

# Rennillia 3

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I knew it was morning without having to look at the clock. Lying on the mattress, I took out of Sophia's room, I wasn't sure if I wanted to get up. My whole body hurt, but the ache in my chest was the worst. Whether it was from lack of sleep, crying or the weight of everything going on, I didn't want to move.

While my mind ticked away with everything I needed to do, my body remained still. I felt responsible for everything, and at the same time, in control of nothing. Then, an unexpected wave of pride rolled through me, and I sat up.

## Chapter 1

I splashed cold water on my face, wishing I hadn't cried all night. It was early enough to take my time getting ready, to meet with Salvador before I picked up Sophia. No matter what I did, my eyes stayed red and puffy. I wasn't looking forward to going downstairs, and having Jackson see me like this either. Giving up, I did my best to put on a pleasant face as I headed downstairs.

In an effort to not be starving later, even though I wasn't particularly hungry, I fixed myself a piece of toast. Seated at the kitchen table, I kept my eyes on my plate when Jackson walked in. After pouring himself a bowl of cereal, he sat down at the table with me.

There was a hint of pity in his voice when he asked, "How are you this morning?"  
I nodded and continued to eat my toast.

"When are we heading to your meeting?"

Keeping my eyes down, I replied, "We're not. I'm calling a driver."

It took him a minute before he asked, "Do you want me to get Sophia for you?"

"No, I'm picking her up after."

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he questioned, almost pleading.

I looked up at him. "Yea, you can be normal."

The second he saw my eyes, I could feel his heart going out to me.

Before he said something that made me want to cry, I urged, "Please don't Jacks. I'm fine."

"You don't look fine."

"I know. I am though. I'm just... I'm sad, but I'll be okay."

I quietly finished my toast while he ate his cereal.

When I was ready, the driver arrived, and I was on my way. Careful not to be found out, I asked the driver to stop at a diner on the way to get Sophia.

As the driver parked the car, I informed, "I am going to get a cup of coffee. I will be right back."

The driver replied, "Yes ma'am."

Opening the door for myself, I took a deep breath, and stepped out of the car.

At the counter, I ordered a large black coffee to-go then stepped to the side. Glancing at the back corner, I saw Salvador, seated alone at a table.

He appeared pleased as I walked to his table. "This is a pleasant surprise."

"I haven't made a decision yet."

With a sly grin, he narrowed his eyes at me.

"Is it possible you simply wished to see me again?"

"It occurred to me, I'm unable to make a decision without knowing what you want from me."

Another slight smile preceded, Salvador complimenting, "I'm pleased you asked. I have to admit, I would have thought less of you, had you agreed without knowing what I require."

"Well?" I questioned, not being fond of his compliments.

With a slow blink, he replied "I'm not sure. However, I know that it's you I need."

Struck by momentary brilliance, I offered, "Then I propose we both take a month to consider...things. Then, meet again."

Salvador gave me a slow nod of agreement before assuring, "I look forward to our next meeting." My number was called and with a sarcastic grin, I excused myself from his presence.

I took my coffee from the counter, walked out of the dinner, and slid into the car. It was possible that being hurt and disappointed from the night before made this meeting with Salvador easier than the first. However, the fact that I had a whole month to think and plan also gave me a settled feeling.

When arrived at Mrs. Thomas', she opened the door before I knocked.

"Sophia just fell asleep."

"Oh, it's kind of early for her nap."

"She was very upset when Jacks left to go home last night. It was so sad. She was up pretty late."

"Aww, you should have called me, I would have gotten her."

She gave me an odd look. "It was your anniversary."

"It wouldn't have mattered." I assured with a pang of sadness.

Taking a closer look at me, Mrs. Thomas asked, "Have you been crying? What happened?"

Shaking my head, I sighed, "It's just... He doesn't..."

"Let's go sit down." She suggested, patting me on the shoulder.

I followed her to the den, and sat down on the couch with her.

I knew I couldn't tell her everything, but at the moment, I was in serious need of a mother daughter talk. Since I had no mother, and she had no daughter, I hoped cashing in her, 'If you ever need to talk,' offer was as welcome as I needed it to be.

"Hert wants me and loves me, but not in the right way."

"There's a wrong way?"

"He wants me...when he wants me. Which I guess is fine. But he doesn't have room in his life for me other than that."

"I see. He wants you, not the relationship."

"Yea. I guess, I'm really not that surprised, but it hurts...because I thought he did."

Teary eyed, all the feelings from the night before spilled out.

"Plus, it's insulting for him to think I would be okay with an arrangement, that I'm just some..."

"I don't know him very well. You say he loves you, but honey, no one who really loves you makes you feel like that."

No matter how upset I was, I couldn't help defending Hert.

"He's had a really hard life. Maybe he just doesn't know how, ya know."

Mrs. Thomas gave me a blank stare, at first.

"Well who hasn't? I was eight when my parents died, and even though it put a terrible financial burden on my aunt and uncle, they took me in anyway. JP's parents all but disowned him when he married me, and I planned on having six children and couldn't. But, you know what, through everything neither JP nor my family ever made me feel unloved."

"We aren't like you and Mr. Thomas. Our families weren't that great when we had them."

"JP and I's marriage hasn't always been easy, but we never lost sight of each other, because above all else, we were committed to each other. You and Hert are married and that is serious. I don't think anyone should take their

vows lightly or not try to make it work. Honestly honey, when someone really loves you, they never make you question if you deserve it or if they do... Because it's a gift," she imparted with a soft smile.  
I burst into tears.

We sat there on the couch for a while. I cried as she consoled. When Sophia woke up Mrs. Thomas suggested I take a little nap, and calm down so I didn't upset her. With a slight headache, I agreed and curled up on the couch.

The sound Sophia giggling and Jackson's voice woke me. Sitting up, I used the tissues Mrs. Thomas left for me, and tried to look like I hadn't just cried my eyes out.

Obviously checking on me, Mrs. Thomas walked in, asking, "Feeling better?"

"Can Sophia and I stay tonight?"

"I would like that," she replied with a smile.

When Jackson walked in with Sophia, she instantly threw her arms out to me.

As he set her down with me, I hugged and kissed her forehead, saying, "I love you."

I held her as she snuggled up with me on the couch.

"You wanna stay for dinner, and then head back to the house?" Jackson asked.

Before I could answer, Mrs. Thomas informed, "Ren is staying here tonight."

Jackson gave me a confused look as I nodded at him.

"I'm going to start dinner," Mrs. Thomas shared, before leaving the room.

He sat down on the floor in front of me, questioning, "Did something happen?"

Confused at first, I realized that Jackson expected me to pick Sophia up, and head back to the house after meeting with Salvador.

"No, it went fine. I got over here and kinda fell apart on your mom."

"I was worried about you," he admitted.

"I'm sorry."

"You're lucky this was the first place I checked and you were here. I was fixing to go around shakin' people down for information," he assured with a smile.

I laughed a little, asking, "Are you gonna stay here too?"

"I would but I'm pretty sure my mom won't like that idea."

"Yea, but you're staying for dinner right?"

With a wink he offered, "I'll stay until they tell me to go home."

Smiling at him, I nodded.

After dinner, Mr. Thomas sat at the table with stacks of folders and a laptop. While Mrs. Thomas and I played with Sophia, I noticed Jackson sit down at the table with his dad.

Smiling, Jackson asked him, "Need an extra pair of eyes?"

Mr. Thomas laughed out loud, teasing, "Boy with those glasses you'd think you could see through the paper."

Mrs. Thomas overheard them too and fussed, "Stop picking on him, JP."

Smiling at them, I shook my head mumbling to myself, "I like his glasses."

I stood up and took Sophia with me to Jackson's old room. I changed her and rocked her to sleep before returning to the den.

"Sorry I don't have a bed for you, I made up the couch," Mrs. Thomas shared.

Chiming in from the kitchen, Jackson commented, "You could always curl up in the crib with Sophia in my old room."

Sticking my tongue out at him, I assured, "The couch is fine."

Mrs. Thomas walked up behind Mr. Thomas, patting him on the shoulder as she asked, "Are you about done? It's getting late."

Shaking his head and rubbing his forehead, Mr. Thomas answered, "We're behind and until we're not shorthanded anymore..."

Jackson looked at his parents, and offered, "I'll do it."

"Jacks you're on vacation," Mrs. Thomas reminded.

Jackson laughed, assuring, "I don't mind. Besides dad's old, he needs his rest."

Hopping up, Mr. Thomas replied, "Oh yea, bet I can still take you."

Mrs. Thomas rolled her eyes, saying, "Okay, boys," as Mr. Thomas tried to put Jackson in a head lock.

Laughing at them, I told the Thomas' goodnight as I went to the den, and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas went to their room.

It didn't take long for me to realize my nap earlier in the day was making it hard for me to fall asleep. It was either that, or the fact that there was still a piece of pear cake in the kitchen left over from dinner. Mrs. Thomas' pear cake was the most delicious desert in the world.

I decided it was the pear cake and walked to the kitchen.

Smiling at Jackson, as I passed him, I shared, "That was really nice of you."

Without breaking his concentration, Jacks nodded.

Thinking the cake could wait a minute, I sat at the table with him and asked, "You want some help?"

Jackson looked up from the papers and questioned, "You wanna help?"

"If I can."

Jackson smiled at me before he handed me a stack of folders, and instructed, "Highlight every third line then put them in order by date."

With the two of us working together, we finished in a little under an hour.

When the work was done, I hopped up from the table.

"Are you fixing to go home?"

"Yea, it's pretty late. Are you going to bed?"

"I might watch some TV in the den. I'm not really tired now."

"I'll hang out and watch a movie with you if you want," he offered.

"Aren't you supposed to go home? I don't want you to get in trouble." I teased.

Jackson laughed, "I'm a grown man."

Shaking my head at him, I walked to the den and sat down on the couch.

He put a movie on then walked to the kitchen, and came back with the piece of cake I had forgotten about, until it was in his hand.

"Ah, that was mine," I complained as he took a bite.

Giving me a strange look, he sat down on the couch saying, "I didn't see your name on it."

"Your mom made it because it's my favorite, so the last piece should be mine."

"It's my favorite too," he disagreed.

In a hushes tone, as not to wake his parents, I fussed, "Give me the cake,"

Refusing, he laughed, "No."

Crossing my arms, I sat there pouting.

"Okay, pouty baby, we'll share it."

I held out my hand and he shook his head saying, "I'll hold it, I don't trust you."

Giving him a stupid look, I leaned over to take a bite. When Jackson moved the cake up to my mouth, I quickly grabbed hold of his hand and shoved the rest into my mouth.

"I can't believe you just did that," he laughed as he ate the tiny bits of smushed cake from his fingers.

Unable to reply with my mouth full, I nodded, and smiled with my cheeks filled with Mrs. Thomas' delicious pear cake.

It took me a little bit, but I finally swallowed my huge bite of cake. Feeling incredibly proud of myself for high jacking the last bit, I looked over at him.

"Told ya the last piece was mine."

“I guess, I should be grateful I didn’t lose a finger.”

Rolling my eyes, I scoffed, “Oh, whatever.”

Scooting right next to me, he shoved his thumb in my face.

“Yes huh, you bit me, see.”

Turning to face him, I argued, “No, I didn’t. Let me see.”

I pulled his hand down, and inspected his thumb.

Pointing to a tiny red mark on his thumb, he insisted, “Right there.”

“Okay, ya big baby,” I admitted, and kissed his thumb.

When I leaned back up his face was turning red, and he was starting to fidget.

The moment quickly turned serious as I realized how close we were. Still holding his hand I rubbed my thumb against the tiny red mark I just kissed. Jackson appeared as though he wanted to say something, but couldn’t. Oddly enough, I seemed to be having the same problem. When we heard Mrs. Thomas clear her throat from the doorway, Jackson instantly jumped up.

Pointing at me, Jackson fussed, “She bit me!”

Outraged, I pointed back, saying, “He tried to eat my piece of pear cake.”

Mrs. Thomas looked at us like we were ridiculous before patting Jackson on the back, and scolding, “Now this really should go without saying, but Ren is our guest, and you should share.” She then turned to me and said, “And no biting.”

In unison, Jackson and I replied, “Yes, Ma’am.”

Shaking her head at both of us, she said, “Night kids.”

I waited to hear her door shut after she left the room.

“Tattle tale.”

“You did bite me,” he stated.

Giving him a stupid look, I blurted, “So you told your mommy on me?”

“Did you want me to tell her she was interrupting us?”

The knot returned to my stomach as I questioned, “Was she?”

Jackson stared at me for a moment, then shook his head.

“No...I’m gonna go.”

Conflicted, I nodded back at him as he got up and left.

After turning the TV off, I sighed and walked back to the couch. With an ‘ugh’ thought, I laid down. It was good that when the friendship line started to slip for one of us, the other one popped it back into place. Jackson and I were spending way too much time together. We were two grown people who were friends, and cared deeply for each other. It was only natural, with everything else that was happening, for something to almost happen.

As mad as I was at Hert, I still wanted him to come back. Even though there was no way in hell at this point, I wanted anything to do with him; it didn’t mean I instantly stopped loving him. In addition to that, having Hert back at the house would definitely limit the close calls Jackson and I were having. With another heavy sigh, I closed my eyes and decided if I spent most of the day here at the Thomas’ going back to the house with Jackson tomorrow night would be fine.