe it will distract you from Mr. Tall, Dark, and Tattooed.”

Ressa barely acknowledged the change in names, just giving Farrah a cursory scowl. *Mr. Hot, Sexy, and Tattooed* might work.

“You gotta call him something.”

Ressa already *did* call him something. But she wasn’t sharing her mental nickname for him with her boss.

Week Twenty-six

“You look tired.”

Trey jerked up his head, realizing he’d been *this* close to falling sleep. With his laptop open in his lap. In the middle of the children’s area.

Ressa Bliss stood in front of him, Clayton holding her hand and swinging it back and forth.

“Did you bring it in, Dad? Did you bring it in?” He let go of her hand to launch himself toward Trey.

Habit had him catching the boy easily even as he looked up at Ressa through dark lenses. “Yeah,” he said, wishing he had about a gallon of coffee to guzzle. “Have had a few late nights . . . trying to catch up on work before we fly out to California later this week.”

“We’re gonna see Grandma for Mother’s Day!” Clayton chirped. Then he grabbed Trey’s messenger bag and hauled it up, dumping it onto the low table. “Where is it, Dad? Where is it?”

It was a gift.

Mother’s Day was on Sunday. It had been one rough week.

She said we were making presents for our moms . . . Daddy, I don’t have a mommy anymore and I was making it for Grandma and she said I wasn’t listening, but I didn’t want to tell her what happened and she kept trying to make me start all over . . .

Well, she sure as *hell* had listened to Trey. Sometimes he wondered what was wrong with people. It was very clearly marked in Clayton’s records that his mother had passed away—if they weren’t going to *look* at those records, why did they ask?

They’d finished up their crafts with Clayton working on his project that he’d give to Denise, his grandmother. He’d been so pleased with it, they’d hit one of the local craft stores and bought kits to make little clay paperweights for all of his grandparents, but he’d wanted to make something special for Ressa, too.

When Trey had pushed him on why, Clayton had just shrugged.

Everybody has a mommy who smells good and is pretty and tells them stories . . .

I tell you stories, man. Are you saying I stink?

Clayton had laughed. But then that sad look came back into his eyes. *Miss Ressa read a book about a little girl who’d lost her mama. There was a lady who lived next door who the girl was friends with. Miss Ressa told us that sometimes people don’t have mamas . . . or daddies . . . but they still have people who love them. Maybe . . . You think maybe she loves me?*

The kid could cut his heart out sometimes.

So there was another clay paperweight.

Trey rubbed the back of his neck as Clayton turned, clutching it in small hands as he looked up at Ressa. He opened his mouth, nervous, then shut it. Then he shoved it out at her. “Here!” he blurted. “I made it for you. I . . . I wanted you to have it.”

Ressa looked down, puzzled.

And then, as her face softened, Trey felt something wrench inside his heart.

“Oh . . .”

She sank to her knees. A smile curved up her lips and he was struck, straight to the heart, by how beautiful she was. Something came over him and it wasn’t that gut-twisting lust. It wasn’t that blood-boiling need that would never end in anything but frustration and humiliation.

It was something . . . more.

Something maybe even better.

A weight he hadn’t realized he still carried lifted inside him and he found he was smiling himself as she reached out, but instead of taking it from Clayton, she cupped her hands under his, steadying the oddly shaped heart the child had molded himself. “Wow,” she said, her voice husky. “You made this, didn’t you, handsome?”

Clayton nodded, chin tucked.

“My goodness.” She bit her lip and then leaned in, angling her head until she caught Clayton’s gaze. “Can I maybe hold it?”

“It’s yours.” Clayton dumped it into her hands and she caught it, handling it with the same care she might have shown had he just presented her with a Waterford crystal vase.

Judging by the light in her eyes, he might as well have done just that. “Clayton, that was really sweet of you,” she said, stroking her thumb over the overly bright, glass “jewels” they’d found to push into the clay. “I don’t think I’ve ever had a paperweight quite so beautiful in my life. But . . .” She looked up at him. “It’s not my birthday or anything. Why’d you give me something so nice?”

“Cuz . . .” Clayton shrugged his skinny shoulders. “You are nice. And I can’t give nothing to my mama.”

He didn’t say anything else, just turned and flung himself toward Trey, his face jammed against his thigh. “I wanna go. Daddy, can we go now?”

“Clayton—”

Trey looked at her and shook his head. “It’s okay. He’s okay.” Or he would be. Scooping Clayton up, he went to scoop his laptop into his bag.

“Here.” Ressa moved in. “Let me help.”

He got a headful of her scent, felt her curls brush his cheek. All the while Clayton clung to his neck like a monkey. “Thanks,” he said, his voice brusque. Things were coming to attention now—of course, and here he was juggling his son, her concerned gaze, his bag.

“I’m sorry if I—”

“You didn’t.” Trey shot her a look, almost explained then, but the last thing Clayton needed was to hear the blunt hard facts laid out just then. He lived with them every day of his life. “He’s just had a rough week,

haven't you, buddy?"

He gave her a smile—the practiced one he'd used when reporters had hunted him down over the years, whether it was because of his writing, his wife's death, or his connection to two famous actors. It was a blank smile, one that could say everything and nothing, one that could hide a million secrets or be as open as one could hope. "He needs a nap and maybe some pizza. In a few days, we hop on a plane and he'll be seeing all his cousins and his uncles. He's been looking forward to that. Don't worry, he's fine, aren't you, buddy?"

Voice muffled against his neck, Clayton said, "I'm gonna see 'Bastian this time, Daddy?"

"You bet." He rubbed his cheek against Clayton's curls. "Uncle Sebastian wouldn't dare miss Mother's Day."

"Is Aunt Abby making cake?"

Chuckling, he said, "I certainly hope so." Giving Clayton a light squeeze, Trey murmured, "Why don't you tell Miss Ressa bye? I think she's upset and thinks she hurt your feelings?"

Clayton rolled his head on his shoulders. "Bye, Miss Ressa."

* * *

The memory of Clayton's smile lingered, hours after he'd left.

It lingered even after they closed up and she was sitting at the computer, debating.

Debating hard, because she was about to do something she had no right to do.

Or she was *tempted*. She wasn't really about to do it, but she was closer to it than she was comfortable. Shit. How often did *she* get pissed when people tried to—or did—meddle in her background? She had plenty of things that she'd rather not have dragged out right in the open.

Actually, *pissed* didn't even touch on how *she* felt when people started meddling. There were some secrets she had that she'd just as soon take to her grave.

Besides, what was she going to do—general search for kids with the name *Clayton . . . five years old . . .* hey, she knew he had a birthday in September. That would *really* narrow the focus.

"What's up?"

Guiltily, she jerked her hands away.

One of her coworkers, Alex, stood on the other side of the desk, eying her.

"Nothing." Guiltily, she powered down the computer. "Is everybody pretty much done?"

"A few more wrapping up downstairs."

With a nod, Ressa picked up the little paperweight, carefully cradling it in her hand.

"Did somebody bring you a gift?"

"Yep." She displayed it, feeling as pleased as if she'd received chocolate and flowers.

“Who is it from?” Alex eyed it, his head cocked.

With a smile, she said, “Clayton . . . the little doll who shows up at reading hour.”

“Ahhh . . . your shadow.” He grinned knowingly. “That kid has a major crush on you, Ressa.”

She grimaced. “Geez. That’s great to hear.”

“You’re going to break his heart when you transfer out this summer.” He tsked and shook his head. “You might want to break the news sooner, rather than later.”

“Oh, shit.”

“Not much you can do about it.” Alex gave her a sympathetic look. “You need the transfer so you can be closer to school—these are the chores of being a parent . . . or a guardian as it were. Your cousin needs you.”

Ressa nodded, her thoughts drifting to the child she’d been taking care of for so many years. “I know. Neeci is why I’m doing it.”

Still, a heavy ache settled in her chest as she looked down at the molded heart she held. Funny . . . she was just now realizing how fragile it was.

Chapter Four

Week Thirty

Sheets twisted around him.

Dream and reality blurred together in that surreal way they did in that short time just before waking.

The twisted ropes of cotton weren’t really cotton. They were long limbs, warm and golden brown. That mouth, always slicked with colors that made him think of sinful wines or lush fruits, moved against his. It was a seductive red today and as he fisted his hand in her hair, she sank her teeth into his lower lip.

“Trey . . .”

That was when he knew he was dreaming.

She’d never called him by name.

With a groan, he rolled them, putting her body under his, determined to enjoy it as much as he could, for as long as he could. She laughed against his lips, a husky sound that tripped down his spine. Who knew that a woman’s laugh could be so erotic?

She might as well have reached between his legs and cupped his balls.

And then she *was* reaching down, one hand closing around his cock.

“Don’t,” he muttered, tearing his mouth away. “I . . . fuck, I can’t.”

“You can’t what?” Ressa smiled up at him, dragged her hand up, then down.

“I can’t . . . this. I just . . .” He shoved away from her, but she followed. Her hand milked him and he groaned, because the pleasure was there, leaving him hovering on an edge between pleasure and pain.

“I think you can.” She sat up and he found himself staring up at her. Her breasts—or least the image his dreaming mind had conjured up—were full, her nipples a deep, deep brown. While she continued to pump her hand up and down his cock, she used her other hand to reach out, grab his wrist and bring it to her breast. “Touch me . . . you know you want to.”

Want? “You think that covers it?”

“You never have done it.” She lifted a brow. “Why is that?”

Any answer he might have given was lost, because she gave a slow, thorough twist of her wrist as she dragged it back up. Then she caught the fluid leaking out of his cock, smoothed it around the swollen crown.

He hissed out a breath.

She did the same and he didn’t realize it was because he’d plucked at her nipple. “I’m sorry . . . fuck, I hurt you—”

“No.” She shoved her breast into his hand. “Do it again.”

Instead, he shoved upright and caught the tip in his mouth.

That warm, soft laugh echoed around him before fading into a moan. He settled between her hips and then the dream . . . shifted. Rolled.

IcantIcantIcant!

Her hands cupped his face and she rolled up against him. “Make love to me!”

He was buried inside her.

He went to pull out. Felt the smooth, sweet glide of her pussy against him and he shuddered.

“Sweet fucking hell,” he breathed out. Then he drove deep inside her.

She cried out his name.

He might have sobbed out hers.

And moments later, he came awake just as he climaxed, one hand wrapped around his cock while the other twisted in the sheets.

Shuddering, Trey lay there, half-stunned.

“Son of a bitch.”

He’d just orgasmed for the first time in more than six years.

“Son of a bitch.”

* * *

“Are you just going to bite the bullet and ask her out?”

He glared at the phone on the bathroom counter. Razor in hand, he leaned forward. “Travis? I’ll listen to your advice on my love life when you listen to mine.”

“I don’t have a love life.”

“Exactly my point.” He finished one pass down his jaw, rinsed the razor off, started another. “Look, it’s just . . .”

He stopped, because there was only so much he was willing to tell. Even his twin. He sure as *hell* wasn’t about to share certain humiliating details.

Unaware of the thoughts circling through Trey’s mind, Travis pushed on. “Just *nothing*. It’s been almost six years since Aliesha died. I *know* you’re moving past that—or *have* moved past it. So it’s not her.”

“Don’t.” Even he heard the biting warning in his voice.

Travis’s sigh came over the line. “I just worry about you, man.”

“Same goes. And hey, I’m not the one who’s working myself into an early grave, right?” He could still remember how Travis had looked in San Francisco when they all met up for their annual get-together. Mom insisted it wasn’t necessary, but she still had that light of complete delight in her eyes when they all descended en masse, ringing the doorbell to the house their parents had lived in for years.

Travis had looked like somebody had dragged him, sopping wet and close to drowning, out of the Pacific.

“I’m not working myself into a grave,” Travis said, his voice grim. “I refuse to die doing this shit work.”

There was an edge to his twin’s voice, one Trey hadn’t heard before. “Everything okay with *you*?”

For a moment, there was just a taut, heavy silence. Then Travis sighed. “Yeah. I’m just . . . tired. I need a vacation. I’ll take care of that. Soon. But let’s talk about this librarian. Who is she? What does she look like? Fess up.”

“We’re not in high school anymore, Trav.”

“Too bad, because then I’d be able to figure this out on my own. Come on, I’ll just work it out of Clay.” There was a sly note in Travis’s voice.

“Bastard.” Trey finished up shaving and rinsed the foam from his face, using a towel to dry off. His hair hung in his face, too long, desperately in need of a trim. “How about I give you something else to hassle me over?”

“It won’t be near as interesting,” Travis said.

“Sure it will.” He twisted the towel around his hands as he readied himself to say it. “I . . . uh . . . I committed to speaking at a writer thing next month. One of the writers at my agency had to cancel—some family emergency, and Reuben decided to take a chance at asking me. I said yes.”

For a moment, there was just silence.

Then Travis said, "Repeat that."

"You heard me," Trey said wearily. "It's in Jersey. Not far, but . . ." Now was the hard part. "I tried to see if Al and Mona could watch him, but that's their anniversary and they are taking a cruise. So I called Mom and Dad. They . . ."

Shit. Hand shaking, he dragged it down his face, realized there was some stubble he'd missed. Maybe he should—

Quit stalling. Just spit it out. "They want to take him to Disney. Just the two of them."

"And you're letting them."

He gripped the counter. "Yeah. I'm letting them."

"Have you puked yet?"

That startled a laugh out of him. "Nah. But if I did, I wouldn't tell you."

"If you did, I wouldn't tell the others."

Now he smiled. "Yeah. I know." He checked the time. "Look . . . I gotta go. It's almost time to go to the library. I'm surprised Clay hasn't come up here and banged on the door already."

"Okay. Man, one second—listen. Make yourself a list or something. You do better with lists. And on that damn list, put down for you to just ask her out on a date."

"Shit." Trey rolled his eyes. "I can't be around her without my tongue sticking to the roof of my mouth, or worse . . . drooling." He grimaced. If he asked her out, then he'd have to worry about other things—what if he kissed her? What if *she* kissed him? What would happen when he started thinking about the void of his memory from that night? Drooling would be the *least* of his concerns. "Trust me, a date is no good."

"Fine. Put *no drooling* on the list. But stop sitting on your ass."

* * *

One hand closed into a fist as Trey stood there.

He hadn't just done that. He really hadn't made a stupid list.

He was going to kick Travis's ass over this . . . because, dumb-ass that he was, he had made a list. More than likely, nothing would come of it.

So, yeah. He'd made a list. Big deal.

Ressa Bliss was gorgeous.

She was outgoing.

She probably had a boyfriend. For all he knew, she might even be married. Not that rings really meant anything, but . . . blowing out a breath, he looked down at the one he had yet to take off.

Slowly, he reached up and traced the tip of his right index finger across the engraved surface of his wedding

ring. It wasn't so much that he couldn't let go that kept the ring on his finger. He had accepted and acknowledged all of this a long time ago.

He grieved for Aliesha long and hard—probably longer and harder than he maybe should have, losing himself in a dark, ugly pit of despair. It had been easier to do that than focus on some of the other things that had gone wrong in his life. It hadn't been until the past year that he realized just how messed up he'd let himself get.

Oh, he'd hidden it.

He'd hidden it well from everybody except his twin . . . and probably Mom. Travis and Denise Barnes saw past the walls nobody else had even realized were there.

But only Travis had any idea of just how messed up Trey probably was. There were missing hours that Trey still couldn't get back—followed by a morning where he had been forced to remember, all over again, that he'd lost his wife.

That void, those missing hours, they haunted him and all he wanted was to *forget*—the whole damn night, not just pieces of it.

Sometimes, he thought he almost remembered. A woman's laugh, the burn of whiskey.

Then a vicious pain.

He'd left the hospital with bruised ribs, bruised knuckles, and various other aches and pains. At some point, he'd gotten into a fight. The bartender said there had been a man in the parking lot, and he thought the woman Trey had been drinking with had left with him.

But beyond that?

He only had emptiness, questions—and a good, thirty-minute gap of nothingness that the bartender couldn't account for between the time he'd noticed the commotion on his security cameras and the time Trey had stumbled out of the bar.

The few dates he'd tried to go on since then, he could almost hear the echo of a woman's laugh in the back of his mind and it was like the fumes of whiskey clouded his head. Any interest he *might* have felt died under a rush of near memories.

So he'd just . . . stopped. Stopped trying to live again, lost himself deeper inside himself.

Until he'd seen Ressa. Staring at his ring, he closed his hand into a fist and slowly relaxed it. Then, without giving himself a chance to think about it, he tugged the ring off.

It wasn't a connection with his wife, really, that he was removing.

In more ways than one, it was his shield.

How he'd kept himself cut away from everybody and anybody save for his family and a few very select friends. If he took that off, then he had to admit to himself that maybe he was ready to move on.

He wanted his life back—or some semblance of it.

He wanted to feel a woman's skin against his own without memories of something he didn't even understand haunting him. Wanted to know he could touch a woman and actually feel that need—feel something other than the grief of Aliesha's death choking him.

How could one night change something so basic? How did something he didn't even *remember* change everything?

"Dad!" Clayton's voice rang through the house.

Wincing, Trey did exactly what he'd done for almost six years—compartmentalized everything. He'd think about all of this later. "Be down in a minute, buddy!" he shouted back, slowly putting the ring down on the counter. Whether or not he'd put it back on, he didn't know.

But he had taken it off. Even if it was just for a little while, that counted, right?

Picking up the little moleskin notebook he carried everywhere, he flipped to the middle and eyed the list he'd just made.

To-Do List

1. Clothes shopping
2. Get groceries—you're out of deodorant, moron
3. Ask her out
4. Try not to drool

The list was out of order.

And it was just as stupid as he'd thought it would be.

Abruptly, he went to tear it out of the notebook, but then he stopped.

If he didn't do this now, then when would he?

Abruptly, he grabbed his pen and scrawled something else down at the bottom.

5. Start living again

"Dad?" There was a pause, and then a more persistent yell with an edge of panic. "*Dad! I can't find my books!*"

Saved by the boy, he mused, stroking a finger down the list, lingering on the final item. *If nothing else, that one right there was something he had to do.*

He'd take it as a sign. So he'd think about it. Think about it and just see. See what happened.

Really, what could any of this hurt . . . nothing really, right? Not more than it hurt to dream about her at night, fantasize about that mouth. Or other attractive parts of her anatomy.

It was a seductive, taunting road, one paved with fantasies and frustration, but it was better than the desolate one he'd walked for far too long.

“In the basket on the bookshelf by the door,” he called out as he shoved the notebook into his pocket.
“Exactly where I told you to put them last night.”

Single fatherhood was nothing if not a lesson in patience . . . and repetition.

* * *

Usually, seeing that head of buttery gold curls brought an instant smile to her face.

Today, though . . .

Ressa curled her hands into a fist, her nails biting into her palm as she saw CD walking with his little boy across the parking lot, long rangy strides shortened to accommodate his son’s shorter legs. CD—her personal nickname for the man who haunted her dreams. *CD*—as in Clay’s dad.

In time, Clayton would be just as tall as his father, she suspected. He seemed small for his age, but she could see the long limbs. It would just take time.

“Saying good-bye sucks, huh?”

Glancing back over her shoulder at Farrah, she lifted a brow. “Ya think?”

“Well, since ya never got around to getting Mr. Yummy Pants’ name, I figured it wouldn’t be *too* bad . . .”

“Saying good-bye to Clayton is going to break my heart,” she said, painfully aware of the sulk in her voice, and unable to do anything about it. She didn’t *want* to do anything about it. “I had to tell too many kids good-bye this week. I’ve only been here two years. How can it hurt like this?”

“Hey . . .” Farrah moved in and wrapped an arm around Ressa’s waist. “You know, you’re *not* moving to Tokyo. You can come visit, drop in on your days off. Visit the kids then.”

“I know, I know.” Ressa shrugged away, out of sorts and still . . . aching inside. “This just sucks.”

“You said he wasn’t here last week.”

She looked up and caught sight of the two males just as they cleared the top step and the ache in her chest expanded. “No.”

A small, cowardly part of her kind of wished they wouldn’t have come here today either. If they hadn’t then she would have been spared this.

Didn’t that just make *her* a coward?

Her heart twisted as the boy came rushing up to her a few minutes later. He was all smiles as he flung himself at her for a hug and she caught him, held him close.

“Aren’t you looking handsome today, Mr. Clayton,” she said, looking past him to see his father linger, just for a minute. Their gazes connected—he wore his trademark dark shades, but she could still feel that jolt.

His mouth parted and maybe it was ego—or just because she wanted so badly to believe it—to believe that he felt it, too.

She didn't look away.

Not that very second.

She should have. She knew that.

But she only had today left, right?

“Hey, um—”

“I was wondering if—”

They both started to speak at once, and then, they stopped, a nervous laugh breaking out between them. He gestured for her to speak and she linked her hands together, looking around. “I just . . . well, I want a few minutes with you . . . with Clayton after we’re done. If that’s okay?”

* * *

An hour later, Trey had less than five hundred words on the screen and his mind kept spinning back to the way she’d met his gaze earlier.

I want a few minutes with you.

He’d been about ready to just walk away, forget asking her out.

Terror and nerves had turned his gut to knots.

Unlike his brothers, he seemed to have missed out on that inborn charm—most of the family, on both his mother’s side and his father’s side, from his cousins, to his uncles and aunts, to his brothers—they all practically *breathed* charm and confidence.

Not Trey.

But then she’d said she wanted to talk to him and he’d felt something relax inside.

That hadn’t lasted long, because immediately, his memory, always such a visual thing with him, had started to feed him back an instant replay of how she’d looked at him, her lips parted, the irises of her eyes spiking as she met his gaze.

No wonder he hadn’t gotten shit done the past hour.

He heard the rise in voices that signified the end of the reading program and he saved his work, a dull pain throbbing in his wrist. After putting away the laptop, he grabbed a bottle of ibuprofen and tossed a few back dry.

Clayton was sitting at his desk studiously coloring away while the rest of the kids gathered around Ressa.

Both of them heard the words at the same time—

Good-bye . . .

We’ll miss you—

Clayton's head jerked up.

Trey's hand clenched into a fist and he shifted the bag from one shoulder to drag across his chest as dread crept through. Dread and . . . disappointment.

I want a few minutes with you . . .

Son of a bitch. With him . . . so she could tell Clayton bye.

"Why do you have to leave, Miss Ressa?" one of the older kids asked, his voice plaintive and loud, carrying through the entire library.

The crayon in Clayton's hand snapped and his gaze darted all around the room before landing on Trey with wild desperation.

Before Trey could reach the table, Clayton was up on his feet, practically running toward him.

"Let's go, Dad."

Clayton's small hand caught his, started to tug.

Yeah. He could get on board with that. But . . . "Wait a minute, Clayton."

"No!" He burrowed in against Trey, his voice already wobbling. "I want to go now. And I don't like this stupid lib'ary no more. I never want to come back. Can we get dinosaur egg oatmeal at the store? I want some for a snack. Let's go."

Users Review

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