

## Episode 12- "The Hardest Goodbye"

What is my life? I saved a rare Diamond for an Irish Duchess, went to Russia to see my boyfriend only to get a call from my ex that our friend had been killed and I needed to get home, found comfort in the arms of my husband, and now was kissing my ex in my best friend's house while said friend was in the hospital. And that was all this week!

What. Is. My. Life.

I finally broke the kiss.

"Hunter, we can't." I said.

"Why not? I know you want this." he said.

"Even if I did...and I'm not saying I do...I'm married." I said.

"That never stopped you before." he said.

"Hunter..." I sighed.

"Tell me that kissing me...being in my arms...tell me that isn't the most natural and right thing you've felt in recent memory." he challenged.

I looked down. He was right and he knew it.

"We both need this. We need to feel each other. We need to forget." he said lifting my chin and looking into my eyes.

I looked at him. I could feel the fear in my eyes. I knew if I started to give in there would be no stopping.

"Tell me you want this. All you have to do is tell me." he said softly.

"I do want this." I whispered.

That was all he needed to hear as he pulled me into his arms and kissed me passionately. The next thing I knew clothes were coming off and he pinned me to the wall, lifting me up in his arms. I wrapped my legs around his waist and I felt him thrust into me. I gasped in pleasure. As much as I loved Rocky and as in love as I was with Jon...Hunter was different. Every part of me told me Hunter was my soulmate and so being with him felt complete in a way no one else came close to. As I felt Hunter thrusting in and out I dug my nails into his back with one hand and grabbed at his hair with the other and kissed his neck. He carried me to the sofa and threw me down on it before getting on top of me and we started going at it some more. I can't say how long we were doing it but I know it was a good long while and we both came a few times.

Finally, we were finished. He rolled off me onto the sofa but pulled me into his arms and held me close.

"I've missed you so much Mich." he whispered as he kissed my head.

"I've missed you too Hunter." I replied.

"I didn't realize how much until today." he said.

"Hunter...this...this was a one time thing." I said.

He sighed. "I know you're married but...Rocky doesn't have to know."

"It's more complicated than that...can we just enjoy this time? I have missed this so much." I said.

Hunter held me tighter. "Me too."

We lay in silence for several minutes.

Finally, Hunter spoke again, "You're seeing someone else aren't you?"

"Hunter, I'm married." I replied.

"Someone other than your husband. You have a side piece don't you?" he asked.

I hated how well he could read me. "What makes you ask that?" I asked, playing dumb.

"I can tell. The way you recoiled at first and then you saying it's more complicated than you just being married...you held back at first and I know it wasn't because you're loyal to Rocky. It's because you have a boyfriend and you didn't want to cheat on him outside of your husband." Hunter said. "I'm right aren't I?"

"I hate how well you know me." I said as I stood up and started getting dressed.

"Who is it?" Hunter pressed.

"Doesn't matter." I said.

"It's not me and you wouldn't risk your family on just anyone...oh fucking shit...it's Jon isn't it?" Hunter asked.

I looked away.

"It is Jon. You're seeing him again. Fuck Michelle...doesn't that ride ever get old? You know how it ends with him every fucking time!" Hunter cried.

"It's different this time." I said.

"You're kidding yourself. My god...I can't fucking believe you are with him again." Hunter said as he got dressed.

"Please don't tell Rocky." I begged.

"I won't. It's not my place. But...you and Jon...and then you turning to me...we've been down this road before. It's like deja vu." Hunter said.

"It's different. Really. Jon and I have boundaries we never had. He had his wife and kids and I have my husband and daughter. We both know we can't risk that. We're on the same page this time. Anyway, it's none of your business." I snapped.

"I suppose it's not other than the fact that I love you and I don't want to see you go down your self destructive path with him yet again," he countered.

"I'm fine Hunter. Really. I'm going to the hospital to see Dusty. I'll see you in Blue Bay. I'm here if you need to talk...that's it." I said as I grabbed my purse and left.

How did I manage to get myself into these messes? What the hell was I doing? Why was I me? Why couldn't I just behave myself and not hop into bed with every ex I still had feelings for? Sometimes I felt like I was a seriously bad person.

I drove to the hospital and went to Dustin's room. He was watching TV. His leg was in a cast and he had some burn marks on his arms and face, but nothing too severe. He also had some bruising and his ribs were wrapped.

"Dusty, oh god, I'm so glad you're ok." I said.

"Mich, I'm glad to see you." he said.

"I am so sorry I wasn't there for you." I said as I felt tears welling up in my eyes again.

"Oh Mich...hey, Marah, can you run to the cafeteria and get me some more pudding?" Dustin asked.

Marah nodded. "Of course babe. I'll be right back." she said as she left.

"Sit." Dustin said gesturing to the chair at his bedside.

I nodded and did as he said.

"Marah told me you blame yourself for what happened to Shane and I. I want you to know it wasn't your fault at all." he said.

"You wouldn't say that if you knew everything." I said.

"What don't I know? You were in Ireland on Ranger business." he said.

I sighed, "No. I wasn't."

"What?" he asked.

"You have to promise not to tell Rocky." I said.

"Oh god...you know I keep all your secrets...where were you Mich?" Dustin asked.

"I did go to Ireland and I did stop Stefano. I didn't stay a few extra days to make sure he was really gone. After I defeated Stefano I flew to Russia to spend some time with Jon...I was having an affair instead of coming home. If I would have just come home instead of going to Russia I could have saved you and Shane. I'm so sorry Dusty." I said.

Dustin sighed, "Mich, this still isn't your fault. You know having an affair isn't a good thing to do...but even if you had been here there is every chance you wouldn't have made it to us in time to do anything. None of this is your fault. We happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and we underestimated the power of the alien we were fighting. We had no idea he could cause explosions like that. No one could have known. Even if you would have been here you wouldn't have known that and then we could have lost you and Shane. Please stop blaming yourself."

"You really don't blame me? Even knowing where I really was?" I asked.

"I really don't. It's not your fault at all. Shane knew what we all know. He knew they risk every time he morphed. It can happen to any of us...but we choose to do it anyway because that's who we are and that's who Shane was." Dustin said tearing up.

"I hate that he's gone." I said crying again too.

"Me too. I still can't fully process it." Dustin said wiping his eyes.

“Neither can I.” I said.

“I got pudding cups.” Marah said as she walked back in.

“Thanks baby.” Dustin said, forcing a smile.

I stayed and visited with Dusty and Marah for awhile longer before I went home. I needed to decide what I was singing at Shane’s funeral. I still couldn’t believe that I was going to Shane’s funeral.

The next day Rocky and I dropped Harley off with Mina and Adam. They agreed to keep her while we went to Blue Bay Harbor for the funeral. I didn’t think it was a good place for a little kid. We drove to Blue Bay and arrived at the funeral home. So many people were there...Shane’s family, past and present ninja students, and several past Rangers. I’d never seen so many Rangers wearing black instead of a color. I saw Kyle, Derrick, Conner, Kira, Eric, and Tally standing together. I saw Hunter talking to Marah and Dustin (who had made it, albeit in a wheelchair) in another group nearby. I needed to avoid Hunter at all costs. My choice was Conner’s group or Hunter’s. Tough call. Both would be awkward but I figured Conner’s group was the safer choice. Rocky and I walked over to them.

“Hi guys.” I said.

“Michelle, it’s so good to see you. I’m glad you’re here.” Kyle said hugging me.

“I’m glad to see you too. I wish it were under different circumstances.” I said hugging him back.

“Me too but at least we’re all together.” Eric said.

“Guess she had a heart after all.” Kira mumbled.

“Kira, I know we’re not friends anymore for whatever reason you’ve invented to hate me but this is not the time or place to get into it. We both cared about Shane and we both care about those left behind. Can we please be civil for a day?” I asked.

Kira glared at me, “You always were great at playing all high and mighty. But you are right. I can play nice for Shane’s sake.”

“Thank you.” I replied, “I am glad you are all here.”

“I am personally still in shock. It was so sudden.” Tally said.

“But we’re here to celebrate his life. He wouldn’t want us to be so sad.” Kyle said.

“Kyle’s right. Shane was a very happy person.” Eric nodded as Kira’s phone rang.

“It’s the baby sitter. I need to take this. I’ll be right back.” Kira said walking away.

Conner finally turned to me. “It’s good to see you again Shellfish.” he said as he hugged me.

I couldn’t help but crack a smile. “You too Conehead.” I said as I hugged him back.

“I’m sorry about Kira.” he said.

“It is what it is. And now isn’t the time to worry about it.” I said.

He nodded. “You’re right.”

We all took our seats and the service started.

"We are here today to celebrate the life of Shane Clarke, a young man taken from us far too soon..." the celebrant started. A lot of it was a blur to me until Porter stood up to speak.

"Shane was my younger brother and as such we did not always see eye to eye but we did have a deep mutual respect for each other. We also both felt the constant need to protect our baby sister Claudia. He was an amazing older brother and an amazing younger brother. Unlike some middle kids he never lost himself. He knew who he was and he had his own identity. He was very certain in who he was. And who he was was the kindest, funniest, happiest person I've ever known. The world will be a little darker without Shane's laughter to light it. There are really no words I can say that would convey the hole I now have in my heart after losing my younger brother. Shane was the best of us. I love him very much and will miss him every moment of every day. He challenged me and made me look outside myself for answers I never dreamed of before. He did that with a lot of people. His inspiration will be missed by all. And now his beautiful wife Kapri would like to speak." Porter finished.

Kapri walked up and hugged Porter before he went to sit down then she turned to address everyone. "Shane and I hadn't been married long but we have been friends for many years and everything that made him a good friend is why I fell in love with him. He could always make me laugh, his smile could light up a room, and he had a way of making me feel beautiful when I was at my worst. Shane made me feel loved in a way I've never known. I remember the night he proposed to me. He wasn't often serious...he could find a joke in almost anything...but that night he was. That told me how serious he took the commitment of marriage and how deeply he truly loved me. He vowed to love me for the rest of his days and he kept that vow. And I will continue to keep mine. Shane, baby, I will love you for the rest of my days." Kapri paused to compose herself. "I asked a very good friend of Shane's to perform a song in his honor. Michelle, when you're ready."

I nodded and walked up. I hugged Kapri then picked up my guitar and prepared to sing a version of "How Do I Live" that I reworked a bit.

"When Kapri asked me to sing I was honored. Shane was a good friend and I know we will all miss his laugh and his humor and friendship...but Kapri was the love of his life. I reworked one of my old songs just for them...so Shane and Kapri, this is for you and your love." I started to play the guitar and then sang:

"How do I  
Get through one night without you?  
Now that I have to live without you  
What kind of life will this be?  
Oh, I  
I need you in my arms, need you to hold  
You're my world, my heart, my soul  
Now that you're gone  
Yeah, baby, you took away everything  
Real in my life

So tell me now  
How do I live without you  
How do I breathe without you?  
How do I ever, ever survive?  
How do I, how do I live?

Without you  
There'll be no sun in my sky  
There will be no love in my life  
I feel there's no world left for me

Oh, and I  
Baby, I don't know, I will do  
I'm so lost now that I lost you  
Now that you're gone  
Yeah, baby, you took away everything  
Good in my life

Ooh, and tell me now  
How do I live without you?  
How do I breathe without you?  
How do I ever, ever survive?  
How do I, how do I live?

How do I live without you  
How do I breathe without you?  
How do I ever, ever survive?  
Yeah, how do I, oh, how do I live?  
How do I live?  
Oh, how do I, how do I, how do I, how do I, how do I live?  
How do I live?  
Oh, how do I live?"

I finished singing and broke down. Everyone was crying at this point. Kapri stood up and hugged me and whispered a thank you. From there we proceeded to the burial. Everyone lined up and took a handful of dirt to cover the casket with. Rocky stood in front of me. As we went past with our dirt I whispered. "Goodbye Shane...be the air my friend and rest in power."