

*"Oh Lessons learned, man they sure run deep  
They don't go away and they don't come cheap  
Oh theres no way around it  
cause this world turns  
On lessons learned"  
~ "Lessons Learned" Tracy Lawrence*

"What the hell is going on here?" I asked as I looked on and saw my dad and baby sister with someone who looked freakishly like me.  
"Two Harleys? How?" Mom asked.  
"Rissa." Felicity said reaching for the other me. The imposter picked up Felicity and held her.  
"Arisa! I should have known! Put my sister down!" I screamed.  
"Arisa? Is that really you?" Dad asked.  
"Yes! OK? I'm Arissa!" Arissa said converting back into her normal self.  
"Put down my sister." I commanded again.  
"Newsflash Princess Saturn, she's my sister too. We were just bonding, weren't we Liss?" Arissa said tickling Felicity.  
"What in the hell were you doing pretending to be me?" I asked.  
"Such language around our baby sister...bad influence..." Arissa said.  
"I'm serious Arissa, what do you think you're doing?" I asked.  
"What does it look like? I was pretending to be you to try to take out the Wildcats from the inside, didn't plan on all the family bonding." Arissa said.  
"We did bond Arissa...you know you can be part of this family...just stop your vendetta against Michelle." Dad said.  
"Sorry, can't do that. See you later Felicity." Arissa said handing Felicity to Dad before taking off.  
"UGH! I hate her!" I cried.

Stacy

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"And so that's what really happened." I finished. I was filling Tommy and Jason in on the whole black mail story.  
"Do you have proof?" Tommy asked.  
I nodded, "Yeah...I got my conversation with her on tape."  
"You're awesome Stacy." Jason said.  
I nodded, "I know." I was very proud of myself. I hadn't edited the tape, just cut out the last part where Nikki talked about Conner being with my dad...ick!  
"Let's go partner, we have an arrest to make." Jason said.  
"Can I come watch?" I asked.  
Tommy laughed, "Sure, but you should take your own car."  
"OK thanks." I said.

I got in my car and followed Tommy and Jason. We got to my dad's house and went inside.  
"Nikki!" I called.  
"Oh Stacy, what can...oh..." Nikki said walking in the room and seeing Jason and Tommy.  
"Nicolette Cruthers alias Nikki Valentina you are under arrest for extortion and vehicular hit and run. You have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law." Jason said.  
"You brat!" Nikki screamed at me.  
"Buh-bye Nikki, see you in the next life, cause that's when you'll be getting out of prison." I said as Jason and Tommy took her away. I smiled, I was very pleased with myself.

Jesse

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I was finally getting out of the hospital. Not that it much mattered, I mean where else did I have to go? I was ready to go when Hunter came in to take me back to the Academy.

“Hey Jesse, you ready to go?” Hunter asked.

I nodded, “I guess so.”

“OK then, let’s go.” Hunter said.

When we got back into the Academy Hunter walked me to the lodge. The other Wildcats were all sitting around.

“Jesse!” Tiffany cried running to me and hugging me.

“Hi Tiff.” I said hugging her.

“You sure gave us a scare.” Derek said.

“No lie, what were you thinking doing something stupid like that?” April asked gently punching me in the arm.

“Sorry...didn’t think I’d be missed.” I said.

“Of course you’d be missed! You’re one of us!” Destiny said.

“Thanks.” I said softly.

“Ok, I’m glad you guys are finally reunited, but it’s time to get to work on your chores.” Hunter said.

“Hunter...” Tiffany whined.

“Now.” Hunter said.

“Yes sir.” We all said as we went to work. Chris and I ended up on dish duty.

“So why did you do it?” Chris asked.

“Who would miss me? My parents are dead. My aunt wishes I were dead. Who do I have?” I said.

“You have us...Michelle and Hunter...”

“I’m just another student to Michelle and Hunter.”

“That isn’t true...you know for all the crap we give them they actually do care about us. They could help you if you let them.” Chris said.

“I thought you were opposed to the whole Starlight experience” I said.

“That was before I found a great girlfriend who gave me a reason to want to change.”

“Girlfriend?”

“Oh yeah...Tiff and I are together.”

“Are you serious? Wow. I thought you saw her as a spoiled princess.” I said.

“I did...I was wrong.”

“Wow...looks like I missed a lot.” I said.

Beth

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“OK Michelle, I finished the list of chores you gave me.” I said.

Michelle nodded, “OK, good work Beth. Would you like to go with me and Felicity to the store? We need some supplies for the kitchen.”

I shrugged, “I guess so.”

“OK let’s go.” Michelle said picking up Felicity. We were headed out of the office when Hunter came in. “Oh hey sweetie, we’re going to the store for kitchen supplies. Do you need anything while we’re out?” Michelle asked.

“Why don’t you pick up dinner for us while you’re gone so we don’t have to cook? I’d like to spend some time in with the Wildcats tonight.” Hunter said.

“Ok what do you want?” Michelle asked.

“Doesn’t matter. Hamburgers are fine.” Hunter said.

“OK. Should I get food for Har too?” Michelle asked.

“I don’t know. She took off after Arissa left and I haven’t seen her since.” Hunter said.

“Neither have I. Should we be worried?”

“No, she probably went to the track. Maybe you should get her something just in case she comes home hungry.”

“OK. Beth, would you like to eat dinner with us?” Michelle asked.

“I guess so. Thanks.” I said.

“OK. We’ll be back soon.” Michelle said.

“Do you want me to watch Liss?” Hunter asked.

“No. I’ll take her. She needs to pick out a cereal anyway.” Michelle said.

“Ok. See you later.” Hunter said kissing his wife and daughter. We walked out of the office and Michelle put Felicity in her car seat then we got in the Jeep and headed for the store.

“So you were on the cheer squad?” Michelle asked.

“Yeah.” I replied.

“I was a cheerleader when I was in high school.”

“You were?”

“Yeah, back then I thought the only thing that matter was my fame. I had just finished shooting a popular TV show and...”

“Yeah Palisades High right? That show changed the way teen shows were made.”

“Yeah. Anyway, while I was filming the show I got it in my head that celebrity and status and all that superficial stuff was the only stuff that mattered.”

“You were wrong?” I asked.

“I was so wrong.”

“What made you come to the conclusion?”

“Well when I became a Ranger I started to grow out of that, by the time I started dating Rocky I knew what it was like to truly care about someone, but when I left Rangering and married Jon Giovanni I started to fall into that mind set again...when I met Hunter and got to know him and everything he went through...it just made everything...all the material stuff, seem so small. Then, when I lost Hunter but my career was taking off again I realized that being at the top of the charts didn’t mean a thing without Hunter to share it with, that’s when I truly realized material stuff didn’t matter and never had in the first place...it was a long process before I learned what true happiness was.” Michelle explained.

“Oh.” I said.

“I really think you should sit down and talk to Chris or Derek...listen to what they have to say. You might be surprised how it affects you.” Michelle said as we pulled into the store parking lot. She parked the Jeep then got Felicity out of the car seat and put her in a shopping cart and we went inside to buy the stuff she needed. “If you’d like to get something to snack on while you’re working you can pick something and we’ll keep it in the office.”

“Oh, ok. Thank you.” I said.

“No problem.” Michelle said as Felicity reached for a candy bar sitting on a shelf, “No sweetheart. Come on let’s get you your cereal.”

We went into the cereal aisle and Michelle held up two cereals for Felicity. “Ruit Hoops.” Felicity said.

“Ok, Fruit Loops it is.” Michelle said putting the box in the cart.

“You let her pick her own cereal? Isn’t she only 3?” I asked.

“Yeah, but she is still human. I don’t let her get any one she wants. I pick two I know she’ll eat then I let her pick one. This way she feels like she’s getting a say in what she eats and I know the cereal won’t go to waste.” Michelle said.

“She doesn’t talk very much.” I said.

“She’s only 3...give her a couple of months and we won’t be able to shut her up.” Michelle laughed.

I nodded.

We finished at the store then went to pick up dinner.

“OK, can you go in and get the Wildcats, they’ll need to help unload the groceries and then put them up.” Michelle said.

“OK.” I said going inside. I found that Tiffany girl, “Hey, um, Michelle said the Wildcats need to help with groceries.”

“Oh ok. Hey Wildcats! Unloading time, come on!” Tiffany called. They rallied around and got to work unloading the Jeep then they put everything away.

“OK, good work guys. Go tell the Cardinals to cook dinner. Hunter and I will be over here after we eat.” Michelle said.

“OK, we’ll be here.” Derek said.

Harley

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I raced around the track for the 20<sup>th</sup> time. I still didn’t feel better. I was so totally pissed at Arissa for pretending to be me. I looked at my gauges. I was low on gas. I loaded my bike up and went home. I went inside my parents’ house and

found Dad in the kitchen finishing up some dish washing.

“Hey.” I said.

“Hey, are you ok?” he asked.

“No, I’m not as it happens. I’m pissed beyond words.” I said.

“I see I was right, you were riding.”

“Yeah.”

“Why don’t you go shower? Your mother will be home with dinner soon.”

“Ok fine.” I said. I went upstairs and took a quick shower before going back downstairs. I was just getting downstairs when I saw Mom walk in with Felicity and Beth. They had food with them.

“Har, are you ok? I was worried about you.” Mom said setting the food on the table.

“I’m fine. Just angry.” I said picking up Felicity. I put her in her high chair and sat at the table. “What did she get?”

“The chicken nuggets.” Mom said.

“OK.” I got Felicity’s food out and set it on her tray. “Here you go Liss.” She picked up a nugget and started gnawing on it.

“I got you a bacon cheeseburger, is that ok?” Mom asked me.

“Yeah, that’s fine.” I said taking the food from her, “So why did we pick up food?”

“With Jesse just getting back I want to have a special group session tonight. Jesse needs the support and I want to fill him in on everything that’s been going on while he was in the hospital.” Dad said.

“Oh ok. I’ll be there.” I said.

“Beth, would you like to join in?” Mom asked.

“Um...I don’t know...” Beth said.

“Come on, it’ll be good for you...consider it part of your community service.” Mom said.

“Well, ok.” Beth agreed.

Stacy

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“Dad, I talked to your lawyer...if you plead guilty to tax evasion the DA is willing to give you 6 months in prison...it’s a great deal. I advise you to take it.” I said. I had gone to fill my dad in about Nikki’s arrest and everything else.

“Why?” Dad asked.

“Cause there’s no way you’re getting off without any prison time. 6 months is the best you’re gonna do. I wasn’t even expecting that, I was expecting at least a year...take the deal.” I said.

“OK...fine. I’ll take the deal.” Dad said.

“Smart move.”

“So Nikki is going to prison?”

“Yes...for a very long time. The DA refuses to make a deal with her. She’s also filing for divorce.” I said.

“Just as well. I would have divorced her years ago if it wasn’t for the extortion.”

I nodded. “OK. Well if you’ll excuse me I have meetings to get to.”

“What is going on with the company?”

“I fired a lot of people. Now I’m going to meet with a rep from NY Designs. They are a very highly respected fashion agency.”

“Since when does Fernandez Industries work with fashion?”

“Since I took over. There is a great deal and if we can get in on it then it might make us enough money to get the company back on it’s feet. Trust me. I know what I’m doing. Bye Dad, see you soon.” I said leaving.

I got to the office.

“Ms. Fernandez, Ms. Truman is waiting for you in the office.” My secretary said.

“OK, thanks.” I said going into my office, “Hi, I’m Stacy Fernandez.”

“Hi Stacy, I’m Krista Truman, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Likewise. So what sort of deal can you offer us?” I asked as I sat at my desk.

Beth

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I went and sat with the Wildcats. Harley, Michelle, and Hunter sat with us as well while Felicity sat off to the side playing with her dolls.

“Ok, first off I’d like to welcome back Harley as group leader, and of course we welcome back Jesse. It’s great to see the Wildcats as a full unit again.” Hunter said.

“Yes, totally. Welcome back Jesse.” Tiffany said.

“Thank you.” Jesse said.

“Now, we have a lot to discuss, which is why I called this group session. Of course the end of the school year is coming which means added stress of finals, we need to make sure you are all prepared for this stress so that we don’t have another incident like what happened to Jesse.” Hunter said.

“Plus April is facing some hard times ahead and we need to be there for her.” Michelle said.

“On top of that Derek has a lot on his plate and needs our support. He is graduating at the end of the year and the trial against his mother will be starting in a few days.” Hunter said.

“We will also discuss what happened to Jesse and why he did what he did. Jesse, you’ve gotten out of talking in group many times, this time we need you to open up.” Michelle said.

“And of course anyone who has anything to add is more than welcomed to speak.” Hunter said.

“So let’s begin...first of all who feels prepared for finals?” Michelle asked.

No one raised their hand.

“Ok, how can you, as a team, prepare for your tests?” Hunter asked.

“Well, we can partner up to study or even work in study groups.” Tiffany suggested.

“Very good idea Tiffany, any one else?” Harley said.

“We could make sure we take detailed notes in class then compare notes during study time.” Destiny said.

“Another great idea. The important thing to remember is these are just tests. They are important but in the grand scheme of things they aren’t everything.” Hunter said.

“But before finals we have another challenge to face as a group, Derek’s mother is going to trial and Derek will need all of our support no matter the outcome.” Harley said.

“Why is Derek’s mom going to trial?” I asked, this made no sense.

“Derek, would you like to tell her the story? It might be good practice for when you take the witness stand.” Hunter said.

Derek sighed, “Ok. Beth, the reason my mom is going to trial is I’m pressing charges against her.”

“For what? Why would you press charges on your own mother? How totally sick.” I said. Seriously, what kind of person tried to land their mom in prison?

“Sick? You know what’s sick? What she did to me? Do you know what she did to me?” Derek asked angry.

“Can’t have been that bad.” I said.

“You’re right...she just would come in my room at night, force me to take my clothes off, and then make me have sex with her, if I refused she would tie my hands to my bed and make me do it anyway...it started when I was 8 and continued as I grew up. For the last 10 years...but yeah, you’re right, I should let her off.” Derek said.

I froze. “I...I had no idea.”

“You think we’re at Starlight because we like talking in group? No, we’re here because home isn’t an option.” Derek said.

“Exactly...and the idea of coming home is too much to bear.” April said.

“April you don’t have to do this...” Derek said.

“She needs to understand why we’re here. She’s a bigger princess than Tiff. You know why I’m here? Because my stepfather raped me. I ended up running away because I couldn’t take it anymore. I lived on the streets for months, just to survive I became a streetwalker. When I ended up here it was a godsend and now to find out I might have to go back to live with that monster and a mother who won’t protect me...I’m not sure I can take it...I don’t want to go back...I don’t want to face him because it will happen all over again.” April said crying.

“Ape, come here.” Derek hugged her.

“Uh, I’m sorry...” April said backing off, I knew she hadn’t meant to cry.

“It’s OK April. Thank you for sharing your story, would anyone else like to explain why they’re here to Beth...Jesse?” Michelle asked as she hugged April too.

Jesse sighed, “OK. Well unlike April and Derek I had wonderful parents, they were the best parents anyone could hope for but they were killed in an accident. After their death I was forced to go live with my Aunt May. She didn’t want the responsibility of a kid but she did want the life insurance money that came with me. She ignored me for years before she finally decided to ship me here. I don’t have any family, that’s why I ODeD.”

“So you see Beth, life isn’t all about cheering and popularity.” Michelle said.

“On that note would you like to share with the group why you framed Anna just to look cool to your friends?” Harley asked.

I looked down. Suddenly everything with Cathy seemed so small. “Because I wanted to fit in...back at my old school I was on top and when I moved here I just wanted to fit in.”

“So you sold out your own family because she wasn’t cool enough for you?” Harley asked.

“And when you got caught your parents helped you and supported you even though you were wrong. When I got arrested my dad told me I could rot in juvie, the only reason I’m here is the judge strongly suggested my father send me here, if he had it his way I’d be locked away.” Chris said.

“Consider yourself lucky. Your dad would never do anything to hurt you, neither would your mother. You have it so good you don’t even know.” April said.

I was totally speechless.

“You know why I’m here? I ask you cause I used to be like you, thinking looks and popularity mattered more than anything. I let my mother convince me I was fat and ugly and not worthy of my name. I was so determined to be who she wanted me to be I purged my food and became bulimic and when the inner pain became too much I turned to cutting to release it. I ended up here because I passed out from malnutrition. The more time I spend here the more I learn all that really matters is how I feel about me.” Tiffany said.

I gasped, my mother would never ever tell me I wasn’t perfect as I was. “Can I go home now?”

Michelle nodded, “Yeah, see you tomorrow.”

I went home and found my parents.

“Daddy?” I said.

“What is it sweetie?” he asked.

I ran into his arms and started crying. I don’t exactly know why, except for the fact I suddenly felt very lucky to have my parents.

“Beth? What’s wrong sweetheart?” Dad asked as he held me close.

“Is everything ok?” Mom asked rubbing my back as Dad hugged me.

I hugged him tighter. “Thank you for being my parents, I love you guys.”