

THE FIRST

I woke up in a dirt hole. It was dark. My body was impossibly stiff and my skin tight. I called out for help but all I managed was a weak groan. I tried to pull myself to a sitting position, grabbing at the earth around me, but my fingers could barely bend and all I managed to do was cover myself with more dirt. My arms flopped uselessly next to me. I tried to call out again, but I could barely form the words.

"Uraghh?" I yelled as loud as I could. "Eraghh?!"

And then you were there, staring down at me from above. You shaved your head, and your eyes were dull and empty. There was no warmth, no love. You reached out to stroke my face, but I flinched away from your touch. Your hand on my cheek was a million pinpricks against my skin. You mumbled something and turned away. You were leaving me? Me?

"Qu- hegggh?" I attempted to say your name. I tried to enunciate every syllable.
"Qwh-wh-en?"

You whipped back around, brow furrowed. "Lily? Are you... my Lily?"

Of course I am. Who else would I be? I reached out my arm toward you, and you grabbed my hand. I flinched again, but ignored the stinging as you squeezed. You smiled at me.

"Finally," I heard you mumble. "I've finally-"

A loud *crunch* cuts you off, and I felt something tear. My arm flopped down beside me, but in your hands...? I lifted my arm again, but all that was left was a bloody stump. It didn't process in my head. My hand is gone? No, you were holding it. I could still feel the stinging pain from you holding it? I could still feel the needles being dragged across it. But then why was my arm ending in nothing? If it- If it fell off shouldn't it hurt? Why doesn't it hurt?

"Failure." You muttered. I could hear the malice in your voice. "Just another failure."

You dropped the hand- *my hand*, into the hole with me. I looked back up at you and your face was angry. You glared at me like I had done wrong to you. I've never seen you look at anyone like that, much less *me*. You stood up and jumped into the hole with me. I think you landed on me because I heard a sharp *crack* and my leg felt lighter. In your hand, you held a large shovel.

"Qu- hewn?" I said. I flailed around in the hole, trying my best to get out of this situation. You put your foot on my center to hold me still.

"Don't make this harder." You brought the shovel high above your head. "Don't worry, my love, I'll succeed next time."

I shielded myself with my arms, but it didn't do much to block the blow. You slammed the tip of the shovel into my chest. I felt the initial impact, the feeling of the metal breaking my bones, and the ripping as you pulled it out. I could feel everything, but it didn't hurt. For a second I thought this was a bad dream.

The second blow I felt in every nerve of my being. I screamed, sharp and loud, my voice cracking halfway through. My breathing was ragged and uneven. I think you pierced a lung because it felt like I was breathing through a straw with holes in it. I tasted copper as my vision went blurry. The pain radiated from my chest to my extremities. Each breath sent a new wave of agony through my body. I looked at you again, begging you to stop, but the last thing I saw was the manic smile plastered to your face.

THE FOURTH

I shot up from the bed in a panic. You were at my side in an instant, same as I last saw you, head shaved and eyes dull. I pushed you away and tumbled out of bed, screaming the entire

time. Something was wrong with my legs, so I crawled along the floor until I reached the dresser, pulling myself to a standing position.

"Lily- What- STOP!" you yelled at me, but I couldn't.

My hand found an alarm clock on the dresser and I blindly threw it in your direction. I think it missed, but I didn't stop throwing things until the dresser was empty. I scrambled back until I hit the wall, using it to stay standing. I was breathing heavily and glared in your direction. I won't let you hurt me again. I won't sit idly while you do as you please.

I pressed myself into the wall and you held out your hands like you were trying to calm a distressed animal, making soft shushing noises. The longer we stood in this stalemate, the more I could see the differences from the you in my memory to the you standing in front of me. You both had your head shaved, but your eyes now were full of worry. You stayed back because you knew I didn't want you close, and you didn't press for more. You had a slight cut on your cheek from something I threw, a thin line of blood staining your skin. My chest tightened. I hurt you?

"Quinn?" Unlike my memory, my voice worked fine. It was sore and scratchy, but it worked. "What-?"

My legs buckled from under me as the adrenaline left my body and I dropped to the floor. Everything hit at once as every part of my body ached. You lurched forward, but didn't come closer. Your lips were pressed into a thin line and your hands were shaking.

"Lily, you were in an accident. You're hurt." You spoke slowly and calmly. "I'm here to help you, okay?"

"An... accident? I- I don't remember an accident." I looked down at my hands and saw scars snaking up my arms and crisscrossing my wrists. My fingers were fat and red. I clenched and unclenched, but they wouldn't close all the way.

"You were in a coma for a while before the hospital let me take you home." You took a small step forward. "You're going to aggravate your injuries. Let me help you?"

I hesitated, but nodded, and you were at my side in an instant. At first I insisted I could walk, but had no strength in my legs to carry me or in my arms to lean on you. Without hesitation, you scooped me up and princess carried me back to the bed, setting me down gently on the bed. You knelt down beside me.

"Why did you react like that?" You cupped my face with your hand. Your thumb lightly brushed my cheek. "I was so scared."

"I think I had a nightmare." I leaned into your touch, and closed my eyes. "I dreamed that I was in a hole and couldn't move. You were there and you attacked me with a shovel. I don't think I fully woke up and I just... reacted."

"Did you now?" You mumble and stop brushing my cheek. I open my eyes, and freeze. You were looking through me, eyes wide. "But you couldn't have remembered..."

"Remember?" I ask. "What would I..."

"Nothing, my love." You blinked and you're back. You smiled at me and kissed my forehead. You stood up and pulled the blanket over me, tightly tucking me in. "Let me get you another pillow."

You grabbed the pillow next to me and fluffed. Your eyes were so full of love as you smothered me with it. The earlier altercation and tight blanket led to me barely being able to fight back. For you, it was quick and easy, but for me? For me it was agonizing.

THE NINTH

You told me I would slowly get better, but it felt like nothing was changing. It's been weeks, but I haven't noticed any difference. My fingers had no dexterity. My limbs could barely

lift a pot. Walking was a huge no, whether you helped me or not. My only saving grace was that I could still garden by myself, for the most part anyway. It took ten times as long as it normally would, but I could do it. You needed to help get everything out, but I could take it from there. It felt amazing to be somewhat self-sufficient.

The garden was mostly bright and thriving. A few spots refused to stay alive no matter how hard I tried, but you said it was just pesticides seeping in from the neighbors side of the fence. Still, I was determined to keep them alive. I was trimming the new lavender plant when you showed up.

"Need anything?" you asked. Before I could say no, you snatched the small sheers from my hands. "Here, let me."

I didn't say anything, but at that moment I resented you. I resented how easily you could do what took me tens of minutes. I resented that you stole the one thing I could do away from me.

"All done!" you turned and beamed at me like you did good. "Lily?"

"Thanks." I must have not reacted how you wanted. I forced a smile. "I can do the rest-"

"Let me help you!" You move onto the next plant and continue to trim. I felt my eye twitch.

"Quinn, I can do it." I tried to take the sheers from you, but you wouldn't let go. "Please?"

"Fine!" You rolled your eyes and dropped them into my hands. "Sorry for trying to help!"

You stomped back into the house, slamming the door behind you. A pit formed in my stomach. You were coming back right? I can't get back in by myself. Surely you wouldn't be so petty as to lock me out? I shook the thought from my head and continued to weed and prune. I knew you would be back for me. You always came back for me.

It started pouring about an hour later. I crawled to the back door and curled up, trying to stay warm. I knocked on the door and yelled for you, but you never came. The rain was so cold, and my nightgown was thin. I couldn't control my shivering. My teeth chattered so much, my jaw hurt. My hands and feet burned.

I yelled for you again, but could barely hear myself over the pouring rain. I never heard the car turn on, so I knew you were home. Was this my punishment for defying you? I wouldn't do it again, I promise. Just, come save me, *please*.

"Quinn..." I murmured, and knocked my head against the door one last time. "Please..."

Another hour passed, I thought, and the rain still wouldn't let up. I felt some warmth return to me, but my skin was still pimply with goosebumps. I leaned my head against the door, and my eyelids drooped. I was exhausted. I tried my best to stay awake, but it was a losing battle.

You never came for me.

THE ELEVENTH

I smelled disgusting. The stench made my eyes water, and I didn't understand how you couldn't have smelled it. My hair was greasy and matted, my body felt like it had a thin layer of grime attached to it. I felt repulsive.

"Quinn?" I rolled onto my side to face you. I felt bad for waking you, but I couldn't stand this stench. It was early, and you were still asleep, but I knew you would understand.

"Quuuuinnnn~"

I reached out to place my hand on your shoulder, but my aim was off, and I slammed my hand into your face. Your eyes flew open and you grabbed my arm, ripping it away from your face. I winced at the sharp movement.

"What the fuck?" you groaned as you blinked the sleep out of your eyes, glaring my way. I whimpered and tried to break free.

"I'm sorry." I said. "I- I didn't-"

"What time is it? The sun's not even-" You dropped my arm and sat up, checking your phone. "Four in the morning..."

Your voice drifted off and I tensed. I thought it was closer to six. You looked at me, but I couldn't meet your eyes.

"I didn't realize it was so early," I said. "I just really wanted a shower and I can't do it myself and-"

The words kept spilling out of my mouth and I couldn't stop them until you laughed. "Is that all?"

"Are you mad?" I looked at you and I could see a hint of satisfaction on your face. You shook your head and kissed my forehead. Relief flooded my body.

"Of course not. I'd never be mad at you." You stretched and pulled the covers off, coming round to my side. "You needed me, so I'm here."

You picked me up and carried me to the bathroom, setting me on the toilet as you got the bath ready. I fidgeted with the hem of my nightgown, face burning, unsure if I should undress myself or wait for you to leave. I think you noticed because you laughed again.

"I can wait just outside?" You offered, but I shook my head. I couldn't do this by myself and you knew it. "I'll close my eyes then, until you say so."

I nodded and you did just that. It was awkward as I used you like a support bar to get myself there, but I did. Instantly, the water was brown, just from me sitting in it. I watched the dirt swirl around the water and felt grosser than I did before. Why didn't you say anything?

"Oh, maybe you need a shower instead." I jumped and you were looking down at me, hand on your chin. I quickly tried to cover myself and you laughed again. "Sorry! You were taking too long."

My face was hot again, but you acted like you didn't notice and hummed a song as you pulled the plug and turned the shower on. I stared at the floor of the tub as you scrubbed shampoo into my hair and soap into my skin. I watched the neverending dirt circle the drain. I don't know how long you scrubbed me, but the water was warm when we started and lukewarm when we ended.

"Why didn't you say anything?" I asked, voice barely above a whisper, as you dried my hair. I met your eyes in the mirror. "There was so much dirt."

"It wasn't that much." You shrugged. "Guess I didn't notice."

"How could you not? Quinn, look, there's still-" my voice was rising with each word. "still dirt sitting at the bottom of the tub! Don't lie to me!"

You stopped, and glanced at the tub, then back at me. You had that empty look in your eyes again. "Does it bother you?"

"Yes!" I all but shout. "I know I'm healing but I'm not so fragile that-"

"You died, you know." You brushed my hair with your fingers.

I frowned. What were you talking about? You didn't tell me that? "At the hospital?"

"Everyone else gave up on you, but me. I was the one who saved you. Who did all the dirty work." You continued like I didn't say anything. "I had to do a lot of messy things during that time, so why would a little dirt bother me?"

You leaned down and kissed my head. My heart pounded in my chest. I didn't understand what you meant at the time. Or why you were telling me that at all.

"What-?"

"But if this bothers you so much, then I guess I'll just start again." You grab the sides of my head with both hands. You were squeezing me. It hurt. "Sleep well, my love."

With one quick movement, you twist and pull my head to the side. I didn't have time to scream or cry or fight back. I watched my body fall to the floor before it all went dark.

THE EIGHTEENTH

We were sitting in the garden together when I finally remembered the accident. You were monitoring me while I trimmed the few living plants left. You said it was to make sure I didn't hurt myself since they were heavy for me.

"Should we go on a date?" You asked, and that triggered the memory of our disastrous first date.

I didn't remember all of it, but I did remember you clearly. Your face. Your actions. I remember standing across the street and seeing you all dressed up, clearly nervous, pacing back and forth, with a bouquet in hand. They were lilies, of course. Your hair was freshly dyed and long, pulled back into a low ponytail. You looked so beautiful.

I called out your name, and I think you almost tripped. You recovered quickly, though, and waved. Your face was flushed, but you were smiling brightly. I took a step into the street and that's where everything gets hazy. I remember your face changing from happy to confused to scared. You ran toward me, throwing the flowers to the side, reaching out to me.

I don't remember feeling the impact. All I remember was the feeling of weightlessness as I flew through the air. I think I reached out to you? I thought you would catch me- but you didn't. I landed on my shoulder, and bounced off the pavement a few times before being caught by a chain-link fence. My vision at that point was blurry at best. My body was caught in the fence and

at a strange angle. I think I tried to get out, but my body wasn't moving the way I wanted it to. I remember hearing tires skidding as the driver fled the scene, and the sound of your voice. The last thing I remember was sirens in the distance before I lost consciousness.

"Lily?" I blinked and you were inches from my face. "Did I mess up again?"

"Was I hit by a car?" I pulled away and rubbed my eyes. It all felt so fresh and new. My joints throbbed at the memory, and I scratched at the scars littering my arms.

"Mhm." You rub my leg. "Did... Did you remember?"

"Pieces. Not everything." I looked at you and smiled. "I remember you mostly."

"Anything else?" You stared at me intently, tightening your grip on my leg. "Do you remember anything after the accident?"

I frowned. "After I-" It all came back to me at once. Not the details, but parts of it. Enough to know I shouldn't tell you anything. How many times have we had this conversation? How many times have you...

"Lily?" Your voice was sinister. Your eyes. I hated that look in your eyes.

I shook my head. "No. It's all blank until recently." You smiled, then quickly changed the subject.

I'm remembering, Quinn. Remembering everything you did to me. You told me I was in a coma, and that the accident was only a few days ago, but I know you're lying. When will you tell me everything? I want to ask, but I'm scared that you'll discard me again and start over. I don't know how you did it, but why didn't you just let me die and stay dead? You'd rather me alive like- like this?

I thought you were the love of my life, but now I think you're the worst thing that's ever happened to me.

THE LAST

I'm in the garden again. I don't know why. At this point the only thing that's still alive is me and a rose bush. Weeds have taken over and are the only things able to continuously grow. A once lush garden filled with vibrant colors and smells reduced to an ugly, grey dirt patch.

I tried my best to bring it back to life, but nothing I did brought them back. Any flower or bush that started to grow, died pitifully quickly after. I asked you if you could help, but you never did. You told me it was pests, that next year would be better once they all die to the cold, but I know you're lying. Something like pests couldn't do all this. I know my garden. I know how pests would affect it. I'm so tired of you lying to me. You used the pests excuse the past three times.

I remember more than you think.

I'm trimming my pitiful rosebush when you tell me you're going to run to the store to grab groceries. You easily pluck the shears from my hands and hang it on a nail in the fence. Easily accessible if you can stand, but I still can't support my own body weight. At this point I'm convinced you want me to stay helpless.

"I'll only be gone 20 minutes, okay? I'll leave the door open for you." You kiss my head, and disappear into the house.

I wait until I can no longer hear your car, and then count to sixty. When I'm sure you're gone, I crawl to what used to be the tomato plants. In every memory I have, they're dead. More and more of the garden died every time I woke up after you killed me. I think if I dig the garden up, I'll find something about what you did to me.

I can't use the shovel since whatever you do keeps me weak, so I use my hands. I dig and dig and dig and dig until I hit what I am looking for. I'm not surprised like I thought I would be. I'm not scared either. I think it was more a sense of dull relief.

The grave is shallow, only a few feet deep. I'm surprised no animal ever dug her up. Then again, no animal probably wants to eat something that kills the land it's buried in. She didn't have a head or hands. I rub the scars on my wrist. I guess those are the only parts of me that are still mine. Unless... I crawl to the remains of a hydrangea bush and dig there. In this grave, she is just a torso and feet.

Oh.

I hop from plot to plot, digging to see what parts of me- her? - were left. Just hands here. Legs and arms there. A handful of torsos I find have their chest caved in. Some of the limbs have defensive wounds. None of them have heads. I think that's the only thing that's truly mine.

I'm digging up the seventh grave when I hear your car pull into the driveway and freeze. I'm covered in dirt and the garden is completely dug up along the fence line. There's no way you won't notice, and I'll become just another body rotting in the yard. I wonder how much I'll remember next time. I lean against the fence and it moves slightly, drawing my attention to the shears.

No. I won't let you do this to me again. I crawl closer to the shears and throw myself against the fence. They wiggle on the hook, but don't fall. I hear the sound of the trunk slam and know I'm running out of time. I can feel my arm bruising but I don't care. The shears are at the edge of the nail. It's so close. I take a deep breath and slam into it one last time.

"Lily~ I'm back-" You stop short in the doorway. Your face goes from happy to confused to irritated. "What are you doing?"

I don't answer. My eyes jump from you to the shears and back. They're swinging on the edge of the nail. I give the fence one last push.

The shears fall to the ground.

"Lily-"

I don't wait, and leap toward the shears. I'm not fast or elegant, but I moved faster than you expect. I grab them as you close the distance between us. I hold the shears in shaking hands pointed toward you and you put your hands up in surrender.

"Don't come any closer." I say. I don't have a plan. I don't know what I'm going to do if you don't listen. I don't know if it even matters in my current state.

"Hah..." You sigh in annoyance and I see a vein pop in your neck. You roll your eyes and come closer anyway, kneeling in front of me. You glance behind me, seemingly just now noticing the holes littering the garden. "Whatever you're thinking-"

I act before I think and slash at your face. Your eyes go wide as you try to avoid it, but I'm able to nick you. The cut is shallow, similar to a cut you'd get while shaving. I swallow hard.

"I don't want to hurt you, but- but I will." My voice warbles as I say it and you scoff. "*Please*, don't-"

"Oh my god, will you just shut up already?" You say, wiping the small amount of blood from your cut on your sleeve. You raise the pitch of your voice to mock me. "*I don't wanna hurt you*. Do you really think you could?"

You're right. I know you're right. My arms are already exhausted and my body aches from all the effort. Still I can't back down now. You put your hands on mine, and slowly lower them.

"We can move past this, Lily. I did this all for you." Your voice softens and I want to believe you. Your face doesn't match your tone, and I look down at our hands. You slowly attempt to remove my fingers from the shears and I almost let you. "I only want what's best for you."

You only want what's best for me? Killing me is what's best for me? Getting annoyed at the slightest inconvenience and making it all my fault is what's best for me? You made me helpless, then punished me for it. You keep me stuck in this house like a dog. Does anyone even know I'm here?

"I remember *everything*, Quinn." My voice cracks, and I tighten my grip the best I can. I rip my hands from yours and point the shears at my neck. I look up. You're taken back. Eyes wide, and mouth open. I guess only you're allowed to hurt me in this house. "I don't want to keep living like this."

"I can explain. I-" You fumble over your words. You won't look at me. Are you ashamed? Confused? Scared? Your eyes are fixed on my neck. "This was the only way I could save you. I-"

You keep talking but I don't hear any of it. All your words are hollow. You say you were trying to save me, but anytime something went wrong you would kill me and try again. Burying me in the garden I love, and expecting me to be grateful for the new monster you would make of me.

"I won't do it again. I promise. I swear, Lily." You hold my face in your hands. You're ugly crying and I can see an emotion in your eyes. "So you'll forgive me, won't you?"

I feel numb. How am I meant to forgive you? I gave you so many chances, and you gave me none. If I say no, will you kill me right now? If I say yes, how long until you change your mind? How can I trust you to not-

A wave of calm washes over me. There's a simple answer that I'm avoiding. You're right. As it is now, I can't do anything to you. But you're only human. You already made one mistake by letting me remember- or at least not killing me when I've shown you I do. You'll make more of them, I'm sure. I just need to wait for my chance.

I drop the shears.

"Of course I can." I swallow my disgust and smile at you, the biggest one possible. "I can forgive you."

You kiss my face and pull me into a hug. You keep apologizing and hold me tight. Your body is tense and trembling. I drop the smile the second you can't see, and hold back a laugh. Did you believe me that easy? You're already making more mistakes.

Maybe killing you will be easier than I thought.