

barely breathing



rebecca donovan

Barely Breathing

by Rebecca Donovan

KINDLE EDITION

~~~~~

PUBLISHED BY

Rebecca Donovan on Kindle

Reason to Breathe

Copyright © 2012 by Rebecca Donovan

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under the U.S Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system without the prior written permission of the author.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

# Table of Contents

---

## Prologue

1. Try Again
2. Fireworks
3. Still Loved
4. "Home"
5. People Change
6. Lifestyles
7. Social Life
8. Intensity
9. Just Not Right
10. Distraction
11. All Better
12. "F" Valentine's Day
13. Overreaction
14. Under the Surface
15. Another Chance
16. Ready?
17. Freaked
18. Story Time
19. Waiting for Friday
20. No Such Thing as "Normal"
21. Drama
22. Inside Out
23. Boundaries
24. Happy Birthday
25. All Over Again
26. Disappointment
27. Lines Blurred
28. To the Extreme
29. Fatherly Advice
30. Unexpected Future
31. What If
32. In the Woods
33. Consequences
34. Confessions
35. Everyone Hurts
36. Restless
37. Into a Nightmare
38. Covering Up
39. Breathe for Me
40. Honest Truth
41. Power of Suggestion
42. Something To Hold On To

**43. Spontaneity**

**44. In the End**

---

**Epilogue**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**  
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

## Prologue

---

Six months ago, I was dead. My heart didn't beat within my chest. Breath did not pass between my lips. Everything was gone, and I was dead.

It's not easy to think about, not existing—despite how much I fought to be forgettable all those years. So I've chosen not to think of it at all.

My therapist asked me to write down my thoughts and feelings in this journal. After months of avoiding the assignment, I figured I should try it once—then maybe I could finally get some sleep. I'm doubtful, but I'll try anything.

I don't honestly remember what happened that night. I get glimpses and moments of panic in my nightmares, but the details evade me. And I'm not looking to fill in the blanks.

I woke up in a hospital bed, barely able to talk, with dark bruises on my neck. There were bandages wrapped around my wrists to protect the raw skin. A sling supported my dislocated shoulder, and a cast concealed my ankle after reconstructive surgery. I don't know what I went through to end up this way. All I care about is that I'm breathing.

The police asked questions. The doctors asked questions. The lawyers asked questions. Whenever they'd start to talk about the details, I'd close them off, or leave the room. Evan and Sara promised to keep the details from me as well. They weren't there that night, but they were in the courtroom for the entire trial—as brief as it was.

Carol...

It's so hard to even write her name. She pled guilty. I didn't have to see her. I didn't have to testify. I didn't have to listen to the witnesses' testimonies. They summoned Sara and Evan, and I couldn't be there for that either—even though the lawyers requested my presence.

And George... from what little I overheard, he was there that night. He was the one who called the ambulance. They didn't press charges. I begged them not to. Leyla and Jack need their dad. And now. Now I don't even know where they are. ~~I hope they remember how much~~ Sorry. I can't. It hurts too much to think about them.

Sara and Evan have barely left my side since that night. I've tried to assure them that I'm okay, but they just have to look at the circles under my eyes to know that I'm not. In truth, I don't want to be alone.

There was some press, but it was a closed trial, and the records are sealed because I'm a minor (I'm pretty sure Sara's father had some influence over that too) —so there wasn't much for the papers to write about.

The town exploded with news of the attempted murder, and you can only imagine what it was like to return to school, or to be seen anywhere in Weslyn. Whispers. Pointing. Eyes following me everywhere. I've become a morbid celebrity—the girl who survived death.

Even the teachers treat me differently, like they're waiting for me to shatter. The small group that confronted me that day are especially wary. Their interference is what put the whole ordeal in motion. They'd made a call to the authorities before speaking with me, and then called George when I left the school.

Carol must have found out about their call to George, or maybe someone from the state contacted her to look into the allegations. Either way, she was desperate for me to disappear —forever. But it doesn't matter what made her do it. She can't hurt me now.

I do hurt. I'm not going to deny that. Especially since no one will ever see this journal. My ankle will probably never be the same, and will remain a constant reminder of what I went through. I fought

to recover, and despite the anticipated outcome, I returned to the soccer field four months later. At the beginning, I would cry in the shower after each practice and game. The pain was almost unbearable. But now I barely notice it.

Nothing looks the same anymore. Nothing feels the same. I'm not sure how to explain this to Sam and Evan. I don't know if they'd understand. I'm not sure that I do.

She wanted me dead.

I keep telling myself that she's gone. She's in prison where she can stay for as long as forever, as far as I'm concerned. But I don't feel safe. Especially when I close my eyes each night and she's right there waiting for me.

I need to get out of Weslyn. Away from the stares. Away from the shadows that continue to haunt me. Away from the pain that paralyzes me when I least expect it. Six more months and all of it will be gone. I get to start again, with the two people I love most in the world.

Then again, my life is anything but predictable, and a lot can happen in six months.

## 1. Try Again

---

*It's just a dream.* I recognized the thought, trying to pull me out of the hands that drug me to the darkest depths of the water. But panic overshadowed the rational thought, and I kicked as hard as I could. *It's just a dream,* my voice echoed through my head again, trying to wake me.

I looked down into the murky water, my breath burning in my lungs. The hands were now long, jagged claws, and as I kicked, one claw pierced my ankle, anchoring me under the water. A dark cloud surrounded me as the blood oozed around its nails. I struggled against it, but it only tore deeper into me. A rush of air bubbled around me as I screamed in pain. I was about to inhale my death when something pressed against my face.

It didn't feel like a dream anymore.

I shot up with a gasp, the pillow falling from my face. Disoriented and panting, I searched the room. Sara stood frozen by her bed, her eyes wide and mouth open.

"I'm so sorry," she muttered. "I thought I heard you talking. I thought you were awake."

"I'm awake," I exhaled quickly. With a deep breath, I pushed the panic away. Sara remained stunned even after I'd recovered.

"I shouldn't have thrown the pillow on your head. I'm really sorry," she frowned guiltily.

"What are you talking about?" I brushed off her apology. "It was just a dream. I'm fine." After another deep breath to ease the shaking, I pulled back the covers. They clung to the layer of sweat covering my body.

"Good morning, Sara." I said as normally as I could.

"Good morning, Emma," she finally returned, forced out of her guilt-ridden stupor. And just like that, it was over, thankfully. "I'm going to take a shower. We have to hurry. We're leaving in an hour." She grabbed her things and disappeared.

I'd been trying to prepare myself for this day for over a month. It didn't matter. I was still freaked out just thinking about it. And now it was here.

I collapsed back on the bed and stared up at the white glowing skylights that lined the ceiling, the morning sun hidden behind the snow.

I looked around the room that had no true connection to me—the large flatscreen hanging on the wall, and a vanity in the corner, lined with makeup that had seen way too many makeovers at my expense. There were pictures of laughing friends taped to the mirror, and vibrant art adorned the walls. No reminder of my life before I came here. It was the place where I'd been hiding—hiding from the judgment, whispers and stares.

Why was I here? I knew the answer. If I had the choice, I'd never leave. It's not like I had anywhere else to go, and the McKinleys wouldn't turn their backs on me. They were the only family I had, and for that I would always be grateful. But that wasn't completely the truth. They *weren't* the only family I had.

So when the phone rang while Sara was in the shower, I sucked in all the courage I could gather, picked up the phone to my ear and said, "Hi."

"Oh! You're there," my mother exclaimed, completely taken by surprise. "I'm so glad I was finally able to catch you. How are you?"

"I'm fine," I replied, my heart stammering in my chest. "Um, so you have plans tonight?"

"Just a party with some friends," she replied, sounding just as awkward as I felt. "Listen. I was hoping we could try, you know... I mean, I live pretty much in Weslyn now if you ever decide you'd like to..."

"Yeah, sure," I blurted, before I lost my nerve, "I'll live with you."

"Oh, um, okay," she responded in strained excitement. "Really?"

"Sure," I answered, trying to sound sincere. "I mean, I'm leaving for college soon, so better to reconnect now than when I'm across the country, right?"

She was silent, probably digesting that I'd just invited myself to move in. "Uh, yeah, that sounds great. When are you thinking?"

"Since I go back to school on Monday, how about Sunday?"

"Meaning, *this* Sunday? As in, three days from now?" There was no hiding the panic in her voice. My heart skipped a beat. She wasn't ready to take me back, was she?

"Would that be okay? I mean, I don't need anything, just a bed, or even a couch. But if it's too much... Sorry, I shouldn't have—"

"No... no, that's perfect," she stumbled. "Um, I have time to get your room ready, so... sure. Sunday it is. I live on Decatur Street. I'll text you the address."

"Okay. I'll see you Sunday then."

"Yup," my mother replied, the shock still lingering in her tone. "Happy New Year, Emily."

"You too," I returned before hanging up the phone. I stared up at the ceiling. What did I just do? What was I thinking?

I grabbed my things and walked past Sara into the bathroom, trying to control the panic rising inside of me. By the time I emerged, I had come to terms with it. It was what I had to do.

"So, I have something to tell you," I began, sitting on the stool next to Sara while her mother, Anna, poured herself a cup of coffee. "I spoke to my mother this morning..."

"It's about time," Sara interrupted. "You've only been ignoring her for like six months."

"What did she have to say?" Anna encouraged, ignoring Sara's outburst.

"Well... I'm moving in with her this Sunday." I held my breath as I watched the news sink in.

Sara's spoon clanged inside the cereal bowl, but she didn't say a word.

"What made you decide that was the best thing to do?" Anna asked calmly, diverting attention from Sara's silent disapproval.

"She's my mother," I shrugged. "I'm leaving for college soon, and I don't think I'll have another opportunity to try to fix us. I haven't exactly been fair to her, and she keeps trying to connect, so I thought this was the best way to do it."

Anna nodded, considering my explanation. Sara stood up and briskly walked to the sink to drop her bowl in, still unable to look at me.

"Well, Carl and I will need to talk about it since we were given guardianship until you're eighteen. And I'd really like to meet her before anything's final. Okay?"

I nodded, not expecting Anna's answer. I wasn't used to having a parent actually care about me, so I didn't really know what to say.

"I understand why you want to do this," Anna assured with a soft smile. "Let us just talk about it first, that's all."

"Thanks," I accepted. "It would mean a lot to get to know my mother again."

Sara stormed up the stairs without a single word. I exhaled deeply before following her up the stairs.

"Okay, say it," I demanded flatly while Sara shoved items into her overnight bag.

"I don't have anything to say," Sara quipped. But she did; it just took a three hour car ride to the hotel and a day of primping before it came out.



After a day of being prepped and primed from head to toe in Newport, I was exhausted, and I hadn't even gone to the party yet. Or maybe it was the drama of the impromptu decision to move with my mother that drained my energy. Either way, I was having a hard time looking forward to tonight.

"I don't understand why you're moving in with her," Sara reprimanded out of nowhere as she smoothed the brush over my lids. "Couldn't you start with... uh... *talking* first? I just don't like it. She left you, Em. Why go back?"

"Sara, please," I implored quietly, "I need to do this. I know it seems messed up to you, but it's important to me. It's not like you're losing me or anything. And if it's *horrible*, I'll move back in with you. I feel like I should give her another chance."

Sara sighed dramatically. "I still don't think it's a good idea, but..." she paused a moment, "you're one of the most stubborn people I know, and if this is what you want to do, I know I won't be able to talk you out of it. Um, you can open your eyes now."

I stretched my eyes open and blinked, the mascara sticking along my lashes.

She deliberated, finally conceding with a roll of her eyes, "Fine. Live with her. But she'd better not do anything monumentally stupid like she did when she left you with *psycho*."

I grinned, adoring Sara's protectiveness. "Thank you. So... how do I look?"

"Amazing, of course," Sara gloated, taking in her masterpiece. "I'm going to put my dress on, and then we'll be ready to meet the guys in the lobby."

I picked up the note that had been waiting for us when we returned to the hotel and ran my thumb over the elegant script.

*Dear Emily and Sara,*

*I am thrilled that you have arrived safely and hope you enjoy your afternoon together. I am looking forward to seeing you this evening for dinner. I have arranged for the car to pick you up along with Evan and Jared at 6:45pm for our 7:00pm reservation.*

*I have no doubt that you will enjoy all that has been planned this evening!*

*Sincerely,*

*Vivian Mathews*

"I hope I don't embarrass her," I hollered through the bathroom door.

"Stop being so nervous," Sara returned. "Vivian really wants you there. This is important to her. She's even convinced Jared to take me so I could be here with you."

I grinned, knowing that Jared didn't need much convincing.

"What do you think? You haven't said anything about how you look."

"Oh, uh," I stepped in front of the full length mirror, and my lips curled up naturally. There was a slight resemblance to the girl who preferred jeans and a ponytail, the girl who still couldn't conquer applying makeup on her own. Her light brown eyes glistened under a shimmer of pink and dark lashes. And her full lips, veiled with gloss, were smiling back with cheeks of red.

I turned to the side and the layers of chiffon flowed beneath me. My fingers traced the soft pink embroidered design on the champagne corseted top. Sara chose the same shade of pink to weave in my hair, resembling an inset headband, with a pile of soft curls artistically stacked at the nape of my neck. I picked up the finishing touch from the dresser and secured it around my neck, allowing my fingertips to brush the sparkling diamond as I did the day he'd given it to me.

As Sara stepped out of the bathroom, I turned toward the door with my cheeks aglow, ready to thank her for her ingenious transformation, but I was held speechless at the sight of her. The sapphire blue

dress skimmed her body, brushing her curves in a shimmering dance. Large curls of red traipsed over her right shoulder. She looked... worshipable.

---

"Jared is in so much trouble," I gaped. "Sara, you look amazing." I wasn't sure why I was so in awe. She was the most desired girl in school for a reason, but I guess I forgot that most of the time because she was just *Sara* to me. There was no denying her modelesque figure and Hellenic beauty now.

Sara smiled vibrantly, revealing perfect white teeth behind her glossy red lips. "Maybe he is."

"Sara, please don't tell me you're going to sleep with him," I begged.

"Relax. I won't," she said with a roll of her eyes. "But it doesn't mean we can't have fun."

My phone beeped, distracting me from her comment. *Spoke with Carl and we called Rachel. She's so sweet, and I believe she wants this too. Meeting her on Saturday, but it looks like everything's all set for Sunday.*

Sara handed me my jacket and the bag that held Evan's gift. "Your parents are letting me move in with her," I announced.

"Well, then I guess it's official." Sara held the door open for me to follow.

"I guess so," I returned, my stomach flipping with the realization.

I thought my knees might give out when we rounded the corner into the main lobby and I saw the back of the black tailored jacket. My eyes trailed to find his usually tousled light brown hair neatly swept to the side in a more distinguished look. He was caught up in a conversation with his brother and didn't notice as we approached.

Evan stopped mid-sentence when Jared's mouth dropped open. Jared *was* in trouble, and it was written all over his face as Sara sauntered toward him.

I couldn't feel my legs moving as Evan turned around. My heart stopped at the sight of his smoldering blue eyes, and a rush of heat filled my cheeks when his mouth formed that perfect smile. It had only been two weeks since he'd left for his skiing trip, but for some reason it was like I was seeing him for the first time all over again.

"Hi," I whispered. He stepped up to take my hand, our connection unbroken since our eyes first met.

"Hi," he responded, still smiling. He tilted his head down to kiss me, but Sara interrupted.

"We need to go or we'll be late."

"Sure," Evan replied, instantly snapped back to the bustling lobby of formally dressed people, most likely attending the same event. He helped me slip on my jacket. I slid on black leather gloves in preparation for January's freeze and took his hand again.

"What's that?" Evan asked, gesturing toward the bag.

"A surprise," I grinned, having waited so long to give it to him it was killing me.

"I have one of those too," he smirked, holding the door open for me.

"One what?"

"A surprise," he revealed, smiling wider and sending another rush of color to my cheeks.

I ducked into the limo and slid in beside Sara, since she was sitting across from Jared. Evan was forced to sit next to his brother, leaving my hand empty. I glanced across at him, and we silently exchanged the *I wish I were sitting next to you too* look.

The limo pulled into a circular cobblestone driveway, and the driver came around to open the door. The restaurant resembled a mansion more than a dining establishment, with multiple eaves and glowing windows on each level.

We were escorted to a private patio that was glassed in for the winter season, offering a spectacular view of the dark rolling ocean.

"Wonderful! You're here," Vivian greeted brightly with open arms. She gripped each of her sons by

the shoulders as they bent to kiss her on the cheek, then admired Sara and I after the guys helped remove our jackets.

“Exquisite,” she declared, wrapping us each in her signature brief embrace with a brush of her lips on our cheeks. “Come. Sit down.”

Stuart remained unmoved. Not giving us a glance since our arrival. He stoically gazed out at the ocean holding a glass of ice, filled with caramel colored liquor.

At Vivian’s insistence, we each found a seat. I made certain to sit next to Evan at the rectangular table, with Jared and Sara across from us and Vivian and Stuart at each end. Evan took my hand under the draped table, instantly calming my nerves.

The polite small talk began. I tried my best not to participate unless a question or comment was directed my way, and of course each time it was, I usually had my mouth full or was in mid-gulp. Sara pressed her lips together to keep from laughing, which only made me squirm uncomfortably.

After surviving the anxiety inducing dinner, I excused myself to use the restroom and promised to meet Evan in the foyer.

It was a struggle to hold the chiffon over my head so it wouldn't fall in the toilet. I was standing outside the bathroom door, smoothing the layers back in place, when I heard, “I don’t want to talk about this again.”

I remained still. Not sure if I should continue around the corner, or wait until they were done. I was thankful I decided not to walk in on, “She’s not your future, Evan. It’s about time you realized that. I won’t allow you to pass up on Yale to follow a girl, especially *that* one, across the country.”

“It’s not your choice to make for me, Dad,” Evan bit back. “I don’t expect *you* to understand.”

“Stuart, what are you doing?” Vivian beckoned from afar. “We’re going to be late.”

I remained still, having collapsed flat against the restroom door with my heart pounding and my mind racing. What just happened? I knew Stuart was withdrawn, but I had no idea it was because he didn’t approve of me. His reaction sunk in, and my lip quivered.

I bit my lip, taking a deep breath to compose myself. Then I walked around the corner and forced a smile when I saw Evan waiting for me with my jacket over his arm.

“Are you okay?” he asked, inspecting my face. I pushed my smile wider with a nod of my head. I slipped my arms into the jacket with my back toward Evan, afraid he could see right through me.

Evan held the door open and allowed me to lead the way to the limo. Sara and Jared were across from us, lost in conversation about who they deemed to be the best guitarist.

Evan took my hand. “Are you shaking?”

“It’s cold,” I lied, wanting to roll my eyes at my involuntary “tell”. Evan wrapped his arm around me to warm me up. I eased away the nerves, nuzzling into him.

“Wow,” Sara admired the up lit mansion as the limo slowly crept in line with the others. A streak of nerves twisted my stomach. I felt like I was nearing the head of the line for a death defying rollercoaster ride.

“They’re just people,” Evan assured in my ear, probably noticing I wasn’t breathing. I exhaled and relax my shoulders, squeezing his hand.

Just people soaked in jewels of every color or poised in tailored tuxedos, full of judgment and snide comments, I thought. We made our way through the glitz covered bodies shimmering in the candlelight. The voices swirled in time with the smooth jazz band in the ballroom.

Everywhere I looked, I was struck by more brilliance.

“Mrs. Mathews, this is incredible,” Sara gawked. “I’ve never seen anything so beautiful.”

"I'm not so sure my sons would agree," Vivian replied with a sparkling smile. My cheeks grew warm when Evan squeezed my hand. "This did turn out more spectacular than I could have hoped. I am so happy to have you all here with me. I need to greet a few more guests, but I will be expecting the dance later, Evan." The corner of her mouth rose as she met her son's eyes, and she glided away in the antiqued ivory dress that floated around her. Vivian was picturesque sophistication with her blond hair swept back into a French twist. I admired how collected she always remained, even in a setting that was completely overwhelming to me.

"What was that about?" Sara demanded, looking at Evan. "Do you have some crazy dance moves or something?"

Jared laughed, and Evan shot him a warning glance. "Evan's Mom's *dance partner*. My father refuses, and I failed out of the lessons..."

"You took lessons?" Sara laughed, interrupting Jared.

"Yes," Evan finally admitted. "My mother loves to dance. And I seem to be the only one who can keep up with her without stepping on her toes." He glared at Jared, who sneered mockingly back at him.

"I can't wait to see this," Sara smirked.

We found a lounge set in a corner away from the stifling conversations, and immersed ourselves in the details of Evan and Jared's skiing trip in France.

"Oh, Em, did you tell Evan about the news?" Sara burst out. It took me a moment to remember what she was talking about, hoping she wasn't about to ruin the surprise I had wrapped in the box.

"No," I said slowly, then remembered with a slight nod. "Oh, I'm moving in with my mother this weekend," I confessed casually, like I just announced I was buying a new pair of shoes.

Jared had no idea why this was big news, but Evan narrowed his eyes. "You're doing what?" he asked.

"Your mother's looking for you," Stuart interrupted from behind us. Evan turned around to view Vivian scanning the crowd. She raised her hand when she located him.

"I'll be right back," Evan announced, rising to escort his mother to the dance floor. I turned toward Sara, but she and Jared were already making their way through the crowd, not wanting to miss the spectacle. I was left alone in Stuart's shadow.

Feeling I couldn't just walk away without appearing completely rude, I fumbled with something intelligent to say. Instead I said, "This is quite the party, huh?"

He peered down at me as if I'd spoken in a foreign tongue, shook his head slightly and walked away.

"Okay then," I mouthed, glancing around to see if anyone had witnessed my humiliation. I picked my way through the crowd to the ballroom. The dance floor was full of couples, but one couple stood out amongst them. They floated around with ease and grace to the cool rhythms of the Sinatra song sung by a lanky crooner.

"Omigod," Sara gasped next to me with a glass of champagne in her hand. "They can really *dance*." My mouth popped open at the sight of Evan leading Vivian in a perfect stance, cradling her hand in his. Her eyes sparkled as they twirled around the dance floor, their feet in perfect unison.

"Told you," Jared interjected. "Kinda scary good, right?"

"Very," I floundered, finding that there were way too many things about Evan I still didn't know.

The song concluded, and there was an overwhelming burst of applause. Evan appeared uncomfortable, while Vivian smiled brightly. At that moment a woman with short white hair in a long-sleeved black dress stepped up to the mic. Stuart joined Vivian, and Evan spotted the three of us on the

opposite side of the dance floor.

~~“Wow,” I admired when he slid his arm around my waist. He shrugged abashedly and redirected his attention to the speaker.~~

The woman went on to recognize Vivian’s philanthropic accomplishments over the years, acknowledging her success and dedication to each cause and organization. She’d invested not only time, but her passion. I listened intently, completely astounded by all that Vivian had done. The presentation concluded with a roar of applause, and the white haired woman handed Vivian an award made of crystal with a kiss on her cheek.

The music picked up again, and we met Vivian, along with every other person in the audience congratulating her affectionately. Evan hugged his mother, followed by Jared and Sara. I went to congratulate her as well. She wrapped her arms around me tighter and longer than she’d ever done before and whispered into my ear, “I’m so glad you’re here with us.”

My eyes watered instantly, understanding the intended meaning of her words. She released me and I was pulled in another direction, with more words of praise.

Evan took my hand and led me away from the crowd. I was still caught up in the moment, my head buzzing with emotion.

“Let’s get out of here,” Evan said in my ear.

“What? You want to leave?” I searched his face, baffled by his request.

“Yeah. I want to show you something.”

“Okay,” I responded, still so very confused. We retrieved our coats, and Evan escorted me out the door without saying good-bye to anyone.

## 2. Fireworks

---

Evan led me down the long driveway lined with limousines and town cars. We approached the parking lot, and I recognized Evan's BMW.

"When did your car get here?" I asked suspiciously.

"I drove it here earlier," he shared with a crooked grin. That's when I realized this was part of his plan, the *surprise* he referenced when we left the hotel.

He opened the passenger-side door and pulled out a backpack. He unzipped it and handed me a pair of sneakers. I eyed him apprehensively, recognizing the shoes that were supposed to be Sara's—which meant Sara was in on this too.

"I figured they would be more comfortable than the heels," he explained, tossing his black dress shoes on the floor of the car, along with his tux jacket and tie, and lacing up a pair of sneakers. I sat on the passenger seat, switching out my shoes.

I had tried to figure out his plans in the past with little success, so I learned just to go along with them without too many questions—unless he walked us to the edge of a cliff and asked me to jump. Then I would have something to say.

Evan found my hand again, and we continued toward the cobblestoned street lined with lanterns. My shoulder brushed against him as we walked with the crisp air swirling around us. The sky was clear, allowing the full moon to follow us like a spotlight.

We hadn't walked very far when Evan pulled me between two hedges that lined the bordering property.

"Evan, where are we going?" I demanded in a panic, fearing we were trespassing and about to get caught.

"They're not home," he assured me, our feet crunching in the glistening layer of untouched snow. I looked up to find a tall mansion with dramatic peaks. The windows were dark.

"But I'm sure they have an alarm system or something," I argued, looking around nervously, anticipating the arrival of flashing lights. I continued after him, faltering on the collapsing surface. I was forced to lift my layers out of the ankle deep snow to keep from tripping.

"Stop worrying," he laughed, supporting me by my elbow. "My mother knows the people who live here and even invited them to the party tonight. They're in Brazil. I spoke with them myself about what I wanted to do, and they couldn't care less. We're not going in their house or anything."

"Really?" I questioned, slightly doubtful.

"Really," Evan confirmed again with a smile. "Trust me."

We walked beneath the long shadows of the mansion to the back terrace. I stopped in my tracks at the sight of a flickering light. "I thought you said no one was home."

Evan laughed again, amused by my overly panicked state. "They're *not*. This is for us. I paid the limo driver to start the fire and bring over our bags."

"Oh."

It was a charming setting, with two Adirondack chairs set before a fireplace on the stone terrace sheltered by an overhang. A portable Bose system and my gift were set on a small table off to the side. "I like this," I beamed up at him.

We walked over to the small fireplace and stood in front of the crackling fire, absorbing its warmth. Evan stepped behind me and slid his arms around my waist, holding me against him. I turned to face him with a ridiculous smile spread across my face. "I've missed you."

"I've missed you, too." Evan bent down to find me. His nose was cold against my cheek, but he

breath on my lips instantly warmed my entire body. He pressed his firm mouth softly against mine and lingered there just long enough for me to lose my breath before pulling away. My eyes remained closed, savoring the buzz on my lips.

"I'm glad you came tonight," he said, hovering inches away. "I know it was hard for you. But it meant a lot to my mother."

"I'm glad I came too. I wouldn't have wanted to miss hearing all that was said about Vivian. She was amazing; I had no idea."

Evan leaned over and kissed me, running his hand down the side of my face.

"Do you want your present?" Evan asked when he pulled back. I began to smile, but faltered. Confusion flashed across his face. "You don't?"

All I could hear were Stuart Mathews' disapproving words, and I wasn't so sure I was excited to give him my gift any longer. "Can we wait?" I requested awkwardly.

"Uh, no," Evan responded with his brows pulled together, retrieving the small rectangular box from the table. "But, you can open yours first if it makes you feel better."

I took it from his hands nervously.

"Go on, open it," he encouraged impatiently. I tore the silver paper to find a long rectangular box that looked expensive. I held my breath when I opened it. A gleaming smile spread across my face when I pulled out two concert tickets.

"Evan!" I jumped up to wrap my arms around his neck. "Yes! This is the perfect gift. Thank you."

"You're welcome," Evan replied, hugging me back. "I wanted to be the one to take you to your first concert."

"When is it?" I inspected the ticket for the date. "The end of the month. Great. I won't have to wait too long."

"I almost bought a third one for Sara because I know how much she loves the band, but I decided this was just for us."

I laughed, already hearing Sara's groan in my head when I showed her the tickets to the sold-out show she'd been dying to see.

I put the tickets back in the box and tucked it into the inside pocket of my coat. Evan looked at me in anticipation. I pressed my lips together, fighting the urge to make up some reason not to give him his gift—but I knew I had to.

"So, I hope you like it." I removed the shiny green wrapped box from the bag and handed it to him, holding my breath as he opened it. He took off the lid and looked from what was inside to me, then back down again.

"Does this mean?" His eyes lit up and his mouth curled into a stunning smile as he set the box on the chair. Despite my reservations, I couldn't help but smile back—his excitement was too contagious.

"You got in!" He swept his arms around my waist and picked me up. I yelled out in surprise, laughing.

"Em, I'm so happy for you." He kissed and hugged me again.

"When did you find out?" Evan couldn't stop smiling.

"Ten days ago," I shared as he set me back on the ground.

"Wow. That must have been hard not to tell anyone," he admired, knowing how much I'd wanted this. "Stanford. You totally deserve this. You didn't even tell me that you applied for early admission."

I averted my eyes sheepishly. "It was hard. But I did tell Sara—sorry."

"When I said *anyone*, I didn't count her. She's a given." The excitement continued to seep in. "Now I just have to find out which school accepts me so I can join you."

My smile faltered again.

“What?” Evan asked, his brow furrowed in confusion.

I opened my mouth to speak, but then immediately closed it.

“Say it,” he demanded. “Let me in that head of yours before you start thinking things you shouldn’t.”

“Too late,” I confessed with a guilty shrug. I paused again before I revealed, “I heard your dad.” Evan opened his mouth, about to spew some not so happy words, when I interrupted, “He’s right.”

He stopped and stared at me. “About what?”

“You can’t make one of the biggest decisions of your life based on a girl.”

Evan smirked. Not the reaction I expected. “Okay.” My eyes widened at his casual response. He continued to wear his infamous amused grin as he added, “Because Stanford and Berkeley are *horrible* schools, and I’d be jeopardizing my whole future if I went to California. You’re right. We should just break up now since there’s no point in us considering each other in any decisions we make about our futures.”

“Evan!” I balled up the wrapping paper and threw it at him. He laughed and batted it into the fire if he’d planned it. “That’s not what I meant,” I huffed.

“I know,” he chuckled, pulling me toward him, “but you can’t listen to my father. He only *thinks* he knows what’s best for me, when in fact he has no idea who I am.” He kissed the top of my head and added, “I would never make such a huge decision based on a girl.” He paused long enough for a jolt of panic to make my back tense, before completing with, “but you’re not just any girl. I’m... We’re going to California.”

I buried my face in his chest and squeezed my arms around him. “Yale’s the best law school in the country,” I rebutted without conviction.

“And who said I wanted to be a lawyer,” he responded, squeezing me back. Suddenly, he pulled away and declared, “I want to teach you how to dance.”

My heart stopped. “You what?”

Evan laughed.

“I can’t dance.”

He laughed again. “I know. That’s why I’m going to teach you.”

I groaned and clenched my teeth in dread as he approached the Bose system. I was trying to figure out how to conjure up an ounce of grace as he inserted his iPhone and scrolled through the song selections. I scanned the empty terrace, scouting for potential tripping hazards. Then I took in the puddle of chiffon around my sneakers and exhaled in defeat—this was going to be a disaster.

My head popped up at the sudden strum of a guitar followed by a round of drums. Evan started nodding his head to the beat, walking slowly over to me. He reached for me, cradling my hips in his hands and rocking me to the punk song.

“Ready?” he asked, taking my hand and spinning me around as I laughed. When I turned back to face him, he started bouncing up and down, forcing me up with him. The thumping energy surged through me and I found myself jumping alongside him. He smiled in approval and proceeded to thrum his head in time with the thrashing bass. I rocked from side to side and jumped in a circle, swinging my arms—my skirt swirling around me.

We po-goed around the terrace for another song until I finally collapsed in an Adirondack, giddy and out of breath.

“You’re amazing.”

Evan stood in front of me, admiring me with flushed cheeks.



“I’m sure I don’t look so amazing now,” I noted, blowing the strand of hair stuck to my nose as a line of sweat ran down my temple.

“That’s not what I said,” he corrected. “You *are* amazing.”

I could feel my cheeks changing color, and my lips stretched into an embarrassed smile. “What do I do?”

“Just you, everything about you—you’re amazing,” he stated simply.

“You just love that I’m such a great dancer,” I teased, making him chuckle.

Evan pulled me to my feet and met me with a kiss that set off a thousand fireworks through my entire body. Wait. Those *were* fireworks. I turned to witness a sprinkling of red sparks in the sky. We stepped out from under the terrace to watch the brilliant spectacle.

“Happy New Year,” Evan said into my ear, pulling me around to kiss me before I could say the same.

It was the most dazzling fireworks display I’d ever seen; I could feel my heart beating in my chest with each explosion. The sparks felt like they were going to sprinkle down upon us. Every so often, I glanced up at Evan to find him watching me adoringly. Then he’d redirect his attention toward the fire in the sky.

When it was over, my toes were numb from standing in the snow and I was shivering. The fireworks were so mesmerizing; I hadn’t registered that the temperature had dropped until now.

“Let’s get going,” Evan said, rubbing my arms when he noticed me shaking. “You’re about to freeze into a lawn ornament.” I followed him to the terrace where the fire had become a heap of glowing embers. Evan walked to the side of the house and returned with a couple gallons of water to douse the remaining heat in the fireplace. I packed up Evan’s package and speaker system while he put the fire out.

When we neared the front of the house, Evan’s black BMW was idling in the driveway.

“The limo driver?”

“Is awesome,” Evan declared in awe. When we ducked into the warm car, I pulled off my gloves and thawed my hands in front of the blowing heater vent. “Now where?”

“Hotel?” I suggested, trying to sound nonchalant.

Evan grinned knowingly. “Mine or yours?”

The question suddenly made me think of Sara. I wondered how her night had gone, and where she and Jared were right now.

“Where do you think they are?” Evan asked, as if reading my mind.

“You don’t think they…” I questioned.

“He was excited to see her again,” he shrugged, “and she looked incredible tonight…”

“I know, right?!” I agreed emphatically. “But you don’t think they would… do you?”

Evan shrugged again. “Let’s just pick a room and hope it’s empty.” He leaned over and found me waiting. What started as a soft kiss, pressed into a more urgent one, coated with want. The nervousness that shot through me at the thought of going to the hotel room, was quickly replaced with a need to get there as quickly as we could.

Evan pulled back, breathing heavily, “Yours.” He buckled his seatbelt and put the car in gear, speeding out of the driveway. That’s when we met the line of slow moving limos pulling out of the mansion’s driveway and were practically forced to stop. “No way,” Evan groaned, banging his head against his head rest in frustration. I laughed.

While we patiently waited to move more than twenty feet a minute, Evan stated, “I think this is going to be a great year, Em.”

“I hope so,” I squeezed his hand that rested on my lap and thought, *It can't be any worse than last year.*

“It’s going to be different, that’s for sure,” he continued, “especially since you’re moving in with your mother. Where did that come from anyway?”

I shrugged. “I figured now was a better time than any to recognize I have a mother.”

“Okay,” he noted slowly with a nod of his head. “But this weekend? All in, huh?”

“What do you mean?”

“If you’re going to do something, you’re going to give it everything you have. You’ve decided to reconnect with your mother, so why not move in with her?”

I shrugged again, never consciously recognizing that that was one of my character traits. But he was right. I was an overachiever, needing to excel in everything I did—so why not this?

“What’s your therapist going to say about your decision?” he asked, and then shook his head when I wouldn’t answer. “You stopped seeing her, didn’t you?” I still wouldn’t say anything, knowing how he felt about the therapy. “How come?”

“I’m fine,” I defended. “I don’t see the point. Besides, Sara’s a better therapist than anyone with a PhD, and she doesn’t force me to write down my feelings.”

Evan chuckled. “That’s probably true.” His laugh tapered and he became serious. “You know if you ever need to talk…”

“I’m not much of a talker.” I directed my attention out the window, not wanting to stir the emotions I’d made a point to shut off.

“I know,” he accepted softly. After a moment of silence, he added, “This year will be better at school, too.”

I glanced at him skeptically.

“Really,” he assured me. “You know something stupid had to have happened over the break. Somebody got a nose job or slept with their best friend’s girlfriend. They have short memories.” Evan squeezed my hand, and I hoped more than anything that he was right.

My stomach fluttered with nerves when we pulled up to the hotel. While we waited for the valet attendant, Evan said, “Let’s not go into this with expectations. We can do whatever comes naturally.”

I stared at him. “Are you serious? Of course I have expectations. I’ve *expected* to have sex with you for about six months now.”

“Okay then,” Evan replied with a smile. “We obviously have the same expectation.” I laughed, easing the nervous tension.

We left the car in the hands of the valet and made our way to the elevator. Evan held my hand the entire time, and my whole body was jittering so much that I couldn’t find anything to say.

Before I opened the door, Evan turned me around and said, “Close your eyes.” I obeyed. “Deep breath.” I inhaled deeply and relaxed my shoulders with the exhale. I awaited my next instruction but felt his lips upon mine instead. Their touch surprised me. My calm breath faltered and my knees weakened. I opened my mouth to the rhythm of his, feeling the warmth of his tongue on mine. Fumbling in my pocket for the key, I tried to open the door while remaining connected. It didn’t work.

I pulled away long enough to insert the key and open the door. Then I tugged Evan toward me, finding his lips again. Evan started to unbutton his jacket as I backed into the room. That’s when I heard, “You’re back!” I pushed away from Evan mid-kiss and spun around, slamming the door in his face.

“Sara, hi,” I fumbled, trying to catch my breath. I cracked the door to find Evan rubbing his forehead, “So, Sara’s here. Umm, I guess I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Uh, okay,” Evan said slowly, looking at me like I was acting weird—only because I was. “I guess I’ll see you in the morning.” I shut the door before he could even kiss me goodnight.

“What’s wrong with you?” Sara demanded. “You could’ve let him in.”

“No, it’s late,” I said in a rush, taking off my jacket and tossing it on the chair, my face on fire.

“Oh, wait,” she shot out. “You two thought you’d have the room to yourselves. Oh, Em!” She started laughing hysterically.

“Sara,” I scowled. “It’s not funny.”

“Oh, it is,” she countered. “For the first time ever, I like a guy and don’t sleep with him. And you were finally about to have sex and didn’t get to. Oh that’s so fucking funny. Em, I’m so sorry.”

I groaned and collapsed next to her on the king sized bed. “This had better not be an indication of how this year’s going to be.”

Sara rested her head on my shoulder and draped her arm across my stomach, “It’s the end of our senior year. Then we’re off to college. It’s going to be the best year of our lives. Believe me.”

I groaned, not sharing her optimism.

### 3. Still Loved

---

“Can we talk about what happened last night?” I asked Sara after leaving the small restaurant where we ate a greasy breakfast with Jared and Evan, surrounded by people who looked like they wished they'd never seen the New Year.

“What? That you were planning on losing your virginity *finally*, but I screwed it up?”

“No, I'm definitely not talking about that,” I retorted. “You mentioned *liking* Jared. What happened between you two?”

“I'd rather not talk about it.”

Something was off. Avoiding a conversation about a guy was not like Sara at all.

“I'm confused.”

“Em, he lives in New York. I'm still in high school, forget about the fact that we're moving to California,” she presented plainly, void of emotion. “I can't keep torturing myself. I need to forget about him... again.”

I glanced over at her. She kept texting and wouldn't look at me.

“Thanks for driving,” she said, slipping the phone in her purse. “I'm going to sleep most of the way if you don't mind.”

“Sure,” I responded, concerned by her reaction.

The quiet drive gave me time to think—which wasn't necessarily a good thing. Being trapped in my car head for almost three hours could be a bit overwhelming—even scary. But at the end of it, I was content with my internal discussion. Whether moving in with my mother was the right thing to do or not, I was committed to trying.

“Let's just do nothing today and watch movies,” Sara proposed as we unloaded our bags from the car.

“Sounds perfect.”

Evan had to drive Jared back to school, so it was just Sara and me in front of the television the entire New Year's Day. I forced myself to get sucked into the sappy romantic comedies and awkward teenage humiliation.

Sara responded to a beeping text. “Em, do you want to go to a party tonight?”

“Yeah, I don't think so,” I answered without thinking twice.

“Are you ever going to go to another party again?”

“I don't know,” I sighed. “I just don't want to hear it if someone gets too drunk and then asks me the wrong thing. I don't want to be the freak anymore.”

“They need to get over it, and so do you,” Sara argued. “You can't stay locked away forever because you're afraid someone's going to say the wrong thing. Someone *always* says the wrong thing eventually, so fuck them. Who cares?”

I grinned, knowing she was right. “Just not tonight, okay?”

“Okay,” Sara shrugged. I knew she was disappointed. I hadn't been to a party with her in over six months.

“But why don't you go,” I suggested. “I don't want to, but there's no reason you shouldn't.”

“Are you sure?” she questioned cautiously.

“Of course,” I replied adamantly.

Sara's face lit up. She went back to her phone and began texting the masses to get the details.

Anna hollered up the stairs, “Girls, we're home. Come down and tell us about the party.”

Sara jumped up and hopped down the stairs. I followed behind, still not accustomed to this family sharing things that Sara had going on. Anna and Carl were so patient with me, not prying too much. But even the slightest questions about my day caught me off guard—questions that were so very natural to them.

Sara sat in her usual spot, cross-legged on their king sized bed, and I sat down on the edge of the bed, very much a spectator. Anna was unpacking while Carl flipped through the mail. He pulled an envelope from the stack. “Emma, this is for you.”

“Thanks.” I replied, as I took it from his hand.

I examined the plain business envelope with no return address while Sara completely recreated every detail of the evening—from the décor, to Vivian’s award, to the fireworks display.

I was running my finger over the Boca Raton, FL postmark when I heard, “How did Evan react when you told him about Stanford, Emma?”

I flipped my eyes up upon hearing my name. All three were eagerly awaiting my response, making me realize that Sara and I hadn’t talked about it either.

“He’s excited,” I replied awkwardly.

They waited a second longer, and when they recognized that was the extent of my account, Anna said, “I’m looking forward to meeting your mom in the morning.”

I nodded, my stomach tensing at the thought.

“Then I thought you, Sara and I might go shopping after.”

“Mom, you should know by now that Emma dreads shopping. But I’m in,” Sara answered on my behalf.

Carl looked over at me knowingly and offered, “College football?” I nodded in relief.

“What are you doing tonight?” Anna questioned. “Isn’t Marissa Fleming having a party?” I shouldn’t have been shocked that Anna knew this. She seemed to know the social schedule of just about everyone in town.

Sara’s face flashed with excitement, “Yes, and I’m going with the girls.”

“What about you, Emma?” Anna asked, hanging a dress in the closet.

“I’m just going to hang out here and read,” I answered feebly.

Sara slid off the bed. “You have to help me pick out something to wear.”

Knowing I wouldn’t really have any input in this decision, I answered, “Sure,” anyway.

I saw Sara off to the party, with several assurances that I would be fine. I was then able to redirect my attention to the mysterious envelope, while sitting on the pile of pillows beneath Sara’s floor-to-ceiling bookshelves.

I tried to recall if I was expecting something from Florida. It didn’t look official enough for college correspondence; it was simply a plain white envelope with small handwriting addressed to me at the McKinleys’.

When I pulled out the folded paper, my heart stopped. I unfolded it with shaking hands to find it streaked with crayon. On the front was a rudimentarily drawn picture of a boy, a girl, a man, and a woman with grey hair standing by a pink Christmas tree. I opened the paper to find, “Merry Christmas, Emma. We miss you!” slanted across the page in a child’s oversized handwriting. The message concluded on the back with, “Love always, Leyla and Jack.”

I stared at the words, tears trailing down my cheeks, and swallowed against the knot in my throat. I took comfort in the large red smiles and the mountain of presents under the festive tree. The man was undeniably George, but I couldn’t figure out who the woman was supposed to be. I wanted to believe

was Carol's mother, Janet, but she didn't have grey hair.

I dismissed it, thinking it must be a teacher or someone they met in Florida. I guess I knew where they were now—not like I'd ever see them again.

That did it. That sent me over the edge. I collapsed in the pillows and cried until I felt a hand brush against my back and I raised my head in surprise. Anna was kneeling next to me, her eyes glassy. She offered me a comforting smile. She noticed the picture in my hand and settled in next to me.

"They look happy," she noted, gently tucking my hair behind my ear. "That's all you ever wanted for them, right?"

It became clear to me that Sara had confided in her mother after everything that happened last March. How could she not? Anna would have insisted on knowing why Sara never came to her, probably feeling betrayed and hurt. So, of course Sara had to tell her that I'd stayed to protect Leyla and Jacob from being taken from their parents. Well... at least they still had one of their parents.

"Yes," I choked, my voice hoarse.

"It was nice that he sent that to you," she continued to console. "It means the kids still really love you."

I knew she was trying to take away my pain, but thinking of them missing me tightened my chest and hot tears flowed freely. Anna pulled me into her arms and hugged me tightly, and I let her without tensing. I inhaled her warm floral fragrance with each gasp of air and allowed myself to miss them.

Once I had control over the pain and was quiet again, Anna released me. I sat up, wiping my wet cheeks.

"I understand why you want to move in with your mother," Anna finally said. "And I want more than anything for the two of you to find the connection you've missed out on over the years. But if for any reason it doesn't work, this is your home first, and we'll always do what's best for you. We're not going to say anything to the social worker, since that will open a whole realm of paperwork that isn't necessary and you'll be eighteen soon. We'll just let her continue to do her periodic check-ins by phone. Okay?"

I nodded, unable to find my voice.

Anna hesitated before adding, "I love you, Emma. We all do. And I am very serious when I say that we will do anything for you; you only need to ask. Do you understand?"

My breath faltered with her emotional declaration, and I replied, "I understand. Thank you."

Anna's mouth spread into the smile that Sara inherited, lighting up her kind blue eyes, instantly changing the seriousness of the moment with, "Let's get some ice cream."

I couldn't help but smile in return, and allowed her to help me up from the heap of pillows to follow her down the stairs to the kitchen.

~~~~~

"Is that everything?" Carl asked, examining the backpack and two duffle bags in the back of Anna's SUV.

"I don't own much," I stated.

Anna and Sara got in the car while I turned to Carl. "Thank you for everything."

"It's been great having you here, Emma," he returned, and without notice, wrapped his arms around me and pulled me to his chest. "I'll keep in touch with Stanford for you, but I'm sure you'll be over before I know it." Then he released me and walked to the house without looking back. I remained still, not quite prepared for the departing hug.

"Ready?" Sara hollered from the open car window.

“Sure,” I answered, heading toward my car.

~~When I pulled out of the driveway, I glanced up one more time at the large house with a twinge of~~
sadness. Although I never completely felt like I belonged there, I certainly felt safe, which was
something I hadn't experienced very often in my life.

4. "Home"

I tried to pay attention to the roads we turned down as I followed behind Anna in my Honda knowing I'd need to find my way to Sara's on my own eventually. At least now I'd finally be able to drive the car that Carl had helped me pick out a few months ago, after I *finally* got my license. There wasn't any need to drive when Sara and Evan chauffeured me every day. But now I was going to be responsible for getting myself to school.

It took about twenty minutes for us to reach the outskirts of Weslyn where my mother was renting a house. We veered down an interwoven maze of streets that wrapped around each other within the disorganized neighborhood. Unlike Sara's neighborhood, all lined up neat in a grid of large homes, this swirling road map had much smaller houses. Kids ran from one snow covered yard into another since most of the properties overlapped their neighbors' without a bordering fence.

Anna pulled into the driveway of a house at the tail end of the maze. With only one neighbor, it was isolated on the dead end, across from the stark woods that surrounded the neighborhood. I pulled up along the curb so Anna could back out when she left.

The small yellow two-story house was quaint, with white shutters framing the windows and a weathered white porch welcoming us to enter. The front door opened, and my mother appeared propping the screen door open with her hip. She waited for us to each grab a bag with her arms crossed, shivering from the winter air.

I didn't make eye contact as I passed her into the house, fearful that her clear blue eyes would reveal something other than the words that came out of her mouth. "Hi, Emily. I'm glad you're here."

"Thanks for letting me stay with you," I replied awkwardly.

"Of course," she answered, her voice coated with nerves. "This is your house too now. You even have your own room."

"You have to see it," Sara burst out, taking me by the hand and dragging me up the wide wooden staircase set in the middle of the small foyer. Anna laughed, making me suspect that they did more than shop yesterday.

At the top of the stairs was a small landing. Straight ahead was an open door that led into a bathroom, and two closed doors flanked the stairs. Sara opened the door to the right and flipped the light on. I slowly followed her.

Stepping into the room, I let my eyes trace all four walls, three of them white, and the wall where the door stood open, solid black. I turned in a circle to take it all in, inhaling the lingering fumes of fresh paint. My lips curled up.

A full-sized bed sat across from the door, covered with a black and white baroque comforter accented with white pillows bordered in black. Above the bed was a three dimensional art piece that looked like a hundred black butterflies were bursting out of the white wall, tethered by black wires.

Two small twin windows to the left of the bed were framed dramatically in thick black curtains. A white chest of drawers rested against the black wall next to a full-length white framed mirror tilting on a stand.

On the opposite side of the room was a desk; its glass top was stenciled with black flowers and butterflies and set upon two white bookcases. A cloth covered board with the same black and white baroque pattern hung on the wall above it. There was a note pinned to the board that read, "Welcome Home, Emma," in Sara's undeniable scrawl.

"Do you love it?" Sara demanded in anticipation.

I turned to find Anna and my mother in the doorway awaiting my reaction.

sample content of Barely Breathing (The Breathing Series)

- [read online Le Cavalier RÃveur \(Le Soldat Chamane, Tome 2\) pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [Zero Waste Home: The Ultimate Guide to Simplifying Your Life by Reducing Your Waste pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [read The Intelligence Paradox: Why the Intelligent Choice Isn't Always the Smart One here](#)
- [*Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture for free*](#)

- <http://www.netc-bd.com/ebooks/Le-Cavalier-R--veur--Le-Soldat-Chamane--Tome-2-.pdf>
- <http://academialanguagebar.com/?ebooks/Computational-Cell-Biology.pdf>
- <http://test.markblaustein.com/library/La-France-dans-les-yeux---Une-histoire-de-la-communication-politique-de-1930----aujourd-hui.pdf>
- <http://academialanguagebar.com/?ebooks/Anti-Semite-and-Jew.pdf>