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Cassie Alexandra K.L. Middleton

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THE BURN



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THE BURN



Mackenzie

Monday, September 12th



GRANDMA RAE PULLED her rusty, white 1978 Beetle into the parking lot of Diamond Lake High School. As we drove toward the drop-off area, I already felt scrutiny from the kids walking into the building. I'd heard from my cousin Chloe, who'd graduated the year before, that the school was filled with snobs. I was already picking up on that vibe and I hadn't even stepped out of the car.

"You sure you don't want me to walk with you to the office?" Grandma Rae asked.

I noticed two girls standing outside of the school, snickering at her beat-up jalopy. If they saw me walking in with my eccentric grandma, who was currently wearing fishing waders, they'd have a field day with that.

"No, thanks. I'll be fine."

"Is it because I'm overdressed?" she asked with a twinkle in her eyes.

I chuckled.

"I suppose I could have waited until I got to the lake to wear my waders. But, my knee was acting up this morning. Easier to get them on when I'm sitting on the bed."

THE BURN

"It's fine. Collecting bait this morning?"

"Yep. We're almost out of minnows."

"That's right."

She parked the car next to the curb, reached back for the folder with my school records, and handed everything to me. "Here."

"Thank you."

A group of jocks walked past our car. One of them looked at us and then said something that made the other guys laugh.

Assholes.

I already hated the school and everyone in it.

"You know, since it's my last year, I could take online classes," I said, giving them a dirty look.

"Your mother went here. I know she'd want you to attend, too. As far as online schooling, that's the easy way out. You need this more than you know."

Right, just like I needed a bullet to the head.

"I guess we can agree to disagree," I mumbled.

She smiled sadly. "I know this isn't easy, but you're going to be fine. You're stronger than you know."

She was trying to help, but the conversation only reminded me of everything I'd lost. My friends. My home. My parents. My entire life. As much as I loved her, I didn't want to be in Diamond Lake. I just wanted my old life back.

"Mackenzie?"

"Yeah, I know."

Her eyes searching mine. "Seriously, you've got this."

I nodded, although I didn't feel like I *had* anything. But, I didn't want to worry her. She'd lost a lot, too. My mother,

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