

C.L. Parker

Nexus

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The Writer's Coffee Shop
(Australia) PO Box 447 Cherrybrook NSW 2126 (USA) PO Box 2116 Waxahachie TX
75168

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Prologue

Looking out over the garden in the early morning, Kerrigan Cruz smiled to herself. It may not have been the mystical refuge she had grown accustomed to, but it was at least an acceptable surrogate to her sanctuary—about as close as she would come to what used to be her once sacred place. The gift of the Light that had been passed down from generation to generation of women in her bloodline was gone. She had traded it for the life of her lover, Dominic Grayson, when they had shared their souls in an attempt to survive an impending threat of a life without one another. They were each part of one whole, no longer divided, just as it had always been meant to be. Watching him as he played with their daughter, Tori, she couldn't bring herself to regret making that sacrifice.

They were her world now, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

Victoria Milena Cruz-Grayson was a miracle child, to say the least. Her auburn hair hung in ringlets around her cherub face, setting off the unusual teal color of her eyes and the natural bronzed tone of her skin. Her features were an even mixture of both Dominic and Kerrigan, but that hair came from her grandmother, Sarah Grayson.

Over the short three years of her life, Tori had given unfathomable joy to everyone who had made her acquaintance. In return, she had been spoiled rotten. She was Auntie Gabe's life-size doll, Uncle Colton's partner in crime, Daddy's baby girl, and Mommy's little sunshine. Grammy and Pappy were wrapped around her tiny finger so tightly it was a wonder she had any feeling left at all. Monthly visits weren't the norm; they were a requirement as far as Hudson and Priscilla were concerned. Pappy Hud had even started to look for real estate in the St. Augustine area so they could be closer to their grandbaby. The hard-nosed retired drill sergeant jumped through hoops like a trained pup for Tori.

No one was immune to her charms.

Despite her parents' immortal bloodlines, Tori was perfectly normal—or so they thought. Really, it was Dominic who was positive she had been spared the burden of carrying Kerrigan's gift of the Light and the curse of his

demonic bloodline. Kerrigan wasn't so sure. Something was amiss, but she couldn't put her finger on it.

Kerrigan took a sip out of the piping hot cup of coffee nestled between her hands. She never used to be a java lover, but late nights spent tending to her darling little girl necessitated the jump-start a jolt of caffeine provided. Just the night before, Tori had awakened from her sleep, screaming with a look of pure terror in her eyes. It wasn't the first time; the nightmares had started when she was a baby. Although they were few and far between, her fear was palpable. A protective mother ready to go to war to protect her daughter, Kerrigan had assumed the worst, but Dominic was sure the hell they had been through was behind them. He thought it was best not to dwell on the few nightmares their daughter had had and blow them out of proportion. Dominic was in denial; Kerrigan was sure of it, but she had no proof and having lost her gift, no way to know for sure.

Dominic's mother was a Guardian Angel, but his sire had been an incubus demon named Drake, so he should have been able to cross into his daughter's dreams. When Kerrigan had asked him to take a peek, he was offended for multiple reasons. He didn't think it was right to go snooping around in someone else's head, but most importantly, he didn't want to be anything like his father. Using that cursed gift would hit way too close to home for his comfort. He had begged her to let it go, to just be happy that they were alive, and to stop trying to find drama where there was none. Definitely in denial.

Not even Lucy could see what was troubling Tori. Each time she held the baby in her arms, a big roadblock—or what appeared as a pitch-black wall—was thrown up to keep Lucy's seer abilities from taking a look-see into Tori's past, present, and future. The black wall was a concern by itself, but what lay behind it? That was what they really needed to get to.

Dominic still hadn't believed there was an issue when Lucy couldn't get a read on Tori. Lucy had said that some had the natural ability to put such a block in place, and with Tori's mixed heritage, it stood to reason why she would be one of those people. Kerrigan still wasn't convinced. She needed to find some way to prove it—before it was too late.

She was shaken from her thoughts when Dominic jogged through the backyard to the porch to greet her. The sun reflected off the gold wedding

band he wore and the resulting glare was just as bright as the breathtaking smile on his face. No longer the brooding, self-loathing man he had been when she first met him, he finally had what he had always wanted—a happy, functional family.

“Good morning, Querida.” He dipped at the knees and gave her a passionate kiss. His breath was warm, the minty taste no longer a residual effect from his ghostly curse but from his mouthwash. “What are you doing up so early? I was trying to let you sleep in today.” He took the cup of coffee from her hands and sipped.

“I haven’t slept a wink since the episode with Tori last night.” Kerrigan had stayed in bed with Tori once she had finally calmed down. “After you went back to bed, she kept telling me about the little boy and the monsters. She was so hot she slept without the covers all night, but she didn’t have a fever. It was the weirdest thing.”

Dominic handed her coffee mug back and walked behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and resting his chin on her shoulder. In the garden, they watched their daughter laugh when a butterfly landed on her finger. She had inherited her Grammy Availia’s laugh and it warmed Kerrigan all over to hear it. She missed her grandmother.

Availia hadn’t appeared to her since the night she, Drew, and Kerrigan had confronted Drake in the cemetery. Although, there was one night that Kerrigan could’ve sworn she caught a glimpse of Sarah and Availia standing next to Tori’s crib. It had given her comfort to think they were watching over her daughter. But she couldn’t help but wonder if Drake might have made a comeback from the pits of Hell to do the same, maybe lurking just out of sight and waiting for his chance to strike. After all, Tori was a special child—the reason Dominic and Kerrigan had been destined to cross paths. Exactly what her purpose was, no one knew, but it was Kerrigan’s job to make sure Tori would be able to fulfill that purpose.

“You worry too much, Querida. I think maybe we need to put our foot down with Auntie Gabe. You know how he likes to snuggle up with her while they watch Supernatural. Of course she’s going to have nightmares.”

Kerrigan smiled to herself. Thanks to Gabe, Tori was already a huge Jensen Ackles fan. He was her boyfriend and she was going to marry him when she grew up. She was also going to marry her daddy and her homosexual uncle, Colton, as well. When Dominic told her Jensen wasn't good enough for his baby girl—because no man ever would be—she had thrown a hissy fit the likes of which only Gabe could've taught her, and said, But I wuv him, Daddy! An' if he don't wuv me back, I'm just gonna died. She was too adorable with her fists on her hips as she stomped her tiny foot. Then her chubby little hands cupped her father's cheek, and those big, teal eyes welled up with tears as her bottom lip quivered. Pwease, Daddy . . . you can't keep me fwom him. You just can't!

Kerrigan smiled at the memory. She wanted her daughter to have so many more great love affairs, and yes, even arguments with her daddy over them. The only way to make sure that happened was to keep her protected, and the most effective way to do that was to anticipate problems before they became too much to defend against.

“Maybe you're right, but I still think we need to be careful. What if Dr—”

Dominic suddenly reached over Kerrigan's shoulder and put his hand over her mouth. “We don't say his name, Querida, remember?” Whether saying his name out loud would actually bring him back, they didn't know, but they were taking every precaution. He removed his hand when she nodded her understanding.

His demeanor made a sudden change from protective father to attentive husband—each as sexy as the other in Kerrigan's opinion. He was going for the distraction, a technique he had more than mastered. One hand discreetly yet brazenly slid down the front of her sleep shorts, and his voice became full of lust next to her ear. “I'm going to go grab a shower. On my way, I think I should find Auntie Gabe and have him keep our beautiful daughter busy so you can join me and I can have some quality playtime of my own with Mommy.” Having found his mark, he cupped his hand between Kerrigan's thighs and pressed his erection against her ass. “What do you think, Querida? Does some playtime with me sound like something you'd be interested in?”

A soft moan from her lips was all the reply he needed.

They had been married for over three years, but it still felt like they were on their honeymoon—not that they ever really had a honeymoon. Every moment they spent together was cherished as if it might be their last. A near brush with death had that effect on a person.

Both of their physical forms had nearly been lost the night they had ascended from Kerrigan's sanctuary to what they could only call the Bosom of Abraham to see their past lives play out before them. The kiss that had sealed the gift Kerrigan had given him had also sealed their fates, but instead of finding themselves in Heaven when they opened their eyes, they found themselves back in their bedroom. It was because of Tori, because she had to live and fulfill her destiny—a destiny that could only be realized if she had been born. And so she was.

Dominic removed his hand and stepped away, swatting Kerrigan's ass and giving her a suggestive look before disappearing into the house. He would be sure to rouse Gabe. Besides, Gabe didn't really have much going on with Colton finishing up his last year of residency at Flagler Hospital, so his whole world revolved around Tori.

Kerrigan turned back to watch Tori, and froze when she saw that a dainty swarm of butterflies had appeared from out of nowhere and fluttered around her. Tori beamed in amazement and giggled so hard she was nearly breathless.

“Look what I did, Mommy! Butterfwies are pretty an' they make me ticklwy all over.”

Stunned, Kerrigan barely registered putting one foot in front of the other to go to her daughter. “Tori? Tori, baby, did you do this?”

Tori nodded, the soft ringlets of her auburn hair bouncing with the movement. “Uh-huh. Does it make you happy, Mommy?”

Was it possible she had inherited the gift of the Light after all?

Kerrigan took Tori by the waist. “How did you do it, baby?”

She shrugged. “I just thinked it, an' now they're here. He told me I could do it, an' I did, Mommy. I did it. See?”

“Yeah, I see, baby. Who said you could do it? Daddy?”

Tori shook her head. “No. The boy, Mommy. The boy in my dweams.”

Kerrigan stared at her, confused by what she was saying.

“Mommy? Did I do somefin bad?” Tori looked ashamed. She had performed a miracle, had been given the greatest gift in the universe, and she felt ashamed.

Kerrigan hugged her tight. “No, baby, you didn’t do anything bad. This is . . . wonderful. Come on. Let’s go tell Daddy so he can be happy, too.”

Chapter 1

Eighteen years later . . .

Cruising at an altitude of thirty-seven thousand feet at four hundred and eighty knots with an ocean deeper than the scientific community could even fathom beneath you should be enough to make anyone feel isolated from the world, like zilch could touch you. There was nothing but skies the color of Carolina blue with clouds the shade of bleached cotton as far as the eye could see. The steady hum of the engines, quiet murmurings of fellow travelers, and the kiss of fresh oxygen blowing across your cheek were about as serene as it could get.

Serenity wasn't helping Tori's situation. She was exhausted: sick and tired of being sick and tired.

Regardless of how tranquil her surroundings, she knew a storm loomed on the horizon. She had been groomed for it since she was a young child. The carrier of mixed bloodlines, she was the key. Whatever in the hell that meant. During her many training sessions with her mother, Kerrigan, Tori was constantly reminded that she wasn't only a Guardian of the Light from the Cruz bloodline, but also a Guardian Angel from her father's. It had been foretold by her great-grandmother, Availia Cruz, that Tori's destiny would be to carry out something monumental, something that might affect the future course of everything they knew. Her mother believed that also made her the Guardian of Mankind. No pressure.

Where her mother acted as if the fate of the world rested in Tori's hands, her father, Dominic, treated her like she was just any other normal teenager. Sure, he was overprotective, but he was also the buffer between his wife and daughter when things got a little too intense around their house. Tori resented the pressure Kerrigan had put on her. It was too much for a teenager to bear. Dominic understood what that felt like, having been in a position similar to that himself at her age. Her parents didn't believe in keeping secrets. She had been told about all the events that led up to her birth, and as overcome as she was by the circumstances of her existence, as special as it made her feel, it was a burden that had been thrust upon her shoulders—one she hadn't asked for in the first place.

Her mother worried incessantly about her, always had for as long as she could remember. It bordered on obsessive behavior at times. If she only knew about the gruesome dreams Tori had been having for most of her young adult life, she'd probably have a conniption. But Tori had kept them well hidden from both her mother and her father, the only evidence of which was in the journal she had kept since she was able to write.

That journal was what preoccupied most of her time and kept her from falling asleep, though it hadn't always worked. She flipped through the worn pages littered with deep indentions from her pen marks, almost afraid to look at the catalogued drawings of the beings she had seen in her dreams. Demons of every shape, size, and color with jagged teeth, pitch-black eyes, razor-sharp claws, and a mission to wreak as much havoc, death, and destruction as they could during the short span of her nightmares.

Since the night of her eighteenth birthday, Tori's nightmares had been more frequent and had felt so much more real. She had been used to seeing disturbing images when she finally fell asleep, but they were few and far between and more prophetic in nature. Sometimes they were insightful, sometimes they were downright horrific, but every time, he was there—a boy turned man whose name she still didn't know. She looked down at her journal and traced the outline of his face on the page in front of her. Unlike the inhuman beings she had seen in her dreams, he was beautiful. Perfect pale skin with just a hint of color on the cheeks, hair so blond at the tips it looked white with infinite darkness at the roots, and eyes that encompassed every hue in the color spectrum like flawless diamonds—just as clear, just as precious.

Whoever he was, he had been there for as long as she could remember, aging as she aged. He had said he was the first, that they were soul mates, only he hadn't ever been reborn like she had. His presence was a contradiction; calming, but edgy at the same time—because when he took his leave from her dreams, that's when they came . . . the demons.

“Waitress! Another round for my boy toy and me here, please?” Gabe called out to the flight attendant. Colton lightly chastised him for treating the attendant like a personal servant, but everyone knew Gabe always got his way, hence the diamond-encrusted wedding band he wore that cost more than his entire wardrobe, which was saying a lot. Colton was a doctor, a very good

doctor. He even had his own practice, but he often volunteered for Doctors Without Borders, traveling a lot to poorer nations where good healthcare was in high demand but seldom available. Gabe never complained. He was proud of his husband, and it didn't hurt that Gabe loved to travel to exotic lands where he presented himself to the locals as someone very famous. Tori was pretty sure he dropped names of celebrities whom he'd never met on more than a few times, and he swore Oprah was his bestie. The locals didn't know any different, and as such, lavished him with attention.

A giggle to her right drew her attention to Kerrigan and Dominic sitting behind Gabe and Colton. They were snuggled up like two teenagers on a couch whose parents had gone out for the night. To a normal teen, it would have been embarrassing to witness to their PDA, especially in front of a group of total strangers, but Tori was happy to see them content and seemingly worry-free for once. They had been so high-strung she thought they had been joking when they had told her they were taking her to Europe for the summer as a graduation present. Not that Tori actually got to go to a high school. Nope, apparently that wasn't a risk worth taking. Ergo, she was home schooled. Whoopee!

Tori smiled warmly when Kerrigan took a drink of her champagne and a bit of it dribbled down her chin. Dominic stopped her from wiping it off, and instead dipped his head to clean her up with his mouth. Gross and extremely embarrassing, but it was clear that despite all they had been through, they were still very much in love.

"I guess it's true what people say. Love does conquer all," Tori mumbled to herself.

Her sight of them was cut off when another passenger stopped in front of her. She scanned the length of the stranger's body from his black leather pants to the white cotton button-up shirt that hung perfectly from his broad shoulders. The top three buttons were undone, giving her a glimpse of the toned, pale chest that lay beneath. When she scanned up to his face, her heart began to pound. It was him.

She swallowed hard and squeezed her eyes shut. "Oh, God . . . I'm dreaming again."

“Is this seat taken?” Not waiting for a reply, he sat next to her and kissed her cheek. “So nice to see you again, Tor. I was beginning to think you were avoiding me.” He looked toward Dominic and Kerrigan. “Your parents really do make the perfect couple, don’t they? Not as perfect as you and me, but still . . .”

He slouched in the seat, propping his foot up so that his right knee was elevated enough to drape his arm over it. “Still keeping that journal, I see,” he said, reaching for it. Tori slammed it shut and moved it away from him. He looked wounded for just a moment before he turned the full power of his gaze and that heart-melting smile on her. He traced the back of her hand with his finger before sliding his hand under hers to hold it. “I’ve missed you.”

Tori sighed in dramatic fashion and rolled her head to the side to regard him. “I don’t suppose today will be the day you tell me your name?” She knew he wouldn’t answer her even as she asked the question, but she linked her fingers through his, relishing his touch and wanting to hold on to him for as long as the dream would allow before they came.

He brought her hand to his lips and kissed her knuckles before resting their joined hands on her lap. “Where are we going? Someplace romantic, I hope.”

Tori didn’t tell him. If he didn’t want to answer her questions, she saw no reason why she should feel obligated to answer any of his.

“You didn’t tell them about me, did you? Because they’ll think you’re crazy and try to come between us, and I’m the only one that can keep them away.” She could have said the words verbatim even before he did because it was the same thing he had said to her in every dream. At first, she hadn’t told anyone about him because she hadn’t thought him to be real, but as the years passed she had come to realize that he was most definitely real, even if she couldn’t see him when she was awake. She knew it would have sounded crazy to anyone else, so she kept the details of his visits to herself.

“Then why do you leave? You know they show up the second you disappear.”

“I love you.” Again with the not answering. He had always expressed feelings for her, always told her he loved her and waited for her to say it back. The sad reality was that he was the only boyfriend she had ever really had, and she did love him, but she was afraid to say the words out loud for

two reasons. If she did, they would find some way to rip him apart—just like they did to all of her other loved ones in her dreams. She had seen her family mutilated more times than she cared to recount. They had always put up quite the fight, but in the end, the demons always won.

Tori took her hand from his and turned away. “Don’t.”

She heard him sigh and then felt the warmth of his hand on her thigh as he turned to whisper in her ear. “You’ll tell me you love me one day, and then I’ll take you away from all of this so that we can be together forever.”

And cue reason number two. He would take her away from her family. Plus, he was very much the possessive sort, which irritated her to forever and back again.

She snapped her head toward him and crossed her arms defiantly over her chest. “I am so tired of people telling me what I’m going to do. What about what I want? Does no one care what will make me happy?”

He licked the inside of his lip and cocked his head to regard her. “I can make you happy. Who knows you better than me, hmm? I know about the darkness inside of you and it doesn’t matter to me. I still love you. Would they?”

“I don’t have darkness inside me. I’ve never done anything bad in my life.”

“Sometimes bad can be really, really good,” he said suggestively as he ogled her breasts.

His long fingers swept over the exposed swell of her cleavage and she smacked his hand away. He laughed. Tori’s reaction to his teasing apparently amused him.

“Playing hard to get today? Or is it the audience? We could always go back to the bathroom and join the mile high club.”

“You want me to lose my virginity in a smelly bathroom the size of a matchbox? And to a figment of my imagination at that?”

“You know I’m not a figment of your imagination.” He took her hand and placed it on the very noticeable bulge that strained against the soft leather of his pants. “Imagination? I don’t think so.”

Tori yanked her hand away in embarrassment, which only made him laugh again. “Stop it.” She looked around at the other passengers, but none of them seemed a bit concerned by what was happening right in front of them. That was probably because even in her dreams, no one ever saw him. No one but her.

The plane hit a patch of turbulence and began to shake, gently at first and then gradually increasing in intensity. He sighed and leaned forward, brushing his lips across hers. “That’s my cue. I have to go.”

As he started to pull away, Tori grabbed him and kissed him harder. “Don’t go . . . please. They’ll come.”

He stroked her cheek and then took her chin between his fingers. “Tell me you love me.”

Her lips parted, poised to say the words, but she just couldn’t do it. “You know I do.”

He shook his head. “That’s not good enough. You have to say it out loud.”

“But if I do you’ll take me away and I’ll never see my parents or anyone else I love again.”

“They don’t love you like I love you. We’re meant to be together forever, Tori. Just you and me . . . for eternity.”

“If that’s true, then why won’t you tell me your name?”

“Because if I do then I’m the one who will have to go away, and we can never be together again.”

This was yet another mystery to which he wouldn’t give her a clue, so it was useless to even ask why that was the case. He may not have told her everything she wanted to know, but he never lied to her either. That had to count for something. In the end, she knew he only wanted to protect her, to protect what they had together. She refused to lose him, but she couldn’t lose her family either, so she would just have to endure the torture of her nightmares until she figured out another way.

Just like she knew he wouldn't answer her questions, he knew she wouldn't say the words he wanted to hear, so he pulled her hands from his shoulders and stood to leave.

Tori stood as well and turned around with her knee in the seat. "Where do you go when you leave me?"

He stopped, but didn't turn to face her as he hung his head in shame. "You know where I go. Behind the wall, where you've kept me locked away for your entire life." Without another word, he walked toward the rear of the plane until he disappeared completely.

Tori looked around, frantically searching out the demons she knew had to be there, but finding none. She found her parents, but even as the champagne in their glasses vibrated from the relentless turbulence, they didn't seem to notice it at all. Her teeth clanked together with the force of the jarring and she clenched them to keep from chipping a tooth or biting her tongue off.

Just then she heard screams coming from the passenger cabin behind where she sat in first class. Men, women, and even children—all of them vocalizing the terror they felt right before their lives were brutally cut short. The demons were there, and they were coming her way.

A loud explosion outside the plane drew Tori's attention to the window. The engine was on fire, black smoke gushing from the flames and leaving a trail behind them in the sky like a comet's tail. She sniffed the air and it reeked of death and destruction. She snapped her head toward her parents and found they were definitely paying attention to what was going on around them now.

Smoke filled the cabin and oxygen masks dropped from overhead just as the plane listed to the side. There was another loud explosion from the other side of the plane. It didn't take a genius to figure out they had lost another engine.

Thick, inky streaks of smoke shot into the first-class cabin and whipped around the passengers until, one by one, the demons began to take shape. Their victims had about half a second to register the horror before their lives came to an end. Six-inch claws impaled and slashed, shark-like teeth severed heads from bodies, and gargantuan fists crushed bones with just one blow. Not all of the initial attacks granted a short death. No, the demons liked to play with their prey, make them beg to die.

Tori squeezed her eyes shut and covered her ears to block out the sights and sounds of those being tortured all around her. The demons never attacked her physically, but the mental and emotional abuse was far worse torture. She would've preferred to die a thousand times over in her nightmares than to have to witness the death and devastation of her dreams.

Steeling her nerve, Tori opened her eyes and decided to brave the chaos around her in an attempt to make it to her parents. Maybe if she was with them, if she shielded them with her own body, the demons would spare them just this one time.

She didn't have time to try to navigate around the thick pools of blood and flesh at her feet. The largest of the demons had just offed a victim and had its sights set on the place where Kerrigan and Gabe clung to each other. Colton and Dominic stood in front of them, blocking the demons' advance. Tori hadn't even made it to the middle of the plane when it violently tilted to the left and she was knocked off balance and slammed against the wall. Her stomach jumped into her chest as they began to make a rapid plunge toward the ocean below.

“We're going down! We're going down! We're going—” The pilot's announcement was cut off, a blood-curdling scream replacing his words.

Just then, there was a loud crack behind her. She was barely able to turn her head to the side enough so that she could read the bold red letters that told her she was pinned to the emergency exit door. The instant she registered what was about to happen, the door exploded from its casing, leaving a gaping hole in the side of the plane. The force of the cabin depressurizing sucked Tori through the opening. She grabbed onto the frame around the hole and held on for dear life.

“Tori!” She looked up to see her panicked mother's face and the determination in her father's eyes.

“Don't let go, baby! Daddy's coming!” Dominic shoved a smaller demon out of his way, his strength magnified in light of his desperation.

Tori's fingers began to slip, the force of the vacuum weakening her grip. “Daddy!” Tears flowed from her eyes, but the force of wind blowing at her

whipped them out into the sky instead of allowing them to fall down her cheeks. “Daddy, I can’t hold on!”

“Don’t let go! I’m almost there!”

Kerrigan screamed from behind him, and Tori looked to see her mother pinned to the roof of the plane by two smaller imp demons while the largest sank its teeth into her stomach. Colton was ripped limb from limb, while Gabe sat catatonic, covered in his husband’s blood.

Sobs racked Tori. She had never been able to save any of them in her past nightmares, and she was foolish to think she’d be able to do so now. Nothing about her dreams ever changed. She found it hard to find a reason to try to hold on any longer. “Daddy . . .” she cried. Dominic reached out to take her hand just as a talon demon lunged at him, ramming its claws into his back. His chest bowed and he screamed out in pain, but still he fought. It was no use. Tori’s fingers slipped and she fell from the plane.

“Tori!” Dominic called out to her, his hand still outstretched; his eyes wide open in fear even as the demon continuously impaled him from behind.

She eased into her fall, not even trying to fight it because at least she knew it would all be over soon. She never died in her dreams, and they only ever ended once the demons had had their fill.

“Tori! Wake up!” She was jolted awake by the relentless shaking of her father’s firm hand on her shoulder. She sat up and looked around, seeing everything as it had been before the demons came.

A ding sounded from overhead and she looked up, noticing the fasten seat belt sign was illuminated.

“We’re about to land, so I thought I’d wake you.” Concern etched the worry lines of Dominic’s brow. “Are you okay, baby girl?”

The flight attendant’s voice came over the speaker. “The captain has informed me that we are about to make our descent to Heathrow Airport. Please fasten your seat belts until we have landed safely and the airplane has come to a complete stop. On behalf of British Airways, we would like to

welcome you to London, England. We hope you enjoy your stay as much as we've enjoyed having you on our flight."

"Sir, you need to take your seat," another attendant told Dominic.

"I'm not going anywhere until I find out whether or not my little girl is okay." He ignored the attendant's annoyed sigh and turned his attention back to Tori. "Tor? You good?"

She gave her father a halfhearted smile and nodded. "I'm fine. Just glad to be getting back on the ground."