

Dad's truck tires crunch on the gravel as we pull up to the house, my heart pounds in my chest knowing this will be the last time I am here.

"Are you ready?" Dad asks, parking the vehicle and turning to look at me, the keys in his hands.

"Yeah, I guess." I mumble, not looking at him.

"Ok... just make sure that you check all the rooms for anything you want, ok?" Dad said, trying to take my hand, but I move it away.

"Yeah, ok." I say, pushing open my door and hopping out.

"Hey, Jenna?" Came Dad's voice, "I love you kiddo." I just nod my head.

The yellow house sits there, unwelcoming, looking abandoned. Before Mom had gotten sick this place had been inviting and safe, always bustling. Now it sat quietly on the ten acre farm as if asleep.

I open the door and head upstairs to my room and find it just the way I had left it except for one thing. The moving boxes.

I start to pack but it's hard, all of my stuff was insignificant, because I would've given *any* of it to have Mom back, or even to have one more hug or smile, free of the pain she was hiding.

Finally I finish, and walk over to the window to look out over the farm. I see Dad, in a field, I can't tell what he's doing, but I know it's nothing fun. Nothing was since we said goodbye to Mom.

I leave my room, heading down the hall and going up the ladder to the attic. I'm engulfed with the smell of sawdust and surrounded by hundreds of boxes.

I have no idea what's inside of them, but I do know what I'm looking for. A box of Mom's

old journals.

Mom used to keep journals, before she got sick, and whatever she wrote it felt like she was right there, telling you the story herself. If I could find even one of them it would feel like having her back. The problem was finding it.

I search through a few dozen of the boxes coming across all kinds of random things: toys, pictures, and books. No journals.

I sigh closing a box full of old china and walk over to an old rocking chair to sit down. Mom had said before that she had started getting rid of her old journals, but I was sure that she would've kept some somewhere, but this search was proving otherwise.

My mind wonders back to the months before, when Mom got diagnosed with cancer and had started treatment. Now, just four weeks before we got a call from the hospital saying Mom wasn't going to make it. After she passed Dad and I started arguing, and no one was there to help us.

With tears in my eyes I get up, I take a few steps before my foot catches something and I stumble and fall to the ground.

I groan, rubbing my knees where they hit the floor and turn to see a loose floorboard sticking up from the attic floor. I pry the board up, then I stop, my breath catching.

Under the floorboard there was a small alcove, and inside of it was a small journal.

I reach down, pulling out the journal, it's plain with a black cover and a metal circle like the locks you see on a locker at school, except instead of numbers there were letters.

I hold it in my hands, my heart beating fast in my chest as I realize that this could be one of *Mom's* journals.

“Please... please...” I whisper sitting down in the rocking chair again, closing my eyes as I open the the journal.

I stop, opening my eyes, the journal wasn't opening. It won't budge, I feel anger rising and take a deep breath like Mom would tell me to do.

*I could ask Dad...*, I think to myself but I shut that thought down, Dad would ask questions and tell me that this book wasn't my business. I had to open it here. Alone.

I flip the book over and see a note taped to the back, my heart stops when I see the handwriting. It's *Mom's*.

I read the note as fast as I can, devouring her words. *“If you want to get this journal open you must answer three riddles to get three passwords. Here is the first riddle: ‘He’s the anchor when storms do pass a guiding light through blurry glass, when challenges come and shadows amass, he lifts us up, in a loving clasp, who stands so firm in every task.’”*

I nod my head, three passwords, I just hoped I could solve the riddles. I take a deep breath.

The riddle referred to the person as a he, and it also sounded like this is a strong person who is always there for the people he loves. Then it comes to me and I feel a guilt settle in my stomach and I know the answer.

Dad. The answer to the riddle, as I think about it I realize that Dad was all those things, I just had forgotten it in all the grief.

D-A-D, I enter the password into the padlock. I hear a soft click and a small compartment in the back of the journal pops out, inside is another note.

I start to read, *“When the world feels heavy, a weight to tug, or emotions surge, an overwhelming flood, it offers solace, a safe place to snug, though not always in familiar arms,*

*it's a comforting nudge, what is it that wraps you, with love and no grudge.*" As I read it the words awaken some kind of want inside of me, a need almost. And deep down I know what it is.

A hug.

I hadn't let anyone, not even Dad, hug me since Mom passed. And I realize now how much I really missed it.

H-U-G, I hear a click and another small hatch opens to reveal another clue.

*"In moments that sparkle, or times that dismay, together we gather, our memories to relay, through laughter and tears, in a night or in day, when one of us leaves, the world turns grey, but through grief and sorrow, we find our way, who are we, with shared time in the fray."*

My heart pounds, this was different than the other riddles. With all the other riddles something had immediately popped into my head, but with this one I was drawing a blank.

I stare down at the book, my mind racing. With every second that passes it feels like Mom is getting farther and farther away from me, it felt like she was leaving all over again.

"Jenna!" I hear Dad yell and I seize up, oh, *no*. "Where are you?" He shouts and I try to hide the journal, I don't want him to see it. I'm frantic, my heart racing and my palms sweating.

"Are you in the attic?" And then he's there, standing at the top of the ladder looking at me, and without realizing tears had started running down my cheeks.

"Hey... kiddo, are you... ok?" Dad walks over and I try to hide the journal but he doesn't seem to be looking at that. All he's looking at is me.

"I... I miss her." I whisper and I knew immediately that was all I needed to say, all this time.

"Oh... kiddo, I do too..." Dad sat down on the trunk next to the rocking chair. He makes me look at him, and when I do I see tears in his eyes too, and his face is full of sorrow. Suddenly, I

don't feel so alone.

I decide that it was selfish of me to keep the book from him, because he lost Mom too, we were in this together. I wasn't alone, I had never been alone. Never.

And so I hold up the journal, "I— I found this under the floorboard, its one of Mom's... and I was trying to open it. She has different riddles and the answers are the password to open it. And it requires three, and... I've only solved two. The las— the last one... is too hard." I whisper the last part, defeated.

Dad's eyes go wide and he looks down at it, "wow... I knew that she had kept a few journals, but I didn't think... What's the riddle?" And that's when I remembered, Dad was great at riddles. It was almost like Mom had wanted us to work together. And maybe she had.

I show him the riddle and he reads it, but when he looks up his face is full of despair.

"I don't know..." Dad whispers and I feel my stomach drop, I feel sick to my stomach and I begin to cry. Dad opens his arms to me and I sink into the hug, feeling safe. I try not to imagine what he must be feeling, I don't want to see the disappointment in his eyes that we both were feeling. I can't help but think about how far I had gotten and then I think about the passwords, Dad, and Hug. Maybe Mom was trying to tell me something.

As I hug him I look down at the last note that Mom had written, then I reread the riddle, and as I do something sparks in my heart.

I pull away from the hug, I knew the answer. "Family." I whisper, grabbing the journal, I had the last password!

F-A-M-I-L-Y, I enter and I hear the click. I was right.

Dad watches as I open the journal and find writing on the first page, I sit down next to him

and we read it together.

*Robert and Jenna,*

*I'm so sorry to have left you, I tried my best to make it, to push through... but, God has welcomed me back, so here you are reading this note. I just wanted you both to know how much I love you and how I never wanted to leave. You both were my world, my life, and I wish you only the best. Chase your dreams, 'cause you never know when you won't be able to anymore. I love you so much, and I'm so proud to be your Mom and your Wife. Don't worry about making me proud, I already am.*

*-Mom, Zayna*

I flip to the next page, but it's blank and my heart pounds. I flip through the book, my heart so heavy it feels like its going to fall right out of my chest. The journal was empty.

I look to Dad and I see the disappointment. "I'm sorry kiddo." I let myself feel the grief and sadness for a second, then I shake it off. "Dad?" I lean in again and hug him, "I think I'm ready to go." I whisper and he nods.

"Ok kiddo, do you want to take the journal with you?" He asks gently and I nod my head. "Yeah, I think I do, I can use it as a way to talk to her."

And this new book felt like a new chapter, with just me and Dad this time. But that was ok, it was ok that she was gone, before it hadn't been, everything had felt wrong. Like I didn't have a place in the world anymore, like my life was useless without Mom. But now... it's whole again. I have a place and Dad is right beside me, Mom is watching over me, and I am right where I'm supposed to be.

Together we leave the attic behind us, we leave all the grief and all the sadness. The lonely

days and the feeling of being hopeless. We are both moving on, and that is what mattered most.