

A New Chapter

By Ellis Starr

BACK COVER BLURB:

All through her life, Andrea Robinson's mom had been the one to worry and stress over the littlest things. Andrea was always the one that calmed her down. But what if one thing happened and all of that changed. It's a saying you've heard many times before: everything happens for a reason. Well, Andrea was about to find that out for herself.

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Chapter 1

The paper on my desk stared up at the ceiling, mocking me with its huge, red eye drawn with a sharpie. I scowled at it and muttered, “Well, if you didn’t have to be so freaking confusing, then I wouldn’t have failed you, now would I? Use actual English next time.”

I heard a stifled giggle come from next to me. “Talking to your failing test again, Andi?” the voice teased with amusement laced in their tone.

“Nope, I’m just sitting here and telling myself to start speaking English,” I replied back sarcastically to my best friend, rolling my eyes.

I reached down to my bookbag to grab my special red sharpie—one that I kept by me in case of emergencies like this—when all my brown locks of hair fell down around my face. Annoyance bubbled inside my chest as I lift my head back up and all my hair flew in my face. “Stupid hair,” I gritted out, taking all my hair and stuffing it on my head in a messy bun.

“Why don’t you just cut it?” Emily suggested.

“Not sure,” I replied, shrugging. “I really hate my hair though. It’s so annoying.” Emily opened her mouth to speak, but I interrupted, “Yeah, yeah. I know what you’re going to say, ‘Be grateful for what you have.’ But no one would like to have my hair.”

As I stuck the sharpie in my mouth and take off the cap with my molars, I could feel Emily’s gaze on the side of my face. “What about those people with cancer or the ones that have to shave their hair off for surgery? Any of them would take your hair in a heartbeat,” she reasoned.

“They would have a wig and that’s different. Now help me figure out what I should write down for this test.”

Emily let out a heavy sigh but didn’t object. She just put her chin on the heel of her hand and squinted—her version of The Thinker. “Uh . . . flamboyant?” she suggested.

“That was last week’s.”

“Flourishing?”

“Already used that one too.”

“Felicitous?”

“It was one of my good days when I thought of that word.”

“Faultless?”

“Em, we’ve used fabulous, famous, fantastic, fascinating, faultless, favorable, flavorful, fetching, fiery, first-class, fitting, flawless, flourishing, formidable, four-star, fulfilling, futuristic and flamboyant,” I listed off, feeling

proud that remembered them all. “If you can think of any more than that, then please give them to me, my dictionary.”

I glanced over at her to see her lips pursed into a thin line and a weird look in her blue eyes. “It scares me at how many tests you have failed in this class,” she said.

“Some of them were quizzes too,” I defended. “It’s not my fault AP Biology is confusing.” And then a perfect word came to mind. “I got it!”

Emily tried to peer over at my desk to see what I was writing, but I put my arm up to block her view. “Why did I take this class again?” I asked, scribbling down a few letters a best as I could in my blocky handwriting.

“You were still high off of the A- you got on the EOC in Biology freshman year,” she told me bluntly.

I stopped writing, a small smile coming to my face. “Oh yeah. Now I remember,” I responded, sticking my tongue out at her. I handed her my test. “Now behold the nineteenth word to describe my awesome test papers.”

To my despair, Emily just raised one eyebrow, not looking impressed by my creative skills. “Fabuloso? Andrea, seriously? You were just telling this test to speak English and you write a Spanish word next to your F?”

I just flapped my hand in the air to dismiss her accusation. “That’s not the point. The point is that I’m a genius.”

“This class would have to disagree,” Em retorted with a small scoff.

“This class just doesn’t understand my humor,” I retaliated.

Emily just let out a chuckle, flipping through my test. She stopped at one page and bit her bottom lip, trying to conceal her laughter I assume. “Why would you p-put that for num-number twenty-three?” she hiccuped out, putting her hand to her mouth.

A full blown grin twisted at my mouth at her question. “I felt led to do that, you know? Besides, I think it gave Mr. Jenson a good laugh.”

“Chase got three cakes for his birthday. He ate two in one day. What went through macromolecules and what purpose did they have?” Emily read aloud. “Why did you change Chase to Carl?”

“I’m going to name my son Carl in hopes that he becomes a psychopathic llama,” I reasoned, smiling brightly.

Emily just shook her head. “What if you had two sons?”

“I’ll name the other one Paul. Duh,” I said, rolling my eyes at her. “And if they’re twins, then the one that looks more like me will be Carl.”

“And why is that?” Emily asked.

I just shrugged, trying to contain the urge to laugh. “Because I’m evil and Carl is such a better name. I will be lookist.”

Emily just smiled, already used to my dry sense of humor. ““Carl will be eating fat, fat and fat,”” Emily continued. ““He will soon get diabetes and live in misery for the rest of his life because of his loved ones. They gave him the cake. #stopchildhoodobesity.””

It was silent for a moment before we both burst into a fit of giggles. The students around us stopped their conversations and just stared at us. Mr. Jenson stood there with his skinny arms crossed and brown eyes narrowed behind his 80’s style glasses. He was around the age of thirty and was born just to torment me.

“Miss Robinson”—his eyes cut into me—“and Miss Stewart, is there something you want to share with the class?” he drew out, his southern accent more heavy. It was always more prominent when he was angry. For some reason, it was always the heaviest around me.

I flushed immediately, sinking down in my seat and covering my face with my hair. Emily just let out an easygoing smile. “I was just explaining to Andrea why number twenty-three was wrong,” she answered calmly.

“Ah, yes . . . Andrea had such an interesting response to that question,” Mr. Jenson recalled, frowning.

Before anyone else could say anything, the bell rang loudly in our ears. I took it as an opportunity to jump out of my seat and run out the door while cramming my test in my bookbag in an unladylike fashion. *Was there even a way to do that like a lady?* I mused to myself as I almost reached the threshold of the classroom.

Then a cold hand wrapped around my arm.

I stopped walking and hung my head in defeat, my heart deflating to my stomach. Emily walked past me and mouthed *sorry*. I just sent her a quick smile.

Mr. Jenson took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes tiredly. I didn’t blame him; if I had a student like me, then I would be too.

“I’m worried about your grade,” he spoke up, breaking the awkward silence engulfed around us. “And about you, Andrea. You seem to have no care about this class. Why is that?”

I just shrugged, guilt eating me alive. I hated being the source of people’s problems. “It’s all confusing,” I said.

Mr. Jenson let out a sigh. “There have been many tutoring opportunities offered to you. And yet you have not taken a single one. The only thing that has

been saving at this point is the labs and projects we do. If this keeps up, then I'm gonna have to contact your mother."

"No, no! Please don't drag my mother into this!" I begged, snapping my head up to meet his disappointed gaze. "She already has so much on her plate!"

"Then I suggest you take matters into your own hands, Miss Robinson," he quipped, sitting down at his desk and picking up a piece of paper. "You may go."

I gritted my teeth together and stomped my way to gym. The hallways were nearly empty but the students that were at their lockers stared at me warily.

I changed quickly into my gym clothes and made my way over to my other best friend Vivian. Her fiery red hair was pulled up into a high ponytail, and she was flirting with a guy on our high school football team.

When her ice blue eyes met mine, she shot the guy one last smile and wink before making her way over to me. I had to look up at her a little because she towered four inches over my 5'7" height.

"Hey, Andi. How was AP?" she teased, wrapping a slender arm around my neck.

I rolled my eyes and jokingly pushed her away. "I failed the test last week. You won't guess what word I wrote this time."

Vivian tapped a red fingernail against her chin in mock thought. "Let me guess: fabuloso?" she proposed.

"Emily told you," I deadpanned, laying down on the bleachers.

Vivian sat down on me and it felt like she was breaking all of my ribs. "Yup. Girl, you have quite a sense of humor," she applauded.

"Thanks," I replied back sarcastically.

A loud whistle penetrated through the air before Coach Wilkins yelled, "Vivian get off of Emily!"

This caused everyone's attention to switch. When Viv, got up, I sat up and looked away from everyone, so they wouldn't see my red face. Vivian just chuckled and sat down beside me.

"Listen up everyone!" our coach demanded, grabbing a large, blue sack. He placed it down in the middle of the gym. "Today we are gonna play dodgeball. Separate yourself into groups as even as you can!" Cue another blow of the whistle.

Classmates ran around the room, calling each other's names and motioning them over. A lot of the jocks came to our side. It was because of Vivian for sure.

The dodgeballs were lined up in the middle of the gym, and it kind of reminded me of something I learned in Biology. I furrowed my eyebrows. *Didn't we learn about something lining up in the middle of something?* I asked myself, knowing I wouldn't figure it out.

I just shrugged.

Vivian gave me a weird look but just grabbed my arm and pulled me up to my feet. "C'mon. We're going to play today," she informed me excitedly, not giving me a choice.

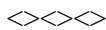
Once the eardrum bursting whistle was blown, students raced down the gym to pick them up. Yelling and the sounds of colliding swirled all around me. I flinched every time a loud noise came and tried to keep myself from putting my hands over my ears.

Vivian eagerly grabbed a dodgeball that rolled next to us and sent it flying at a girl with short, black hair. It caught her on the shoulder and Vivian bounced up and down while clapping her hands. The other girl just shot her annoyed look before going to sit on the bleachers.

I just shook my head at her. Vivian was always competitive and loved winning a game or a challenge. She was stubborn and every time Emily and I dared her to do something, she would do it. This sprung a challenge between Emily and me—to see who could cause Vivian to do the craziest things.

It was when I went to say something to Vivian was when something struck me in the head so hard I lost balance and banged my head on the bleachers. Pain erupted through my skull like vines gripping a tree. My eyes weighed down like a ton of bricks as dots danced across my vision. Voices in the background were drowned out by the roaring ocean in my own ears.

And then suddenly it felt like I was falling. Falling, falling into the dark abyss.



The next thing I remember is trying to shift positions because my head was hurting. A hand pressed down on my arm to keep me from moving. My eyes hurt from the pressure of my eyelids as I tried to open them.

Loud cries filled my ears as I kept trying to open my eyes to see what was going on. "Please wake up, Andrea," a familiar voice wailed. *Mom*. "I can't lose someone to that awful head disease. Not again."

Head disease? What the heck is that?

I scrunched up my eyes and slowly tried to widen my eyelids, so I could see. There was no such luck. It was like they were glued shut by some magical force.

I slowly opened my chapped lips and forced one word through my rough throat: “Mom?”

The sobs became louder as Mom mumbled my name over and over again. Warm tears dropped onto my freezing arm while two hands clasped onto one of my own.

A wave of dizziness overtook me, and I knew I was going to fall once again. Before I lost to the looming darkness once again, I whispered in a broken voice, “What does that mean?”

Chapter 2

The next time I woke up, I was confused and didn't know how long I had been asleep. The only thing I remember is hearing a noise and then nothing. I think that happened a few times but everything was a blur and muddled together, so I couldn't really keep track of time. But if there is one thing I learned from my stay was: hospital bed are entirely too uncomfortable.

All it is is a thin mattress on a metal frame. Wouldn't it make more sense to make them comfy so patients don't have a terrible stay? Sitting on one for just a few seconds made me want to get up immediately. And I had been sitting on one for *three* days. Three freaking days! Just because my mother—for some odd reason—couldn't accept that I was fine and could go home.

So there she stood in her five-foot-five form demanding that my six-foot-four doctor run more tests on me to make sure I was okay. But I *was* okay. I think it was pretty clear after a PET scan, MRI scan and a neurological exam.

I love my mom but sitting in the same place and smelling the same chemically smell was starting to drive me up the wall.

"I'm telling you that my daughter is not okay, Damien!" Mom insisted, crossing her arms and tapping her foot on the ground. "I will not have her go home in this condition! Anything could happen!"

Doctor Damien Dragonslayer—I know—rubbed his forehead and sighed. "Makenna, I have done everything in my ability to make sure Andrea is okay. Her ankle will heal accordingly, but, regarding her head, there is nothing else I can do." He spread out his arms beside him with a defeated look on his face.

Mom just scowled, her green eyes narrowing. "Well, maybe your ability isn't good enough, Damien!" she snapped harshly.

This made Doctor Dragonslayer frown, so I decided to intervene. "Mom, I'm fine. My ankle is the only thing that is hurting me, but I'm just really tired of this hospital and want to go home."

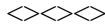
Mom sat down beside me on the bed and brushed a few locks of my hair behind my head. A sad smile quivered on her lips as she pressed a kiss to the top of my head. "I just don't want anything to happen to you. I couldn't live with myself," she confessed, resting her head on top of mine.

"Nothing bad will happen to me as long as your my mom," I told her, sounding like some cheesy sitcom.

Doctor Dragonslayer quietly left the room to give us privacy as Mom ran her finger through my knotted hair. "We'll leave soon"—I grinned widely at

this—“but will you at least come to a check up next week to put me at ease?” she asked

“I will,” I promised, suppressing the urge to argue with her. *Why couldn't she see I was just fine?*



“I’m so glad you’re okay, Andi!” Vivian cried out, wrapping her arms tightly around my neck.

I laughed roughly, gently prying her arms off of me, so I could breathe again. Emily rolled her eyes at us and plopped down on the bed beside me. Vivian frowned but sat at the end of the bed, red tendrils of her hair floating over her eyes.

I sunk deeper into my bed and let my eyes flutter closed, the events from the day getting to me. “So what was it like to sleep for three days straight, and why are you still tired?” Emily asked from beside me curiously.

I immediately shot up and exclaimed, “I was asleep for three days?!” Two sets of wide eyes met each other before both of them pasted on a fake smile. “I can’t believe Mom wouldn’t tell me that,” I muttered angrily to myself, feeling hot coils run through my veins. It felt as if I had newfound energy that needed to be released. *Maybe I could start by yelling at Mom,* I thought to myself, getting ready to get off my bed.

Emily grabbed my arms and stopped me from standing up. Vivian took that as a cue to grab onto my ankles, unintentionally digging her finger into my sprained one. I yelped, pulling my legs up to my body as streaks of pain flowed through my leg.

Viv gasped, her eyes wide. Emily let go of my arms, so I could grab onto my ankle in pain. Vivian opened her mouth to say something, but I put my hand up to stop her. “It’s okay,” I gritted out.

I laid back down on the bed, breathing heavily and wrapping the blankets around myself. It was then my door burst open and my older brother ran through the door. His blond hair looked as if hadn’t been combed in days and his clothes were wrinkled. When he saw me, relief flooded through his grey eyes and his face relaxed.

He glanced at my two best friends and cleared his throat with raised eyebrows. Emily blushed lightly and gave me a quick hug and a “get better

soon” before rushing out the door like her pants were on fire. Vivian, on the other hand, took her time getting up and smoothing out her clothes. She embraced me goodbye then slowly walked out of the room with a flip of her hair.

She was always such a flirt.

Emmon paid no mind to her and sat down next to me on the bed. I laid my head down on his lap and whispered, “Why are you home? Aren’t you supposed to be in class right now?”

My brother wrapped one of his muscular arms around my waist and sighed. “Mom called me a couple days ago crying and spluttering about how you got hurt. I couldn’t come earlier because I had an exam I needed to do.” His voice was calm and soothing and had my eyes growing heavier every second he talked. But I hadn’t seen him in awhile, so I fought the urge to go to sleep and sat up.

Emmon smiled tiredly at me and scratched at the stubble on his jaw. Dark bags hung under his eyes and a few wrinkles creased on his forehead. It looked like college had done him well.

“I told you not to take eight classes for your first semester,” I chastised, lightly slapping his shoulder. “When will you see that I’m always right?”

He rolled his eyes jokingly and said, “Sorry dearest sister for not listening to your every beck and call.”

“You should be,” I retorted with crossed arms.

Emmon chuckled deeply. “I’m just not sure what I want to do yet. You know that. The classes I’m taking right now are supposed to help me decide my career.”

“And what if it doesn’t?”

“Then I’ll come to you and get your opinion.”

“You know what? I think you’ll make a great garbageman,” I decided teasingly, sticking my tongue out at him.

Emmon grinned mischievously at me and drawled out, “Let me get started then.” He scooped me out of the bed and spun me around. The world twirled around me, but, instead of getting dizzy, I just threw my head back and laughed. My brother then proceeded to walk over to my window.

“On second thought, you would be a terrible garbageman,” I thought aloud, putting a finger to my chin in mock thought. Emmon raised his eyebrows at me in question as he carefully placed me on the bed. “Well, first of all, they just don’t spin their garbage around like that! It would get everywhere! And

secondly, you were about to throw me out the window! What happened to the trash?" I ranted on, wagging my pointer finger in front of his face.

Emmon opened his mouth and was about to bite my finger, but I pulled it away just in time. I gave him a disgusted look, and he just laughed. "You always joke that I'm an old man, so I decided to act like one. That's how people threw out their trash back in the day.

"Excuses," I accused, laying down on the bed and sidling up to his side. "You were just too lazy to carry me downstairs. You and your nonexistent muscles couldn't handle me."

"I'm not gonna deny your accusation but nonexistent muscles?" he scoffed, flexing and looking at me with a smug face. "I'm nothing but muscle, Andi. And you indirectly called yourself fat." Well, he wasn't exactly wrong.

I shrugged, not getting offended at all. "As long as you don't call me that, then we'll be fine," I warned him, giving him a childish glare.

Emmon just laughed at me and held his hands up in self defense. I smiled at that and rested my head over his heart. It was soothing to me that it was a muscle that was still beating strongly in his chest. But the up and down of his chest was getting annoying.

"Could you, like, stop breathing, so I can sleep?" I muttered out groggily, not opening my eyes.

"I thought you wanted to be the one to kill me?" he asked.

"True. Keep breathing."

A comfortable silence filled the air as we both just laid there and tried to fall asleep. Well, *I* was trying to go to sleep. But after many minutes of it not happening, I sat up and yawned loudly, tears filling my eyes.

Emmon sat up too, his blond hair even more of a mess now. I gently ran my fingers through his hair to try and tame it, but it didn't work. "Can you tell me why Mom was so hysterical when I got hurt, Emmon?" I questioned quietly, fearing his response.

My brother let out a loud sigh, looking over at me with sad eyes. "She just doesn't want you to end up like Dad, Andrea," he said before giving me a small smile and leaving me confused.

Dad? How did this relate back to Dad? He died over a decade ago.

I flopped back down on my bed, growling in frustration. It was then a picture caught my eye. On my bedside table was a picture of a little girl with brown hair getting a piggyback ride from what looked like her father. He had the same brown hair and silver eyes.

I grabbed the picture and stared intently at it. I ended up tracing the smile on both of their faces. “Me and Dad,” I whispered, staring at his face. Wondering . . . *wondering* what could have happened to him that caused Mom to become the way she is.

Chapter 3

Dad, Dad, Dad. What do I remember about Dad?

I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to sift through my memories. “Why can’t I be like Shawn from *Psych*?” I muttered, staring at Dad’s face in hope some memory would trigger. Sadly, none did.

Was I too young to remember him? Was that why? Or was that time in my life so traumatic that my brain blocked it out? Wait, was that even possible?

Feeling curious, I opened up my laptop and googled whether or not a brain can block out a traumatic experience. “*Traumatic experience . . . dissociation . . . The brain will block out a traumatic experience in order for it to protect itself;*” I read aloud with raised eyebrows. “That’s cool.”

So . . . maybe that happened to me? *Or you were just too young to remember*, the realistic side of me argued.

I groaned out loud, blowing a strand of my brown hair out of my eyes. It floated back down on my face, so I blew again. And again. And again. I let out a huff of frustration and sat up on my bed.

Taking a chance, I hobbled out of bed and fell on my knees to look under my bed. Like I remembered from years ago, a cardboard box sat there, gathering dust. I grabbed onto the box and pulled on it. It was a lot heavier than I thought, so I ended up whacking my head on the edge of the bed from not stabilizing myself enough.

Once again, a shot of pain spiked through my head, but I shook it off. I wiggled my body under the bed and tried to pull the box once again. I was able to get it out by using my whole body, but I was sweating by the end of it. “Wow, Andrea, you really need to start working out,” I reprimanded myself, wiping a bead of sweat off my forehead.

I opened the box and just stared at its contents. A thick book laid right in the middle with a picture of Mom, Dad, Emmon and me. Above read: **The Robinson Family**. “Thank God for Mom loving photography,” I thought aloud, picking it up and setting it down on my lap. It immediately hurt, so I set it down on the ground and struggled to open it up. “Okay maybe not,” I rethought.

The very first picture was a tired looking but young Mom holding a swaddle of blankets in her arms. Dad had one of his arms wrapped around her while smiling brightly at the camera. I flipped the page and came across just more picture of chubby Emmon. “These are all about Emmon. Ew,” I said to myself, flipping through the scrapbook.

It felt like I flipped through a billion pictures of my brother before my birth happened. “He’s only two and a half years older than me,” I complained. “It’s not like they had a whole other life before me.”

My birth picture looked similar to Emmon’s, but Mom and Dad had a few more laugh lines on their face and Emmon was in Dad’s arms. I skipped over the couple of hundred first pictures because I knew there was no way I would be able to remember anything from when I was two and under. Dad died when I was almost four so age three was my only hope.

The first one from that time was my third birthday. My face and hands were covered with chocolate cake and the rest of my cake was destroyed. Then there was me reading my first book all on my own, me building a snowman with Emmon and many other things.

But the last picture caught my eye. I was sitting on Dad’s lap while wearing baseball clothing. Dad was also wearing a Red Sox cap and holding up a baseball.

I slammed my head on the book and groaned out—both in pain and annoyance. “Why can’t I remember? I have a great memory!” I murmured to myself. “Well, when I want to have one.”

At that moment, a vision of me running through the house laughing floated through my mind. And then strong arms catching me and spinning me around. Then . . . then lots and lots of crashes and crying. Then the next thing that hit me was the strong smell of something too clean. And then . . . nothing. Everything after that is just Mom fretting over Emmon and I like we were fragile glass.

I tried reaching out into the dark vicinity of my mind, but I couldn’t quite grasp onto the memory. It was just a bunch of moments jumbled together without any order. I opened my eyes when they all floated away into the dark abyss in my brain.

Feeling tired and perturbed, I slammed the scrapbook shut and didn’t even bother putting it back under the bed. I latched my hands onto the covers on my bed to pull myself up. This didn’t work quite well for me because I ended up pulling the covers off my bed and falling on the floor once again. *At least I didn’t hit my head*, I thought to myself.

After staying on the ground and letting my body heal some more, I gained enough energy to push my sore body off the ground. I stumbled around a bit—almost crashing into everything in my room—before gaining balance and making my way to the door. From all the way downstairs, I could hear Mom sniffling.

I made my way slowly down the stairs and came to the view of Mom sitting on the couch with her head in her hands and Emmon slowly rubbing her back. I walked over to her and wrapped my arms around her neck.

Mom reciprocated my hug and began crying on my neck. I shot Emmon an inquisitive look, but he just shrugged and smiled lightly.

It wasn't long before my neck and shirt became damp from my mother's tears, so I tried to soothe her by rubbing her head awkwardly. All that did was make her wail louder.

"Mom, won't you tell me what's wrong?" I asked desperately.

Mom moved away from me, wiping away her tears with the back of her hands. She nodded reluctantly and took my hands into hers, searching my grey eyes with her green ones. "Andrea, dear, you probably don't remember, but your father . . . he-he died a long time ago." Tears flooded her eyes once more, and she looked away while taking deep breaths.

"He had a condition that he couldn't cure, and it eventually killed him," she continued, her voice thick with tears. I furrowed my eyebrows at this, my heart thudding in anticipation at her next words. "It was Epilepsy. He had Epilepsy."

"Epilepsy?" I asked in shock. "Doesn't that have to do with a disturbance in the brain or something?"

Mom nodded, a few tears rolling down her cheeks. "It is basically when something happens to your brain and causes an abnormal amount of electric activity." She sucked in a large breath. "Your father had it, and he had to suffer from seizures daily."

"How did he even get Epilepsy, Mom?" I inquired, tilting my head to the side.

"One of the main causes of Epilepsy is head trauma, and that's what happened to your father—he got into a car accident when he was fourteen," Mom explained.

I sat back on the couch, mulling over the new information. I could feel a headache beating like a drum in my head from hitting my head on the bed and everything Mom has said.

Emmon moved to sit beside me and wrapped an arm around my shoulders. "And Mom is just scared that you might hurt your head and start having seizures," he said, hinting at his words earlier.

"So how did Epilepsy kill him exactly?" I questioned.

Mom let out a small sob at that question, and I knew I had taken it too far. I pulled her into a tight hug, whispering to her that it was okay. She shook her

head at my words and mumbled into my shoulder, “He had a grand mal seizure and went into a coma. He . . . he didn’t wake up.”

Emmon gently pried Mom off of me and shot me a warning look in the process. “Why don’t you go take a nap, Mom? I’ll visit next weekend,” he whispered lovingly. Mom nodded, giving Emmon a small hug before heading upstairs. She didn’t even look at me.

Emmon placed his hands on my shoulders and stared into my eyes. “Don’t ask Mom too many questions, alright? She’s really fragile right now, and I don’t want her calling me while crying her eyes out,” he stressed.

I nodded. “Are you leaving already?”

“I’m supposed to be in class”—he glanced down at his watch—“right now actually,” he told me reluctantly, frowning slightly.

I stood up from the couch and wrapped him up in a hug. “Okay, but be careful. I’ve heard that the girls are crazy over there. But you probably haven’t experienced that,” I teased, elbowing his side.

“Har har har,” he mocked laughed, rolling his eyes. He pulled the strap of his duffel bag over his shoulder and walked over to the door. “Wanna walk me about, sis?”

I grinned up at him, looping my arm through his and dragging him out through the door and to his car. I wrestled open his car and tossed his duffel bag in there. “Now leave, peasant, and don’t come back!”

“Love you too, Andi,” he said with a smile. “I’ll see you soon and take care of Mom for me.”

I shoved him to his car and saluted to him. “Aye, aye, sir!” Emmon just chuckled before getting into his car. With a wave through the side view mirror, Emmon drove off, kicking up dirt behind his wheels.

And I was left there, wallowing in the new information I had just received.

Chapter 4

The next week passed by in a blur. Questions about my dad and Epilepsy constantly plagued my mind. I rarely paid attention in class—nothing new in AP Bio—and stayed up late at night, twisting and turning in bed. I knew everyone could notice the change, but they didn't say anything.

How could I not even know about Dad and what happened to him? Would I eventually get Epilepsy? Is Epilepsy even genetic? What causes—

An elbow nudging into my side broke me out of my thoughts and caused me to snap my head up at Emily. Her confused eyes met mine, but she just gestured to our Pre-Calculus teacher Mrs. Ward.

“Oh! Um, two?” I blurted out without even looking at the equation on the board.

Mrs. Ward frowned at me and slowly shook her head. I slowly sunk in my seat as the other students laughed, my cheeks flaming red. “Miss Robinson, would you like to collect yourself?” she asked kindly.

I nodded eagerly and nearly sprinted out of the classroom. I made my way to the bathroom and stood in front of the sink, internally cringing. Dark bags hung under my grey eyes and my brown hair was messily thrown into a ponytail with strands coming out everywhere. A frown was permanently painted on my face and creases crinkled on my forehead.

“I look terrible,” I said to myself, pulling the band from my hair and running my finger through my locks. I also splashed some water on my face in hopes that it would wash away the look in my eyes.

Sadly, it didn't.

I applied a light layer of makeup and exited the bathroom just as the bell rang. Emily and Vivian were already there, holding my stuff with a sad face. I just forced a smile at them and took my things.

“I'm okay, guys,” I assured them, knowing what's going on in their head. “I'm just tired.”

Vivian opened up her locker, a frown twitching at her lips. “Do you think you have insomnia or something?” she asked.

“Not sure,” I replied, shrugging and trying to play it off coolly.

Emily closed her locker with a bang as did Vivian and wrapped an arm around my shoulders—which was awkward for her to do considering she was three inches shorter than me. “Well, we'll be with you no matter what.”

Vivian nodded to that but then started staring at a boy passing us. Emily sighed and dug her elbow into Viv's ribs. Vivian just smiled guiltily as we walked into the cafeteria and apologized.

We all got our food and sat down in our regular place in the corner. I played around with my salad, my thoughts running wild. Why would Mom wait so long to tell me about Dad? How did Dad feel having Epilepsy? Was he able to act like a normal kid? Or did he have the weight of it on his shoulders all the time?

A pair of snapping fingers brought me out of my thoughts, and—once again—I met the questioning gaze of Emily. I waved her concern away and asked, “Is everything okay, Em?”

She scowled. “No. Vivian had been staring dreamily at boys, and you have been angrily stabbing your salad. So no one was talking to me,” she explained.

I glanced down at my hand to see it wrapped tightly around my fork. “Sorry,” I apologized, taking a bite of my food.

Emily then shook Vivian to get her attention and started scolding her. Vivian just rolled her bright blue eyes and said, “I will not apologize. I'm a seventeen-year-old girl without a boyfriend. What do you expect me to do?”

“Support your friends when they need it the most,” Emily stressed out, gesturing to me. “I bet you couldn't go a day without fawning over a boy.”

“Yes, I could!” Vivian refuted loudly. “I'll start right now!”

Emily shot me a look and whispered, “We'll see how long that lasts.”

“I'm guessing not very long,” I responded after spotting a jock walk past our table. To our surprise, Vivian didn't even bat an eye and just focused on eating her pizza. Me and Emily exchanged shocked expressions.

Vivian rolled her eyes and stated, “Don't look so surprised, guys. I can control myself when I want to.” She looked over at me. “So you didn't tell us what happened at the doctors last week.”

I shrugged. “Nothing much. My mom just made me promise to set up an appointment today with Doctor Damien.”

“Oh,” Emily hummed to herself, nodding. “Doctor Damien Dragonslayer. He's pretty handsome, don't you agree Viv?”

Vivian bit down harshly on her bottom lip before blowing up her cheeks and shaking her head. Emily tilted her head to look at the ceiling and sighed, “With his luscious locks of black hair and eyes that you can just swim in forever? And don't you like those tall guys with some muscles?”

“I know what you're trying to do, Emily Stewart, and it's not going to work!” Vivian hissed, crossing her arms and lifting her chin in the air.



“Do you see anything, doctor?” I asked, swinging my legs back and forth as I sat on the hospital bed

Doctor Dragonslayer ran a hand through his black hair and sighed, “All your motor skills seem to be working fine and there is no abnormal activity in your brain. Although, your head seems a bit bruised, so I would try and not hit it on anything. Problems could arise from that.”

I laid back on the bed. “Why does it seem like Mom wants something to be wrong with me? I get that my dad got Epilepsy but . . . but that won’t happen to me.” I swallowed and glanced at the doctor nervously. “Right?”

Dr. Dragonslayer sat down at his desk and took off his glasses to rub his eyes. “Anything is possible, Andrea. The healthiest person alive could easily get cancer or have a heart attack. Everything is about chances.”

“So I could easily have seizure right now without any warnings,” I checked, sitting up.

“Potentially,” he answered honestly, rubbing his five o’clock shadow. “But the odds are highly against it. By the way, how is your mom doing?”

I tilted my head in confusion at that question but just shrugged it away. “Doing okay, I guess. I think she is still getting over everything that has happened; she is watching me like a hawk all the time.”

The doctor nodded his head and turned to look at me. “Has she told you about everything with your dad?”

“You know about that?” I nearly exclaimed, raising my eyebrows at him.

“I’ve known your mother for over a decade, Andrea. Of course I know about him,” he scoffed, putting his glasses back on and frowning. “I was a new doctor at the time, and I heard about your dad a lot. I asked to become his doctor because I had dealt with seizures first hand. I-I wanted to help him, but I couldn’t.”

I hopped up from the hospital bed and wrapped him in a hug. “Thank you for everything you’ve done, Doctor Dragonslayer. You’ve always been the person I can come to when I need it. You’re the closest thing to a dad I have.”

“It’s my fault why your dad isn’t here today,” he said, regret laced in his voice. “But I’m glad I can be there for you.”

I smiled at that and squeezed him tighter. “Nobody could’ve helped him. It was his time to die. But Mom needs the most comfort out of any Robinson right now. Feel free to come or call anytime. I’m sure it will cheer her up.”

“Take care of her, yeah?” Doctor Dragonslayer responded, gently pulling me off of him and standing up. I only came up to his chest.

“I will,” I promised, “but I need to ask some questions first.”

The doctor just laughed, shaking his head. “I know you do, and I’ll answer them but another time. I’m busy the rest of this week, so how about sometime next week? I’m sure I can whip up a powerpoint to show you or something.”

“Great!” I cheered, clapping my hands excitedly and exiting the room with a new pep in my step.

Finally. All my questions will be answered.

Chapter 5

“To your left! No, no now to your right! Don’t go that way!” my brother shouted, watching in terror as I shot the zombies in front of me.

“I’m doing the best I can, Emmon!” I yelled back, making my character on the screen jump out on the building and run to the other side of the map. I could hear all the other zombies jumping down after me and dared a look back. To my horror, a wave of zombies was trailing after me quickly.

“Run faster!” Emmon cried hysterically. I could picture him gripping his hair in his hands.

“I can’t go any faster! It’s an animated character, Emmon!” I retorted, gritting my teeth in annoyance. “And if this was real life, then I would leave your sorry butt behind to die!”

“You don’t mean that!” my brother scoffed.

I made my character run into another building and go upstairs with the sounds of the zombies slowly fading. “Try me,” I muttered. Once I reached Emmon’s pathetic character, I hit the revive button and had to force myself not to close my eyes in terror.

Right as Emmon’s character got up from the ground, me and Emmon jumped up in joy and embraced each other, forgetting all about our earlier bickering. “You saved me!” he cheered.

“I know that I’m the best,” I boasted jokingly, but my smile fell short when I heard the sound of the zombies attacking us. I hurriedly tried to get away from them, but they had surrounded us in a circle, their limbs whacking us.

“This is all your fault, Emmon!” I shouted, taking a step closer to him and nearly slamming the control on the ground.

“How is this my fault? You’re the one that hopped up from the couch like your butt was on fire!” he defended.

“You were right there with me!” I retorted snarkily. “And you put your arms around me first! So it’s your fault!”

“No, it’s yours!”

“No, it’s yours!”

“No, it’s yours!”

“No, it’s yours!”

“No, it’s mine!”

“No, it’s mine!” I gasped out then immediately slapped my hand over my mouth, glaring at the soon-to-be dead person in front of me. “You better run.”

Emmon dropped his controller and booked it out of the room. I took off after him, already feeling the pressure of a headache pounding in my skull from our bickering. I was slightly slower than him, but he luckily tripped over the rug in our hallway. I took that as an opportunity to leap on his back. The action sent us both slamming our heads together and falling down to the ground with me on top of his hard back.

“What the heck is in your body?” I groaned, rolling off of him while holding my head and ribs.

“Oh, I don’t know? Bones!” Emmon said sarcastically, blowing a blond strand of hair off his forehead.

I closed my eyes for a brief second, listening to the beat of the drum going off inside my head. “Do you really wanna go at this again?” I threatened, sliding a finger across my throat.

Emmon gulped, standing up with a wary look on his face. I hoped he was remembering back to the time I “accidentally” knocked my knee against his temple and knocked him out. Mom wouldn’t leave him alone for a month.

“I’m good, but thanks for the offer,” he grunted, massaging the back of his neck. “I’m just gonna go take an ice bath to try and soothe my muscles. I just had an elephant jump on me like a trampoline.” I shot him a deadly glare, and he just ran back to his room like the coward he was.

I slowly got up from my position on the floor and pressed my fingers against my temples to try and relieve some pressure, but it just made everything much worse. A small cry escaped my mouth at the streak of pain shooting from the top of my head to my eye.

It took all my strength to get up from the floor, and when I did, black spots danced across my vision and a staticy feeling crept over my head. All I wanted to do in that moment was close my eyes and never to open them again,

Deep breath. Deep, deep breath, I instructed myself, pressing my hand to my chest and focusing on my own beating of my heart. *You can do this, Andrea.*

I shuffled slowly over to the stairs and made my way down them by holding onto the railing and taking a break between each step. I could vaguely hear Mom talking to someone on the phone, but all my attention was zeroed in on the bottle of Advil sitting on the island.

I nearly screamed for joy, but it hurt to even think about doing that. So I eagerly opened the pill bottle and dry swallowed one of them out of desperation. I could feel the pill lingering in the back of my throat, so I used all my strength to open the fridge and chugged half of a water bottle.

The pill made its way down my throat, and I cringed at the feel of it. I then sat down at a stool near the counter and pressed my forehead against the cool marble. Almost instantaneously, slamming of the sledgehammer in my brain stopped, and I could sit in peace.

That was until Mom's voice raised. "No, no, Damien! Please you have to understand!"

I got up from the stool and made my way over to the living room. Mom was standing in front of the fireplace with the phone pressed up against her ear. She had her blonde hair pulled up into a messy bun and wrinkles surrounded where her mouth was pulled into a frown.

"Isn't there someway you can check on her daily or something, Damien?" Mom cried out in desperation, putting a hand over her eyes. "She needs something."

There was a moment of silence before Mom exclaimed, "I'll do anything for my baby girl. Despite the price or anything. I just don't want to lose another loved one from that . . . *disease*."

Letting out a heavy sigh, I made my way over to Mom and took the phone out of her hand. Doctor Dragonslayer stopped talking when I interrupted, "I got this. Go to bed; I know you're tired and stressed. I'll take care of her like you told me to." For some reason, Mom's green eyes lit up for a second when I said that.

"Thank you, Andrea," he sighed out. "Tell your mother I said goodbye." I frowned at that but nonetheless gave the message and hung up on him.

I brought my mom into my arms for what felt like the hundredth time this month and rested my chin on her shoulder. "I know watching me get hurt and in danger is hard, but I'm fine," I assured her, pulling away to look her in the eyes. She opened her mouth to argue, but I shot her a look. "And even *if* I wasn't fine Doctor Dragonslayer is the best doctor to help me. Okay? I'm—we're—in good hands. Don't let this fear run your whole life."

Mom slowly shook her head and sat down on the couch. "Andrea, what you don't understand is that Epilepsy has been a part of my life for a long, long time." She took a deep breath and continued, "Your father and I were childhood sweethearts. All of my earliest memories consisted of him, and I had to watch him suffer. I witnessed most of his seizures and sometimes had to go through them alone."

She blinked away the tears and smiled at me weakly. "They weren't small seizures. His limbs would go flying everywhere and the spasms were so bad. All day, every day was the constant fear of him having a seizure.

“I went with him to every doctor’s visit but nothing helped him. I-I watched the man I loved slowly degrade and break down from the weight Epilepsy had on him. Until it killed him.”

Mom stared into my eyes. “And I can’t watch you go through that, Andrea. I don’t think I could handle it. One of the worst things in the world is watching a loved one dying in front of your eyes through the years. It’s heartbreaking. And to watch it happen to my own daughter?” She shook her head as if she couldn’t even bear the of it. “I couldn’t do it.”

“That won’t happen to me, Mom,” I said, trying to convince her. Actually, I was mostly trying to convince myself. “Have I had any signs of having seizures before?”

Mom shook her head, smiling at me. “I’m sorry I’ve been overbearing and crazy these past few weeks. Memories of your father have been invading my mind, and I got a little paranoid.”

“It’s okay, Mom,” I whispered, pulling her into a tight hug. I squeezed my eyes shut and promised that no matter what happened, Mom would be happy.

Chapter 6

“All I want to do is get married,” Vivian sighed, resting her chin on her hand and letting her red hair fall over her shoulder in soft waves. She was laying on the floor of my bedroom on her stomach with legs kicked up in the air and purple pajama pants rolled up to her knees.

Emily glanced over at her with furrowed eyebrows, spinning around in my desk chair. “That’s *all* you want to do? Don’t you want to—I don’t know—make the next big discovery or inspire someone to achieve their dreams? Don’t you want to be remembered forever?”

“Not really,” Viv answered honestly, shrugging her thin shoulders. “I just want a husband that loves me and many, many children that are active. And maybe we’d have some pets that love to play in our backyard. And our house would be white with a picket fence and blue shutters. . . . Oh, I can see it now.” Vivian rolled onto her back, extending her arm into the air like she was about to grab something. “I can almost reach it. It’s like I can grab it and make it become a reality.” She glanced at us with a small smile. “Who knows, maybe I’ll be raising the next person that will make a far greater impact on the world than I ever could.”

“Sounds lovely,” I deadpanned, hanging my upper half of my body off the bed and letting all the blood rush to my head. “But you’ve got it all wrong, Viv.”

Vivian looked at me with a raised eyebrow, almost as if she was challenging me. “You’re thinking about the future—the far future—and not about the here and now,” I explained. “You have to live in the present to make the most of the time you have because you never know when your life will burn out”—I snapped my fingers—“just like that. And then you’d have wasted all that time by picturing a future you inevitably were never gonna have.”

I finished my little rant by sitting up and letting out an aggravated huff. Emily and Vivian just stared at me with wide eyes and parted lips. After a few moments of silence, Emily just shook her head and stood up to plop on my beanbag.

She tapped her fingers against her thigh and said, “You both have got it wrong. People fail other people. That’s why there is a whole fictional world. It is scientifically proven that you feel real emotions with fictional stories. So why waste your time with people that will ultimately fail you in the end? Fictional characters never do.”

“Have you figured out what you’re writing yet for that book you always keep talking about writing?” Vivian asked.

Emily sagged against the beanbag chair. “Coming up with the perfect topic is hard, okay? It has to be something you’re passionate about and won’t get bored with it. If you start a book and you’re not into it, then you’ll just waste all that time.”

“You’ve been saying all high school how you’ll finish the book before we graduate,” I said doubtfully. “We’re already way into our junior year, and you don’t even have an idea. Do you really think you’ll be able to get it done?”

“Yes, I will. The idea will hit me one day, and the words will just flow from my fingers,” Emily defended with a small huff escaping her lips.

I flopped back down on the bed and buried my face in the covers for a minute. “School is way too stressful to actually do anything productive, so you’re not going to have any time to actually write it.”

“Andi, you’re just a pessimist,” Vivian piped up. “If you put your mind to something, then you’ll have the will to get it done.”

I raised my eyebrows at that. “I guess so but don’t put your expectations up so high, y’know? Humans are weak and don’t do what they’re supposed to,” I deadpanned.

All three of us glanced at each other and let out tiny laughs to break the high tension in the room. “It’s a sleepover, and we’re being so serious. This needs to stop,” Emily said, standing up and stretching. She moved over to my closet and pulled out a board game. “How about we go back into our childhood?”

I scrambled out of the bed and grabbed the box, grinning from ear to ear. “*Mouse Trap*? This game is terrible and amazing at the same time.”

Vivian opened up the box and put it on the ground. “Now let’s really start this sleepover.”

We ended up playing the game for hours, laughing and talking about everything. Turns out that Emily actually did have a few ideas floating around to write a story on.

“They’re all love stories,” I stated, wrinkling my nose up as I put added the bathtub to the board and handed the dice to Vivian. “Do they have anything else in them?”

“What else do they need?” Vivian interjected with a dreamy sigh, rolling the dice and moving her yellow mouse to the spot with cheese on it.

“A deeper meaning? A book that goes beyond itself?” I listed off with uncertainty, hiding my laugh when Emily had to put two cheese back in the pile.

“I don’t mind books with romance with its main plot, but it shouldn’t be all about that. The characters should grow and develop during the story.”

I rolled the dice and landed on the four. This caused me to enter the “Loop” and land on the “Safe” space. *Wow, I’m landing on a space that is so helpful but completely useless right now*, I thought glumly.

Emily stared at me with her crystal clear blue eyes. “Got any suggestions, Andi?” she asked, but it came out as more of a challenge.

“Even if I did I wouldn’t tell you,” I told her honestly. “The book you write should be yours and yours alone. That means being inspired and coming up with it on your own.”

Emily’s shoulder deflated, and she said, “I guess you’re right.” Vivian put up the post on the board and passed the dice down to Emily.

I patted her on the back and shot her a small smile. “Don’t worry. The perfect story idea will come to mind, and it won’t take you long to write it.”

That was the end of that conversation, and we played the rest of *Mouse Trap* with lots of laughs and jokes without going anywhere near the topics from before. As always, Vivian ended up winning and wouldn’t stop bragging.

“That’s right. Guess who won again? You got that right. It’s me!” she gloated, rocking her head back and forth like a rock star. She even went as far as to play air guitar.

“And what to the winners always get to do?” I questioned, a devilish grin twisting on my lips when her face dropped.

“You got that right. You clean!” Emily finished, slapping my hand that was in the air ready for a high five. Like normal, her hand totally missed mine. The amount of force she was putting into the action caused her to jerk forward and hit her head right on the board.

Me and Vivian bursted into a fit of giggles when Emily lifted her forehead and had a red mark on her head. “How many times have I told you to look at my elbow when high fiving?” I lightly scolded, getting up from my cramped position on the floor and stretching.

Emily got up with me and put her hand where she hit her head. When she saw my amused expression, she scowled at me and dropped her hand. “Oh stop laughing. I can’t even count the number of times you’ve hit your head on something,” she fired back.

It was my turn to glare.

“Y’all can have your little pow wow later, but do I really have to put this up by myself?” Vivian interrupted from below.

“Yes!” me and Emily exclaimed together, not even bothering to look down at her.

“First one that breaks the stare can have the bed,” I suggested, knowing that it wasn’t going to work anyways. Emily just kept her eyes locked with mine, and I did the same.

“I can sleep on the floor just fine,” Emily stated bravely, crossing her arms and narrowing her eyes at me.

I copied her stance. “So can I.”

“That’s good because I’m not moving,” a voice spoke from our right. We both whipped our heads to the bed to see Vivian lounging on it with her arms under her head and red hair splayed out everywhere. A smile was spread out across her mouth as we stared at her.

“I’ll get the blow up bed,” I said with a defeated sigh, letting my shoulders slump forward.

This time it was Emily who copied my stance. “And I’ll get the blankets and sheets.”

Vivian’s laughter followed us out the door.



How much do I really know about seizures? That question has haunted me and made it so I was twisting and turning on the uncomfortable bed.

What are the symptoms to seizures? Do they even have a cure? The last question made my stomach turn inside out. If there was a cure, my dad would’ve gotten it, right? Unless he did try to get a cure and it ended up failing.

What is the difference between seizures and strokes? How do you help someone that is going through a seizure? How long do they last? Are there different types of seizures?

I sat up on the air mattress and ran a hand through my sweaty hair. My heart was pounding furiously in my chest and my head felt like it weighed a million pounds. I rested my head back on my pillow and listened to the sounds of Emily’s and Vivian’s breathing to try and calm me down.

I wonder what it feels like to have a seizure, I thought to myself, trying to fall back asleep.

I stuffed my head into my pillow and let out an aggravated huff of annoyance. It was like my mind couldn’t shut up about seizures and the

information I didn't know. Emily twisted around in her spot, and I immediately stopped moving in fear that I woke her up.

Her eyes were still closed and soft snores escaped her mouth every now and then. I smiled to myself and closed my eyes once again. *Just focus on the people around you, Andrea. There is no need to fret over something that may not even happen. Live everyday to the fullest and be happy with everyone around you while you can.*

And, just like that, I was slipping off into unconsciousness.

Chapter 7

The bell rang loudly, and it rattled around in my skull seconds after it was gone. Mr. Jenson picked up a pile of papers on his desk and turned on the projector. “Okay, today we are going to talk about the brain, and its functions,” he said.

I perked up at this, brushing the hair out of my eyes and staring at the white board expectantly. Excitement burned in my chest at the thought of all the questions I had being answered. Much to my disappointment, only a slide with a brain came up, and they were labeled.

Mr. Jenson started handing out the papers and explained, “I want you to label and color this picture, and we’ll go over the functions after y’all are done.” His eyes cut deeply into mine as he gave me the paper. It was the look he gave me every time we had an assignment to complete. Instinctively, I shrunk down in my seat and let my hair cover over my face.

Just like he wanted me to, I labeled the parts of the brain and colored them accordingly. Questions about seizures and how they related to the brain swirled around wildly in my head. Without realizing it, I raised my hand high in the air.

Mr. Jenson sighed when he looked at me and rubbed his forehead vigorously. He made his way towards me and deadpanned, “This is not for a grade, Miss Robinson. But if you want to do good on the test then you must complete it.”

A blush covered my cheeks at that. “Actually, Mr. Jenson, I wanted to ask you a few questions regarding the brain,” I corrected politely. He raised his eyebrows in surprise, so I took that as a cue to continue, “How do seizures relate to the brain exactly? What causes a person to even have a seizure? Does it have something to do with chemicals in the brain?”

Mr. Jenson just blinked and squinted his eyes at me. “Are you actually interested with something that has to do with Biology?” I wasn’t surprised by the shock laced in his voice. I was very vocal and adamant about how the class was useless.

“I’ve learned some new things recently, and I’m just curious about it,” I explained vaguely, trying to stomp down the bubbling of annoyance in my gut. “Now can you answer my questions?”

Mr. Jenson rubbed his mouth with his hand in thought and sat on the edge of the lab table. “Well, Andrea, I am not a doctor, but I can tell you a few things I do know.”

I nearly fell off the stool I was on from anticipation and shuffled closer to hear the words he was about to say.

“There are these things called neurones that travel in and out of the brain,” he began to explain. “They send electrical signals to each other that control the way we think, move and feel, right? Well, if a bunch of electric signals get sent at once or the signals get disrupted then it is called an abnormal message. That is when a seizure occurs.”

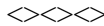
“And why do the neurons do this is exactly?” I asked.

“The neurons could be damaged or they might not be enough or too many. Those are all possible but scientists are still trying to figure them out,” Mr. Jenson replied patiently.

I opened my mouth to pin some more questions on him, but he just slowly shook his head. “I would love to go over this with you, Andrea, but I need to go through this lesson. Maybe they will answer some of your questions.”

I let out an aggravated huff and hit my head on the lab table. I already started to regret it when pain spread through my head rapidly. Emily patted my shoulder lightly and whispered, “You will know everything you need to know soon enough, Andi. Just be patient.”

I don't know if I can.



The day that I skipped—yes, skipped—into the hospital was the only day I was glad to smell the awful chemically smell of a hospital. I easily spotted Dr. Dragonslayer with his back to me. His stethoscope hung around his neck and nearly looked like it was about to fall off from the way his head was bent.

I walked up to him and politely tapped on his shoulder. He jumped up from his spot and spun around to face me, an easygoing smile plastered onto his face. “Hello,” I chirped, swaying back and forth on my spot.

“Hello, Andrea,” he greeted back, the corners of his eyes crinkling as he smiled at me. “Why don’t we go to my office to talk?” He turned to the receptionist and said, “I’m taking my lunch break now.”

Dr. Dragonslayer wrapped his arm around my shoulders and led me down the hallways to a small room with a desk and two chairs. He sat down behind the desk and gestured for me to sit down across from him. I did so and twirled my thumbs around on my lap nervously.

“You weren’t this quiet last week, Andrea,” Dr. Dragonslayer pointed out, his forehead creasing. “Did anything happen?”

I shook my head, my brown hair waving behind my head in soft waves. “No, no. I’m just trying to find out where to start,” I said honestly. I mulled over a few options in my head before starting, “What is the difference between seizures and strokes?”

“Strokes are bleeding the brain while seizures are an abnormal amount of electrical activity,” Dr. Dragonslayer answered simply.

“What are the symptoms to seizures exactly?”

Dr. Dragonslayer stroked his chin and rested his elbow on his desk. “Um . . . temporary confusion, staring spell, jerking movements, or strong emotions.”

I shuffled around in my seat for a second nervously. It’s kind of ironic. I was so eager to get all the answers to my questions, but now that it was actually happening, I was . . . scared. Scared to find out something that could change everything for me.

“How long do seizures last? How do they even stop?” I fired off.

“Most seizures last for only a few minutes,” he replied, not at all fazed at whatever I was asking. “But if a seizure lasts more than five minutes, then whoever is watching over the person should call the ambulance. As for how they stop . . . that is still unknown. Scientists suggest that the brain realizes it is having a seizure and sends chemicals to stop it, but that’s not for sure.”

That information spurred on my next question: “What do you do to help another person that is having a seizure?”

Dr. Dragonslayer got a distant look in his eyes as he stared at something over my shoulder. “Well, first things first, there only on some situations you should call a doctor for. They are: if a person hasn’t a seizure before, they can’t breathe after waking, have another one, lasts longer than five minutes, if they get hurt, if it happen in water or if they have another serious condition.

“For any seizure, stay with the person and take them to a safe place and tell them what happened in a simple way. Just try and comfort them in any way you can. And make sure they get home safely,” he continued. “But if a person has a grand mal seizure, then it is a totally different story. Make sure to ease them to the floor and turn them on one side, so they can breathe. Be sure to clear anything sharp near them, so they don’t get injured and put something under their head to cushion it. Remove glasses if they have some and loosen anything around their neck, so they can breathe. And make sure to time the seizure.”

“That’s all?” I checked. Dr. Dragonslayer gave me an affirmative nod. “Is there anything not to do?”

He let out a soft laugh and bobbed his head up and down. “Do not try to halt their movements, do not put anything in their mouth, do not give CPR and do not offer them food or water until they are fully alert,” he listed off expertly.

“Are there different types of seizures or just one?”

“Many, many different types. The two main types are focal and generalized seizures. Focal is when a seizure occurs in one area of the brain while generalized seizures happen in all areas of the brain,” Dr. Dragonslayer informed, entwining his hands together and resting them on his desk. “Focal seizures either happen with awareness or loss of consciousness. Generalized seizures, on the other hand, have six different types: Absence Tonic, Atonic, Clonic, Myoclonic and Tonic-clonic (grand mal).

“Tonic seizures that cause stiffening of muscles. *Atonic* seizures cause the loss of muscle control, and you might suddenly collapse to the ground. Clonic seizures are rhythmic, jerking movements. Myoclonic seizures, on the other hand, are only brief twitches of arms and legs. And the worst type of seizures are Tonic-clonic seizures. You can lose consciousness and your body will shake violently and bite your tongue.”

At his words, realization dawned on me. It was the type of seizure Dad had when he died. “Are there cures for seizures?” I asked quickly, sitting upright in my seat.

“Not cures exactly but treatments,” he corrected. There are four types of surgeries you can get: resective surgery, multiple subpial transection, hemispherectomy and corpus callosotomy.

“Resective surgery is the most common one and leads to the most success out of any of them. Doctors use MRI scans to pinpoint where the seizures happen and remove the size of the brain similar to that of a golf ball. The multiple subpial transection, on the other hand, is a rare procedure, and doctors only recommend it if you have severe and frequent seizures. During the surgery, doctors cut out multiple parts of the brain in order to stop the spread of seizures.

“The other types of seizures—hemispherectomy and corpus callosotomy—are different than the other two. Hemispherectomy is often referred to as ‘the most radical type of epilepsy surgery.’ It is when doctors remove the outer layer on one side of the brain that has been damaged by seizures. Corpus callosotomy surgery doesn’t even stop seizures. It just lowers the severity by cutting the nerve fibers between the two sides of the brain, so the seizures don’t spread from one hemisphere to the other.”

I furrowed my eyebrows in confusion. “Are there other ways other than surgery?”

“Surgeries are just the most common way,” Dr. Dragonslayer clarified. “There are also: responsive neurostimulation, deep brain stimulation and dietary therapy. For the first one, doctors will implant a device on the surface of your brain or within the brain tissue that will spot seizure activity and deliver electrical stimulation to stop the seizure. Deep brain stimulation, on the other hand, is when doctors implant electrodes in your brain to regulate seizure activity. Lastly, dietary therapy is when you have a diet that is high in fats and low in carbs.”

“Okay,” I muttered distractedly, playing nervously with my fingers. “One last question and then I’ll go: what can cause a seizure?”

Dr. Dragonslayer cleared his throat and half-smiled at me. “I’ve been waiting for this question. There are three main types of causes for seizures: epileptic, provoked and nonepileptic. As you already know, epileptic seizures are ones when people have an abnormal amount of electrical activity in their brain. If a person get a head injury, then they could possibly get this. This includes: strokes, brain infection or a brain tumor. Provoked seizures are when somebody is dealing with drugs, alcohol withdrawal and other imbalances. They usually have one seizure and not another one. And finally, nonepileptic does *not* result from an abnormal amount of electrical activity. It usually comes from a fainting spell, muscle disorder or psychological condition.”

Once the doctor was done talking, I closed my eyes and took deep breaths before saying, “Thank you so much, Dr. D. This means so much to me.” I stood up from my cramped position on the chair and held my hand out to him.

He just raised his eyebrows up at me and grinned. “I think we know each other a little more than a handshake, Andrea,” he teased, standing up and pulling me into a tight hug.

“I was just trying to be professional,” I defended, my voice muffled from his aggressive hugging.

A small chuckle escaped his lips before he let go and held out his hand, a playful look in his eyes. “Have a good day, Miss Robinson. Be sure to tell your mother I said hi.”

“You too, doctor,” I replied, taking his large hand in my much smaller one. I shook it vigorously and then walked out of the door with a new pep in my step, thinking that that chapter in my life was at its final page. Oh, how I was wrong.

Chapter 8

It was another day and another headache. As the days went on, the building up in my head got worse and worse. It became so bad that I would fall asleep in class and have to be shaken to wake up.

There was one day where I was eager to go to Ap Bio because of how cool it felt. I pressed my throbbing head against the table and let out an audible sigh. I didn't even have the energy to shy away from Emily's touch when she lightly put her hand on my shoulder. "Andrea, what is wrong?"

I lifted my head and looked at her, brown tendrils of hair falling in front of my eyes. "I've just been having these killer headaches lately, and I can't take it anymore."

"Have you told your mom?"

I shot her a dubious look. "My mom would freak out if she found out I was having terrible headaches. She's already asking me how I feel every ten minutes, and if I told her about this, then it will be even worse. Do you want to see me anymore?"

"Your mom isn't that bad," Emily said, rolling her eyes at me.

"There was this one time where I sneezed, and Mom made me stay home because I was 'sick,'" I deadpanned.

Emily pressed her lips together to keep herself from laughing. "I stand corrected." I snorted at that and rested my head back on the table.

My eyes fluttered closed, and I could slowly feel myself lose a tiny bit of my consciousness. My peace disappeared quickly when the classroom door slammed shut. I groggily opened my eyes and sat up, massaging my temple lightly.

Mr. Jenson stood in front of the room with his hands on his hips as he scanned our entire class. When our eyes met, surprise flashed through his eyes. A scowl formed on my face as I thought, *Didn't know I looked that terrible.*

"I think he's surprised that you even showed up," Emily joked from beside me, bumping her shoulder against mine lightly.

I let out a laugh at that and shook my head. I was about to respond when Mr. Jenson cleared his throat and announced, "Today y'all will begin the project about the brain. You can pick whatever we learned inside or outside of the classroom to center your project on. You have all day. Begin."

At his words, a large smile overcame my face, and I clapped my hands like London from the *Suite Life of Zack and Cody*. I pulled out my binder from my

bookbag and opened it to take out all the notes from this unit. “What are you going to do?” I asked Emily, ripping out a piece of paper.

Emily scoffed from beside me. “I’m not sure. I’m not obsessed with brain like you are.”

“I’m not obsessed . . . just really curious,” I defended, rolling my eyes and making a mini sketch of a brain. “I’m going to do mine on seizures.”

“Well, that’s a shocker,” Emily stated dryly, stealing a piece of my paper. “I might draw one of those creepy wooden doll things and show what part of the brain controls what.”

I halted in my drawing and looked up at Emily with raised eyebrows. “You mean a puppet?” She nodded. “Please make it look like Pinocchio.”

Emily rolled her eyes. “Don’t insult me, Andi. I was going to do that whether I was allowed to or not.” She chuckled at herself. “What are you doing?”

“I’m going to get one of the huge canvases from the basement and paint a large brain on it. Each section of the brain is going to have different colors, and I’m going to talk about how seizures relate to the brain, and what might happen if a surgery goes not so well in each parts of the brain,” I told her.

“Good luck with that,” Emily said, a devilish smirk growing on her lips. “I really think Biology has grown on you, Andrea.” She started fake crying, even going as far as to wipe under her eyes. “My little Robinson has grown up. I can’t believe it.”

“Don’t insult me,” I mocked from earlier, flicking her arm with my mechanical pencil. “This is one subject for AP Bio. Sue me.”

“What if I do?” she challenged.

“Be prepared to lose.” We both paused what we were doing and glanced at one another, busting out laughing.



“How is the food, Andrea?” Mom asked, looking at me from the corner of her eye.

“Good,” I mumbled back robotically, pushing the broccoli on my plate around.

A few minutes of silence passed with me staring endlessly at my plate of food and my stomach recoiling at the thought of ingesting it. “Anything interesting happen at school today?” Mom pestered.

“Not really. Just another boring project for AP Bio,” I half-lied. The project was anything but boring.

Mom shifted around in her seat to stare at me. “Well, what did they have in the cafeteria for lunch? You’re not really eating a bunch.”

At that, I looked up at Mom and furrowed my eyebrows. Her green eyes were wide and had a sheen in them that I remembered all too well. “I know Moms are supposed to ask how school is and everything but . . . what are you doing?”

Mom sighed quietly and glanced down at her lap. “Your father used to stare off into space cluelessly before he had a seizure. I just . . . I just wanted to make sure you were okay. That’s all.”

Guilt immediately crawled around my insides at how insensitive I was being. “Oh . . . Mom. I’m sorry. I didn’t-I didn’t even realize,” I apologized.

“It’s okay. I know how paranoid I’m being. I just can’t find it in myself to stop all the worry.” She buried her face in her hands, her blonde hair covering her face.

I reached out and took one of her hands in my own. “Have you thought about focusing your time and energy on something else? A hobby maybe?” I suggested. I softly squeezed her hand before taking her other hand to stare at her in the eyes.

There was so much sorrow and pain that I was always too blind to see. Mom shook her head defiantly. “I can’t do that. My whole life was always centered around helping your father and after he left . . . it was making sure you and Emmon were safe. It’s all I’ve ever known. And to suddenly stop?” She shook her head fervently again. “It seems impossible.”

“Uh. . .” I stuttered, biting my bottom lip nervously. “How about cooking? I know you like it a lot. Why don’t you try experimenting or something? It might serve as a distraction.”

Although I tried my hardest, Mom’s breathing only grew heavier and had no sign of slowing down. Tears spilled out of her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Her body started to quake, and she gripped her throat like she couldn’t breathe.

I immediately got up from my seat and ran over to her. “Mom? Mom!” I yelled, slightly shaking her shoulders to try and get her to look at me. But I couldn’t. She just kept staring at the same spot on the wall. “Can you hear me?”

My words just made her cry even harder and rough coughs escaped her mouth. “Call . . . him,” she whispered.

I furrowed my eyebrows at her as she struggled to get air into her lungs. “Him? Whom? Emmon?” I asked frantically.

“No, no!” she yelled, shaking her head. “*Him!*”

I picked up my phone hurriedly and dialed the only person that she could possibly be talking about. It took him three rings to answer, but, once he did, I rushed out, “Mom is having a panic attack, and I don’t know what to do! She told me to call someone, and I don’t know if she was talking about you or not!”

“Put her on the phone,” Doctor Dragonslayer demanded.

I did as he said and pressed the phone against her ear. Muffled sounds came out of the phone. It was almost instantly that the tears magically disappeared from Mom’s eyes and all the tension in her shoulders disintegrated.

She laughed at something he said and wiped away the remaining tears on her cheeks. “Thank you, Damien,” she said to him, a small smile on her lips and a pink color tinted on her cheeks.

That’s probably just from her crying, I reassured myself, shifting in my standing position while Mom was talking to the doctor. There was a gleam in her eyes I’d never seen before. *No. No! Mom does not like Doctor D. That’s insane! Well . . . right?*

I shook my head to get rid of my thoughts and pressed a kiss to Mom’s cheek. “Do you need me still?” I checked. Mom mouthed no before saying something else to Doctor Dragonslayer. “I’m going to the basement.”

She shot me a smile, and I took that as a cue to go. I raced out of the dining room and down the steps into the basement. I flicked on the lights and smiled when I saw the exact canvas I wanted. “I guess all those painting lessons I took when I was younger really paid off,” I mused to myself, grabbing the biggest paintbrush and a can of red paint.

I situated myself on the stool in front of the canvas and swirled the paintbrush in the paint. “Time to actually put effort into Bio.” And then I started to paint.

Chapter 9

“Daddy! Daddy!” I yelled, running down the length of the hallway in socks. It wasn’t the best idea, but that didn’t even cross my three-year-old mind. “Don’t catch me! Don’t catch me!”

Thunderous sounds of feet stomping on the ground buzzed in my ears from not that far behind me. “You can’t get away from me, Andi!” he shouted, his voice sounding as if it was almost right next to my ear.

I slipped and slid right into the coat closet, huddling right under the jackets hanging up. From behind the door, Daddy came to a stop and glanced around with mock worry. I placed my hand over my mouth to stop my giggles but failed miserably.

Daddy knocked on the door and called out, “Andi, are you here?” I pressed my lips together and curled my face into the wall behind me. “Well, I guess not.” This exploded another round of laughter from me before the door busted open and light flooded in.

There Daddy stood with his brown hair ruffled from sleeping and a certain gleam in his grey eyes. A shrill escaped my lips before Daddy picked me up in his arms and started running down the hallway. I thrashed around in his arms, my limbs flying wildly.

Daddy dumped me onto the couch and grinned wickedly from above me. He started tickling my sides and laughed when little giggles escaped my lips. And the next thing I knew, Dad’s smile disappeared, and he took a giant step back.

I sat up and reached my short arms out to him. “Daddy? Daddy? Where are you going?”

Dad grabbed ahold of his head and ran out of the room. I attempted to get off the couch to follow him, but Emmon grabbed me before I could. He wrapped his arms around my torso and kept me in place. “Andi, stay still!” he ordered when I started trying to escape from his arms.

There was a loud crash from the kitchen, and it startled Emmon so much, that I was able to get out of his arms and run over to the kitchen. It was a sight that traumatized me to the point of forgetting about it.

Dad’s blood painted over the usual white tiles and his whole body was shaking from whatever was happening to him. Mom was crying and talking to someone hurriedly on the phone. She slammed the phone down and grabbed a towel to wrap around Dad’s head.

As a three-year-old, I didn't know what to do. So—like most toddlers—I just started crying and screaming. Mom glanced up at me, tears and fear swimming in her emerald eyes.

Emmon grabbed me again and clamped his hand over my eyes. I kicked at his body and squirmed to try and get out of his grip to run over to Daddy. The last thing I remembered was hearing the overwhelming sound sirens invading my ears.



I sat up in my bed with a start, sweating glistening on my skin and my breathing labored. My covers were thrown off of my bed and the sheets were half on and half off. I fell back on my bed with my limbs spread out wildly.

My chest rose and fell drastically with each breath I took as I stared up at the ceiling, trying to digest the nightmare I just had. *Was that a nightmare or a . . . a memory?* I thought to myself, goosebumps rising up on my skin just at the thought.

I rolled up on my side and curled up into a ball with my arms wrapped around my legs. My heart was thudding wildly against my ribcage, and it reminded me that everything was okay and that I was safe.

I let my eyes flutter close and immediately regretted it. The agonizing picture of blood oozing out of Dad's head and him having a seizure popped up. A cry of pain left my mouth from the banging going on in my head, so I buried my face in my pillow. That only made it worse.

I rolled over back onto my back and just focused on the next breath going in and out of my body. It calmed me for a little bit and then the thought of Dad not being able to breathe anymore sprang into my mind.

Tears suddenly flooded my eyes, but I pushed them back. "Why are you crying now, Andrea?" I muttered to myself. "Dad has been dead for over a decade now."

Deciding that I was pitying myself enough, I reached out blindly onto my nightstand and grabbed my phone. I immediately dialed the one number that I knew would pick up no matter what—whether it was early in the morning or late in the night.

The phone rang four times before a groggy voice mumbled, "Hello?"

“Emmon,” I breathed, reaching down to grab my blanket and wrap myself in it like a burrito. “Thank you for picking up.”

Emmon cleared his throat. “Andrea. No problem. Can I ask why you are up this late or early? Or whatever time it is.”

“I had a nightmare,” I confessed, resting my head back on my pillow and fighting the urge to close my eyes. “I’m not sure if it was a memory, but it was pretty bad and now I can’t fall asleep. I knew you were the one person I could call.”

“Of course,” he agreed. I could hear the smile in his voice. “Do you want to talk about it?”

I pressed my lips together and let out a slow breath. “I think talking about it will help some,” I decided, taking a deep breath to prepare the words coming out my mouth. “Dad was chasing me around the house and then . . . then he started tickling me. But he just stopped and ran away. You tried to stop me, but I escaped and saw Dad bleeding out and Mom crying. . . . The last thing that happened was the overwhelming sound of sirens in the air.”

I was crying before I even realized it, and my voice shook with each word coming out. “Em-Emmon, did that really happen? Or was that just a nightmare and only a nightmare?” I squeezed my eyes shut to stop the tears, all the while praying that it was the latter.

“Oh, Andrea,” Emmon sighed out. My heart broke at that moment because I knew what his next words were going to be. “I was hoping you didn’t remember that. I’m so sorry.”

A small gasp escaped my lips, and I slapped my hand over my mouth. “Emmon, you were only five when that happened,” I realized out loud. “You grew up so fast. So fast for me. *I’m* so sorry.”

Emmon laughed, but it sounded strained. “Life is a gamble, Andi. And we just got a really bad set of cards.”

“Everything happens for a reason,” I reminded him quietly. “Even if we don’t see why something happens, it’ll make something possible as an end result. Me being clumsy in gym set all these chain reactions and . . . and I’ll just go along for the ride.”

“Yeah, and maybe all of this craziness will help me decide what to do for the rest of my life,” Emmon joked lightly, trying to clear the heaviness in the air away.

“I don’t think even that will be able to help you,” I teased through the phone.

Emmon chuckled quietly but stopped quickly. “Andrea, are you okay?”

“I’m scared,” I said, looking up at my ceiling through the pitch black darkness. “I’m scared that I will turn out like Dad and one day have a seizure. And . . . and I might die. I don’t know. I’m just really freaked.”

“Just live life one day at a time,” Emmon replied. “Who knows what tomorrow will bring, so it’s all about today. And don’t live your life full of fear. Enjoy it.”

I buried my face in my pillow and let out a groan. “That’s harder than it sounds. Did you know six hundred people die from Epilepsy every year? I mean, I know it’s not a lot but considering that Dad was one of them . . . it makes everything so much more real.”

“I know, Andi. I went through that same phase a couple years back. I thought I would end up dying from a seizure but soon realized that the chances of that happening were—are—slim.”

“I guess you’re right,” I grumbled, sleep covering my entire body. “Doctor Dragonslayer was telling me all about seizures, and I don’t think it helped me out any. It just made me even more paranoid than I already was. Do you think I’ll turn into Mom?” By the end of my speech, my words started to slur, and I could feel my mind getting fuzzy with exhaustion.

“Nobody can be a worry wart like Mom,” Emmon reassured with a teasing undertone. When I didn’t reply, he whispered, “Goodnight, Andrea. Have sweet dreams, and if you need to talk to someone, then just call me. Love you.”

“Love you, too.” Then I was out like a light.

Chapter 10

“Got an idea yet?” I pestered Emily, opening my locker and placing some of my books inside.

She shot me an annoyed look and said, “Give it time. A masterpiece takes a while.” Vivian snorted at that but immediately covered it up with a cough when Em shot her a look. “Oh, don’t laugh. Have you found your prince charming yet?”

“You don’t find love, Em. Love finds you,” Vivian stated with a roll of her eyes as she examined her red nails. “I can’t just choose to fall in love.”

Emily just scowled and rested her back against the lockers and gave me a curious look when I just stared into the lockers. I waved her concern away and just smiled. “Just a headache.”

She slowly nodded before saying, “I actually do have a story idea brewing inside my thinking cap, but I just have to see if it has a good ending or not.”

“No stories have true endings,” I argued, slamming my locker shut. “The author just decided to end it there because they can’t be writing forever. Who knows, after the last chapter of one of your favorite books, one of the characters could’ve died or something. You never know.”

Vivian tilted her chin up to the ceiling and pondered that idea for a minute. “Well, the author would’ve written about that if it happened,” she pointed out stubbornly.

“Or maybe they wanted to end the book in a positive note,” I responded challengingly, swinging my bookbag on my shoulder and twirling a piece of my hair around my finger. “Sometimes I want a good cry, so I’ll just make up a really sad ending to one of my favorite books.” My best friends shot me weird looks. I just shrugged. “It works!”

Emily just smiled to herself. “Y’all ready for that math test we have today? I just know I’ll do good on it,” she said sarcastically.

“What? The math we are—” I was cut off when a solid body collided with mine and sent me slamming against the lockers. I felt the cool of the metal burn against the back of my head and the world went black for a second.

And then loud sirens like the ones in my nightmare started ringing through my head obnoxiously. I slapped my hands over my ears and shook my head vigorously to get the sound to go away. The action made the pain in my head worsen, and felt something sticky slide down my scalp. I closed my eyes shut in hopes that this wasn’t actually happening to me.

Emily and Vivian immediately reached down to help me, but I shied away from them and cried out in agony. In the distance, I could hear a frantic voice apologizing furiously while another one yelled at them.

I slowly opened my eyes to see Emily holding Vivian back by the back of her shirt as she spat some words at the jock that was standing there with his head bent in shame. My hand robotically reached out on its own and touched the tender spot on the back of my head. A hiss left my mouth when I applied pressure.

I brought my hand back to my face to find it caked in blood. At the sight, flashes of memories from my nightmare invaded my mind and caused another wave of cries to escape my mouth. Emily and Vivian helped me stand my already sore body up and face the person that did this to me.

His large, blue eyes looked at me like a wounded deer, but I was too livid to care. “Do you even care that you did this to me!” I suddenly yelled, adrenaline coursing through my body. “This is serious, y’know!” By then, all the students in the hallways crowded around us and stared at me in shock.

“Do you just not care what your actions have on affect other people?” I shouted, taking a painful step closer to him. He widened his eyes and took one step back. “Huh?!”

“W-well. . . .” he stuttered.

“Excuses!” I interrupted rudely. “Head injuries can lead to some pretty serious conditions! Conditions that people could potentially die from! Is that what you want? For me to die?!” I knew by then that what I was saying was completely crazy and irrational, but I couldn’t find it in myself to stop.

The jock shook his head, his blonde hair flying everywhere. “Well, you should think twice before you go running into people!” I scowled before turning on my heel and stomping away.

Emily and Vivian ran after me, and they both grabbed my arms. “Whoa, Andrea. I think you need to go to the doctor,” Emily suggested, but there was an undertone of demand.

I shook my head slightly, wincing when a spike of pain shot through my scalp. “I’m just going to go home. I don’t want to be here anymore.” I could hear them start to protest behind me, but I freed myself from them before they could get a word in edgewise. Everybody stared at me as I fled down the hallway with my head lowered in pain.

When I got outside, the hot temperature almost made me run back inside, but I began my short trek back home by putting one foot in front of the other.



The next thing I knew, I was lying on my bed, waking up from a long nap I had. My head had stopped bleeding with the gauze I had wrapped around it, but it still stung. Flashbacks of me yelling at the guy in my mind flashed through my mind, and I let out a long groan of embarrassment.

“Good going, Andi,” I scoffed to myself, slowing getting out of bed. “Taking your anger out on someone that didn’t deserve it was a really smooth move. Why didn’t I think of that earlier?” I huffed angrily at myself and nearly slapped myself for not thinking rationally.

I waddled my sore body to the bathroom and unwrapped the gauze around my head warily. Blood was plastered all over it, but it was all dried up. I jumped into the shower and tried my hardest not to let the water run directly over my head, so it wouldn’t hurt too badly.

I put on some fresh clothes and walked back into my bedroom a lot quicker than I went in. I didn’t dare to brush my hair and just settled in by wrapping it up into a towel. My body yearned to rest, so I laid down on my stomach on my bed and closed my eyes in hope to succumb to peace once again.

There was no such luck because laying there and waiting for sleep to take me over allowed me to think about things. Well, to be specific, the jock I yelled at for bumping into me. “I didn’t even hear his side of the story,” I groaned, lifting my hand up into the air and letting it fall back down. “Look at me being all compassionate.”

I sat up and grabbed my phone from the nightstand to call Vivian. However, when I turned on my phone, my jaw dropped open immediately. I had over two hundred texts and fifty missed calls. Most of them were from Mom and Emily while a couple others were from Emmon and Vivian.

“How long was I sleeping for and how hard?” I asked myself, clicking on Emily’s name and putting the phone up to my ear.

It barely rang once before Emily answered and screeched, “Oh my gosh! Andrea, what happened to you? We tried to call you earlier, but you didn’t pick up the phone, so we got worried. Then we called your mom, and she started freaking out—”

“You called my mom?” I almost shouted, already making my way off my bed. “Emily, why would you do that?”

Her breath hitched over the phone. “We were so scared, and we didn’t know who else to call.”

“You couldn’t have just come over to my house to find me *sleeping*? Now my mom won’t ever let me out of her sight again.”

“I’m sorry, but—”

“I’ll talk to you later,” I interrupted, opening my door and hanging up on her. I ran down the stairs to find Mom talking to someone on the phone while holding her head in her hands. *Please don’t be the police*, I mentally begged.

Mom looked up when I came down and widened her eyes dramatically. She muttered a, “She just came down. Talk to you later.” Then she was wrapping me into a hug and squeezing tightly. “Andrea, you scared me so much,” she sighed.

“Please, don’t tell me you called the police,” I replied immediately, already preparing myself for her affirmative words.

Mom just shook her head, a small smile on her face. “I’ll admit that when Emily first called me that I freaked out just a little bit.” I raised my eyebrows in challenge at that. She playfully rolled her eyes. “Okay, fine. I freaked out a lot. But I couldn’t help it. You wouldn’t answer any of my calls or texts, so I sped home and found you sleeping on your bed.”

She pressed a hand over her heart. “I was so relieved, but then I saw the gauze wrapped around your head and freaked out again. I was talking to Damien”—*again?*—“and he calmed me down.” Her fingertips ran lightly over my still healing wound. “He said to take me to the doctor if it was hurting too bad. How do you feel?”

“Sore,” I answered honestly with a shrug of my shoulders. “But I just want to stay home and be with you, Mom.” She smiled brightly at that and pulled me into another hug. “You’re the only one I need right now.”

Chapter 11

It was after that my life sorta . . . stopped. In a way. I woke up every day and went to school. There I would laugh and talk with my friends, and then I would go home and work on my school work until midnight every night. Each day the same thing happened.

I never did get to apologize to that jock for yelling at him like I did. Turns out that Vivian didn't know who he was, so I didn't really have a way to contact him. But, mostly, I was too ashamed of myself to gain the courage to apologize like other people would do.

Nightmares about my dad still plagued my mind at night and caused me to wake up only a few hours after going to bed. There were some new ones about my friends and family members also dying from a seizure. Needless to say, coffee quickly became my best friend.

Mom was also becoming different. Her eyes sparkle in a way I'd never seen before and smiles lit up her face more times than not. She stopped worrying so much about me and my health and focused more on the happiness of each and every day. She even took my advice and started taking cooking classes every Tuesday and Thursday to master her craft.

That plan backfired on me because I had to start cooking on my own with her gone.

And while Mom started to become more and more laidback, I was turning into how she used to be. Everything I would look at, I would come up with an image in my mind of how it could either kill or seriously injure someone. Not a day went by that I didn't think about seizures and the potential to have one. It was always the fear at the back of my head.

Emily and Vivian were all good too. Emily was dropping hints on the new book she was writing but wouldn't tell me or Vivian what it was about. Apparently it was going good because she would come to school with a huge smile on her face and a new pep in her step. A couple of weeks after the whole incident with my head, she had commented, "This story is really close to my heart, so I don't plan on stopping anytime soon."

I wasn't the only one changing either. Vivian stopped being obsessed with boys and really focused on her schoolwork. She wasn't the best, but she tried her hardest and just focused on speaking to me and Emily during lunch. I could also see the fear for me in her eyes each and everyday. I guess that one day at school didn't only just scar me.

I hadn't talked to Doctor Dragonslayer in awhile because Mom stopped forcing me to go get checkups. She did tell me one day that he was doing well but just very busy. Don't ask me how she knew that.

Emmon . . . well Emmon was just Emmon. He called me every night before I went to bed and asked me how I was feeling. He still had no idea what he wanted to do for college and weighed some options with me. None of them fit him enough.

Well, Emm—

Vivian snapped her fingers in front of my face and stared at me with raised eyebrows. "You were just zoning out there for a second," she said. "You okay?"

I nodded, taking a huge bite of my sandwich. "I was just thinking about the last few weeks," I answered after swallowing. "Everything has been . . . normal."

"Yeah," Emily agreed, reaching over the table and snatching a fry from my tray. I shot her a sharp look, but she just grinned. "It's weird, isn't it?"

I opened my mouth to reply when a loud crash echoed through the lunchroom. Instinctively, I put my arms above my head for cover and shrunk down in my seat. I could feel my breath grow fast at a high rate, my chest rising up and down like I just ran a marathon. The only thing on my mind was the image of Dad laying in his own pool of blood.

A hand gently touched my shoulder, and it made me jump in my seat. I slowly lowered my eyes to see Emily and Vivian shooting me questioning looks. I swallowed harshly and pressed my hand against my chest to calm down.

"Sorry. That scared me," I said, eyeing the kid who was picking up the lunch tray they dropped. "I took AP Psych last year, and what just happened to me is called inattentional blindness. A fascinating topic." They both glanced at each other. "Really."

"As long as you are okay, Andi," Vivian replied slowly after a few moments of silence.

I nodded but was shaking my head in my mind.



Whoever says painting is fun is dead wrong. Sure, splashing paint at people is enjoyable but actually sitting down and working on one? Torturous. I mean, the *Mona Lisa* doesn't even have eyebrows!

“Why do I hate myself?” I asked, putting a huge pink blob right in the middle of the canvas. It would somehow turn in a brain in the future for sure. “And when did I start to become an overachiever?”

I laughed at myself and started to outline the shape for the brain with a sharpie. My stool lifted off the ground a little, but it sent my heart racing furiously. I stood up and decided to just stand while doing it. “I’m just being cautious,” I reassured myself, shaking out my arms to get rid of any other fears.

I glanced over at the piles of paint cans and involuntarily took a step back.. Scenarios of paint cans falling on top of me and hitting my head flitted through my mind. I carefully unstacked them and placed them all in a single line.

A smile crossed my lips at what I had done and was about to go back to my project when I caught sight of all the other canvases leaning on each other. “That could fall too,” I muttered, laying them all out equally on the basement floor.

“It is completely normal to freak out like this, right?” I inquired to myself. Then realization struck me like a lightning bolt. “I’m turning out like Mom!”

I buried my face in my hands and nearly started crying then and there. “When did this happen? I promised that I would never become like her? She’s not even like herself anymore!” I cried out.

It was comical really. The child becomes like the parent when the parent tries to make themselves younger and “chill.” I just thought it was going to happen many, many years from then! Or never really.

I was too busy wallowing in my self pity to hear the basement door open until a voice called out, “Andrea? What are you doing?”

I instinctively shook in my position and looked up to see Mom staring down at me with concern, a frown tugging at her lips. I realized that I was sitting on my knees in the middle of the floor, so I stood up and smiled at her innocently. “Just working on my projet.” I gestured to the canvas that was nearly on the other side of the room.

She glanced around with a confused expression. “Do you reorganize the room or something?” she questioned, walking over to the paint cans and picking one up. “I was sure that these were stacked up. . . .”

“I just made the room safer,” I replied nervously, shifting my weight from one foot to another. “Plus, the room looked tacky with the way they were stacked up.”

Mom raised a skeptical eyebrow and set down the paint can. She made her way back over to me and put her hands on my shoulders. Her green eyes met my grey ones. The old spark of concern was back.

“Tell me what’s really going on, Andrea,” she prompted, wrapping an arm around my shoulders and squeezing.

I shrugged nonchalantly but could feel my face heating up from under her gaze. “There is nothing going on, Mom,” I lied. “I’m being safe like you have wanted me to be all these years. Aren’t you happy?”

“Andrea, you know that being safe is important but this . . . this is just being paranoid and obsessive,” Mom pointed out with a shake of her head. “I don’t know you reasoning for doing this, but you need to figure this out soon. Your actions and decisions doesn’t just affect you.”

“I know,” I mumbled before turning around and rushing upstairs without so much as a warning. I made it to my room in record time and face planted on my bed. “You’re stupid, Andrea Robinson. Completely and utterly stupid.”

I sat up and brushed the hair out of my eyes. I grabbed my laptop and started searching up ways you can die from a seizure. “You could fall and crack your head open or drown or get in a car accident,” I mumbled to myself.

I clicked on several articles until my eyes burned from staring at the computer screen for so long. My eyes watered from the lack of blinking and tiredness. “SUDEP: sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. It is an unexpected and sudden, non-drowning and non-traumatic death. It usually happens when someone can’t breathe during a seizure,” I read aloud, my eyes suddenly wide and alert.

I was about to look at more about SUDEP when my eyes glanced at the clock. “One in the morning?” I groaned. “I’ve been obsessing over this for three hours? I’m going to die tomorrow.”

I carelessly threw my laptop on the ground and squeezed my eyes shut in hopes to get a few hours of sleep. Too bad that didn’t actually happen.

Chapter 12

February 18th,

I learned today that children with parents who have had Epilepsy has a higher chance to get Epilepsy than other kids. Some Epilepsy syndromes are based on genetics alone. So does that mean I'm going to get Epilepsy?

February 19th,

I had another bad headache today. Emily and Vivian were worried for me, but I told them I was fine. Today that I learned that neurons in the brain can travel as from 1 mph to about 268 mph. Crazy, right?

February 20th,

My body decided to betray me and didn't let me get good enough sleep. Mom has been happier, and I've been grumpier. A squirrel running up a tree scared me. I learned that children with Epilepsy will grow out of it into adulthood.

February 21th,

Emmon called me the other day and asked how he would look as a lawyer. Um, no. And you know what weird thing happened? A guy asked Vivian out, and she said no. No! What world have we come to? I learned that women have a harder time dealing with Epilepsy. This is because of hormone changes and pregnancy.

February 22nd,

I fell asleep during Pre-Calc and had a nightmare about Dad again. I was excused from class and just ended up going home to take a nap. Where I had another nightmare. I learned that you can't swallow while having a seizure. Interesting, right?

February 23rd,

I think I'm becoming crazy. I can't seem to go to sleep, so I'll just stay up researching about seizures. Does that make me obsessed? I learned today that the frontal lobe controls memory. If you have a seizure surgery there, you can potentially lose your memory.

February 24th,

Mom has been a lot happier lately and has been talking on the phone a lot. I wish she would tell me what's going on, but I respect her privacy. Lately, I've been wondering what my life would be like if I hadn't got hurt in gym that day. I wouldn't know anything about seizures and Dad. Everything happens for a reason. I didn't learn anything about seizures because everything I looked up, I already knew. Should I be worried?

I slammed my head on my journal and let out a groan. A headache throbbed in my head and left my eyelids heavy. I couldn't remember the last time I left the room. *Maybe it was when we had school two days ago?*

I wrinkled my nose at that thought and ran a hand through my very obvious oily hair. "Why did I become so disgusting?" I asked myself, opening up a new tab on my laptop and creating a new journal entry:

February 25th,

Why exactly am I making these journals? Well, if I do ever have a seizure like Dad, then I'll probably have to get surgery. And, with my luck, I'll lose all my memories. JK. That wouldn't happen. The real reason why I am doing this is because all the stress and lack of sleep I have been getting has noticeably been affecting my memory. Some days are just a blur, and I don't want to lose track of my own life. Nobody wants that. Plus, Mom told me today—when she came to check if I was still alive—that Dad actually did get surgery done, but it was unsuccessful.

I rubbed my forehead vigorously and laid back on my bed. "I seriously have no life," I said aloud, rolling onto my stomach and hugging my pillow like a teddy bear. "Staying in my room all weekend like some loser. Wow." Emily and Vivian had even asked me if I wanted to hang out, but I had made the

excuse that I was working on my AP Bio project all day. *Ha! As if! I haven't touched that thing in ages.*

“Procrastination as its finest, ladies and gentlemen,” I announced like a dork, rolling off my bed intentionally and landing on the floor. I was still wrapped up in my blanket like a burrito, so I didn't even feel the impact.

I closed my eyes tightly and started laughing to myself. “Okay, it's official: I've gone crazy. Or maybe I'm just lonely. I mean, I'm talking to myself,” I pondered quietly, moving my body, so I was rolling around my room in my thick blankets.

It wasn't long before I got dizzy and had to stop. My headache only worsen, and I knew wasn't just crazy. I was also a complete idiot. “This is what I get for trying to have fun once in my life,” I murmured angrily, trying to sit up, but I was too fat to.

A huff left my mouth as I flopped up and down on my spot in an attempt to get up. I think I was too busy focusing that I didn't hear Emily slam open the door or see her standing there with an amused expression. “Need help?” a voice laughed.

A loud scream escaped my mouth, and I tried to turn my head to the door but failed. “Emily? Is that you?” I called out. “Can you come to my line of vision?”

Giggles filled the air, and I strained my neck to try and get a glimpse of her to scowl but failed. Emily finally walked up to with a wide smile on her face. Her brown hair was pulled back into a braid, and her blue eyes were shining with amusement.

“Need help?” she teased.

“Just get me out of this,” I demanded crossly.

Emily's eyebrows rose at what I said and crossed her arms. “Are you really in a position to order me around, Andi?” I just stuck my tongue out at her and squirmed blankets. “I'll let out after I say something.”

She took a deep breath and began, “I came here to give you a piece of my mind because I was so angry. Isolation yourself in your room for two days straight? That is so unbelievably unhealthy. And lying to us? I doubt this is working on your project.” She shook her head, her cheeks tinting pink at her rant. “I'm just glad I caught you like this.”

I licked my cracked lips and frowned slightly. *Did I really affect her like this?*

It was as if she read my mind. “You do know that your actions don't affect only you, right?” she checked. I nodded hesitantly. “Well, you don't. Vivian and

I were worried sick! Gosh, you're so oblivious. It kills us to see the way you're obsessing about seizures. I know it's a huge part of your life, but you've stopped living your entire life because of this."

She sighed heavily. "Do you know how hard it is to watch? To see you degrade yourself to a shadow of who you used to be. If you really love us, then you'll take better care of yourself."

"I'm sorry," I apologized sincerely. "I didn't realize how I was being. Once I get out of this burrito blanket, I'll try to be my onceself once again."

Emily grinned so widely, her eyes turned into little slits on her face. "Okay, let me unravel you now," she chirped, grabbing the edge of the blanket and yanking with surprising force. The world spun in front of my eyes as I spun around in the blanket and landed roughly on the floor.

I pressed a hand to forehead and groaned, "Do you workout in your spare time, woman?"

"*Maybe*," Emily drawled out, an evil smile curved on her lips.

I had to use my bed to stand up and even struggled then. Emily chuckled at me from behind but shut up when I shot her a look. "It feels good to be out of that blanket," I commented, resting a hand on my sore back.

Emily just stared at me, a tilt to her lips and expectantly raised eyebrows. I just rolled my eyes at her and said, "Okay. I give you permission."

Emily grabbed my shoulders and shook me back and forth lighter than I was expecting. "Pull yourself together! You are Elastigirl!" she quoted from *The Incredibles*.

"Did that make you feel better?" I asked.

She nodded, a bright smile on her face. "Actually it did." Her eyes swept over me and wrinkled her nose. "What happened to you?"

I glanced down at myself to see my pajamas crinkled and one leg of the pajamas rode up higher than the other side. "I know I'm gross, but you still love me."

"When I came here, I was going to tell you that you need a boyfriend but now that I see you like this. . . . I don't know," Emily said. "I think you're too gross to get one."

I lightly slapped her shoulder and pulled her into a tight hug, laughing loudly. "How I've missed you, Emily," I said honestly.

"You better."

Chapter 13

After that day, I went back to the old Andrea Robinson. The girl that complained about AP Biology because it made no sense. Although now I didn't try to intentionally fail all of the tests and was passing the class with a solid C+.

I made Emmon come home most weekends, so we could play and hang out together. He was still trying to choose what career what he wanted to go with, but he wasn't telling me what they were. Even after I chased him around the house and body slammed him on the couch.

Everything about the seizures became a distant memory as the weeks went by and work after work piled on top of me. I actually got to sleep at night, and Mom rarely brought up the topic about Dad. It was only occasionally that a memory about Dad popped into my mind. They usually passed by if I focused hard enough.

Vivian was still acting odd. She didn't want to go to the mall anymore and rathered to just hang hang out at one of our houses. So Emily and I planned to do something about it.

We were sitting in Pre-Calc when Emily and I finally got Vivian to talk about what was going on with her. A guy had been trying to talk to her, but she was blatantly ignoring him. He was even her type too! His black hair curled on top of his head, and he had brighter green eyes than my mom. Why she didn't talk to him was a mystery.

In her defense, she was just staring down onto her notes to prepare for the "pop quiz" we were going to have. Like we believed that. Not only did our teacher told us when we were going to have a quiz, but Vivian was a total genius in math. And do geniuses have to study? Well . . . actually I don't know.

I tapped her shoulder to get her attention, but she barely moved a muscle. "Viv, girl. What's going on?" I asked.

She just shrugged, pulling her red hair so it shielded her face. Emily and I glanced at each other in worry. Emily stood up and snatched Vivian's binder from her desk. She crossed her arms. "You're not getting out of this, Vivian."

Vivian looked up at her with a confused expression. "How can we get out of a pop quiz? Not even—"

"Not that," I scowled, rolling my eyes at her pathetic attempt to get out of it. "You haven't been acting like Vivian in awhile. I mean, it all started after I hit my head. . . . Wait. . . ." An idea struck my mind. "You don't blame yourself for that, do you?"

Vivian's cheeks turned a dark color, and she turned her head away from me. "No," she lied, rubbing her hands on her pants. "Everything is perfectly normal.

"You've always be a horrible liar," Emily deadpanned with a straight face. "Now tell the truth, Vivian."

The red haired girl just let out a sigh and slumped down in her seat. "You shouldn't have gotten hurt, Andi," she whispered. "It was my fault that you got hurt in gym that day, and I should've seen that guy coming. And I guess I've been feeling guilty, so I've decided to just focus on my being a good friend to you."

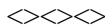
"Nobody could have known about that, Vivian," I said with furrowed eyebrows. "And you've always been a good friend to me—to us—when you were daydreaming about boys. Vivian, I want to be friends with the real you and not the one sitting in front of me.

Viv grinned at me and glanced over her shoulder. "So now that we got that straight, can I go talk to him?"

Emily slapped her on the shoulder. "And there she is. . . ."

Vivian narrowed her eyes at Emily and was about to get up when Mrs. Ward walked into our classroom with a huge smile pasted on her face and a hand behind her back. Viv let out a disappointed sigh and sat back in her seat. "I'll talk to him during lunch," she decided.

Right after she said that, Mrs. Ward slammed down a pile of papers on her desk and announced in a sing-song voice, "Pop quiz!" Emily and I definitely didn't miss the "I told you so" look on Vivian's face.



"Honey, there's another meeting with my company today," Mom told me over the phone. "I'm sorry but work has kept me so busy lately." Her voice had an off sound to it, so I didn't pay much attention to it.

"That's okay," I replied, tugging my bookbag on my shoulders and slamming my lockers. "Emily, Vivian and I decided to hang out after school and watch Vivian's 'crush' throw footballs around." I rolled my eyes at that. She had a crush on about every boy at the school. "What time will you be back?"

Mom stayed silent for a moment. "Not too late. We're just going out for supper and then I should be home. What are you doing for food?"

“We’re probably going to go out to *Sonic* or something,” I answered, gesturing for Emily and Vivian to come to me. “Be safe Mom and text me if you need anything.”

“I’m the parent. Shouldn’t I be saying that?” she teased.

I just laughed and said my goodbyes before hanging up. “Are you ready to stalk whatever-his-name-is?” I asked, grinning cheekily.

Vivian stuck her tongue out at me. “I know his name. Well, his last name,” she weakly defended. I raised my eyebrows at that and high-fived Emily. She rolled her eyes at us. “Let’s just go, guys.”

Emily and I grinned at each other when she turned around before following after her. “What position does he play?” I questioned, standing on my tippy toes to wrap an arm around Vivian’s shoulder.

“A wide receiver,” she sighed out dreamily, a giddy smile coming onto her face. I blinked at her in surprise then turned to Emily. She had the same shocked expression I had on. I know we both had the same thought: *That’s new.*

“You actually know stuff about him?” Emily sputtered out, doing a little jog to catch up with us.

Vivian frowned. “Well, yeah. Shouldn’t I?” she replied back questioningly with a tilt of her head.

“How should I put this?” I wondered aloud. “When you like a boy, you just obsess about his looks and not what he is actually like. This is the first.”

“I guess so,” Vivian said, shrugging. Her lips were pulled into a thin line as she ran up the steps of the bleachers and choosing a spot directly in the sun.

I shielded my eyes with my hand and scowled at her. I could already feel the perspiration building up on my skin. “You couldn’t have picked a spot in the shade?” I scoffed, laying my jacket on the metal, so I wouldn’t have to sit directly it.

“You’re going to get a sunburn,” Emily commented, taking out her writing notebook and turning it to a page near the back. I tried to peek to see what she was writing, but she put her palm on my forehead and pushed me back. I ended up on Vivian’s lap and grinned up at her.

“Hello.” I winked at her. She smiled and dusted me off her lap.

“It doesn’t matter,” she dismissed, waving at the black haired boy on the field. The brightest smile I’d ever seen was on her face. “He just has to see me.” She turned to me, her ice blue eyes wide. “How do I look?”

I pulled out her ponytail and fanned her hair out around her shoulders. “There’s a nice wind, so your hair will get blown back lightly, and it’ll knock

the breath right out of his lungs,” I explained. “And it’s not just because he’s running up and down a football field a bajillion times.”

Vivian nodded and nearly fell out of her seat when the jock gestured for her to come down. She bobbed her up and down happily before smiling at me nervously. “Wish me luck,” she whispered, taking my hand and squeezing it.

I shot her a thumbs up and nudged Emily to do the same. Emily snapped her head up in surprise but did so and watched Vivian go down the bleachers with a curious gaze. “What exactly did I miss?”

“I gave Vivian some beauty tips.”

“No, seriously.”

“That hurt,” I muttered dryly. “Fine, the jock wanted her to come down to the field for something. Probably to meet his friends.” We watched as Vivian nervously walked up to the boys and started shaking their hands. I looked at Emily with raised eyebrows. “Wanna tell me what you’re writing?”

Emily scowled at me. “I think it’s time you learn a little something called patience, young padawan. I will share it with you when I’m done.”

I crossed my arms like a little child but didn’t object. I did try to snatch her notebook away sometimes and glance at it over her shoulder. I even tried to act like I was getting up to go to the restroom, but she acted fast. Every time, she would poke my arm with her pen. It wasn’t long before my whole arm was covered.

I did eventually stop when Vivian came skipping back up the bleachers when her shining hair flowing behind her back. “His name is Adrian,” she said dreamily, resting her head on her chin.

It wasn’t long before she was spilling out information about him in sentences that didn’t make any sense. She wouldn’t slow down or take any breathers, so I couldn’t understand what she was saying.

But that didn’t end up mattering because guess what happened. Yep, you guessed it. The football came spiralling through the air and hit my head like it was the intended target. *I’m not even surprised anymore.*

Chapter 14

“I don’t see anything out of the ordinary,” Dr. Dragonslayer observed, running his fingers over the x-ray of my brain. He rubbed his forehead and squinted. “No. . . . no there’s nothing.”

I twisted my hands together and bit my lip worriedly. “I’ve been hitting my head a lot on some things recently,” I told him quietly.

“You need to be more careful, Andrea,” he sighed, turning to stare at me. “Too many head injuries can certainly cause epilepsy. And just think about what will happen if you do have a seizure. . . .”

I shivered at the thought. Mom would go back to her old ways and become even crazier than she already was. She would then shut out everybody else in her life besides her family like she did after Dad died. “I won’t have a seizure, Dr. D,” I said fiercely, crossing my arms. “It would be terrible for everyone. I can’t . . . I can’t.”

Doctor Dragonslayer frowned at me. “You can’t control whether you have epilepsy or not. It’s just something crazy that happens. Your mom will just have to understand.”

“It’s my mom, Doctor D! She won’t ever understand! You’re talking about the woman that lost her husband to epilepsy and has been trying to save her children from getting it too!” I nearly yelled, standing up from the hospital bed. “You think that *that* woman will understand me having a seizure?”

“Andrea, please just calm down,” he replied calmly, getting up from his chair and putting his hands on my shoulders. “If your mother wants to think clearly about the best options for you, then she will have to understand. And I know that she loves her children very much and will do anything for them.”

I blushed and took a step back. “I’m sorry,” I apologized. “My anger can sometimes get the best of me, and I-I’m trying. All of this actually having a life stuff is getting to me.”

Doctor Dragonslayer cracked a smile and motioned for me to sit back on the hospital bed. I did so and kicked my legs as he went to pick up a piece of paper from the sink. “Are you feeling any stress lately?” he asked professionally, clicking his pen.

“All students are stressed during the school year,” I said. “AP Bio has made me insane but everything with my head has made things even harder.”

“Please elaborate,” he suggested, scribbling something down onto his clipboard.

“Well, first off, sometimes I get these really bad headaches and can’t really focus on anything,” I started to explain. “And I can barely go to sleep at night. When I do go to sleep, I have nightmares about my dad.”

Dr. Dragonslayer snapped his head up to meet mine. “How long has this been going on?”

I shrugged. “It was really bad a couple weeks ago, but Emily helped me through it some and now it’s not so bad. It started after I knocked into the lockers at school, and it just went downhill from there. I literally was obsessed with researching about seizures.”

He rolled his lips into his mouth and glanced behind him at the scans of my brain. It was almost as if was checking over them again to make sure. “Andrea, it is absolutely necessary that you don’t hit your head on anything. With all the injuries your head has gone through, the chances of having a seizure is higher.”

I could see a hidden fear in his eyes, but he looked away before I could decipher what he was feeling. “I’ll let your mom come in now,” he said. “I want to run some more tests to make perfectly sure that you are okay.” In a flash, he was out of the room, his white lab coat lifting up behind him.

I let out a huff and decided to lay back on the hospital bed and pulled the covers over my cold body. A few minutes, Mom walked through the door, blonde tendrils of her hair falling out of her messy bun. Dark bags hung under her head, and she didn’t waste time before she hugged me tightly.

“Oh, Andrea, please stop doing this to me,” she whispered out, an underlying tone of fear in her voice. “Can you go one day without falling and hitting your head on something?”

“Technically, I didn’t fall then hit my head. I hit my head *then* fell,” I mumbled defensively. “There’s a difference.”

Mom lightly traced over the swollen part of my head and frowned. “You got hurt this time too, so there is not a difference. At least not to me. I should’ve just came home instead of going out.” A tear slipped out of her eye. “My baby shouldn’t be getting hurt like this.”

I rubbed her back soothingly. “Everything happens for a reason. Remember?” I replied. “Maybe I’m supposed to have a seizure for a greater purpose or something.”

Mom retracted from me as if I had electrocuted her. “And so your dad died for a reason? What is that reason exactly?” she challenged.

“I don’t know,” I said honestly, shrugging. “Maybe for whatever everything that has been happening for the last month has been setting up for. You never know.”

“It’s just hard to understand,” Mom sighed, sitting down in front of me on the bed. She ran her fingers through my brown hair. “I’m just so glad that I have a beautiful daughter to help me see the good in everything.”

I rolled my eyes playfully. “First off, moms are inclined to call their children handsome or pretty. And secondly, I am not an optimist. Sure, I try to lighten my mood up sometimes, but that doesn’t mean anything.”

It was Mom’s turn to roll her eyes at me. “Sure, Andrea. That’s what you think.”

I opened my mouth to argue but a knock on the door had me snapping my mouth shut. My eyes narrowed at the intruder at the door. His black hair was ruffled messily as if he had ran his hand through it many times, and he was chewing nervously on his lower lip. It was the Adrian guy. The supposed “wide receiver.”

Mom looked between us and clearly got the message. She kissed my cheek. “I’ll just be waiting outside,” she said quickly before scurrying out of the room.

When Adrian just stayed standing with his head lowered, I gestured to the chair beside my bed. “Please, have a seat, butter fingers,” I offered as nicely as possible.

The jock visibly gulped as he sat down in the seat, his right leg bouncing up and down. I just stared at him blankly and waited patiently for him to speak up. But he wouldn’t even look up to stare me in the eyes like a real man.

“Viv had told me you were a wide receiver,” I started, cutting off the tension in the room.

“I am, but I’m also the back up quarterback,” he explained softly, slowing lifting his head up. “I was practicing my throws in case our quarterback gets hurt during a game.”

“Well you’re pretty bad considering you didn’t aim to one of your own teammates,” I snapped suddenly. “Do they have another quarterback option besides you because you sure aren’t going to get your job done.” I shook my head.

Adrian’s eyes widen at my words. “Let me just explain, Andrea,” he responded quickly. “I was distracted by Vivian. She laughed and somehow it reached my ears. I looked y’all way while mid throw and my arm just followed my eyes. I’m so sorry!”

“Answer this one question honestly, and I’ll let you off the hook,” I proposed, lifting up one side of my lips in a smirk. He nodded instantly. “Do you care for Vivian?”

“Yes,” Andrian answered instantaneously. “I’ve liked her for awhile now, and I just wanted to get her attention somehow. But now she hates me! I didn’t mean to hurt anyone, but it’s just that—”

“Shut up,” I interrupted, applying pressure on my temple to try and stop the incoming headache. “Vivian wants a guy that will confess to her without wimping out like you are. Just explain what happened to her, and she’ll melt like butter in your arms. Trust me. She’s always wanted a fairytale so give her one.”

Adrian grinned goofily, his green eyes growing brighter. “So I have your permission to ask out your best friend?”

“Maybe,” I shot back, scrutinizing his every move. “Vivian deserves to be treated with the greatest care in all the world. And if you don’t do that, then you’ll have a permanent imprint of my fist right in the middle of your face. Now don’t let the door hit you on the way out.”

The poor boy’s eyes widened and a bead of sweat rolled down his forehead. He nodded and mumbled something unintelligible. He nearly sprinted out of the room like his butt was on fire.

I let out a long sigh and sagged against the hospital bed. I was pretty sure that I was threatening enough to stop him from asking Vivian out if he didn’t like her enough. *But the way he talked about her*, I thought to myself, a small smile spreading across my face. *He’s not going to disappoint me.*

After a few minutes of thinking, I got up from the uncomfortable bed and made my way to the door to let Mom know she could come back in. But what I saw made my jaw drop open. *How could I not see this before?*

There—in a hallway where anyone could see—Mom and Doctor Dragonslayer were hugging tightly with smiles on their faces. Smiles! Never in my life had I felt so oblivious.

Chapter 15

It was like there was one spark and a whole bonfire erupted in the pit of my stomach. I could feel my arms start to shake with the amount of anger that was coursing through my body. I forced air through my nose and into my lungs to calm down. “Don’t let this anger control you, Andrea,” I told myself, taking deliberate steps back to my bed. “You are better than this.”

I gripped my hair in my hands and took deep breaths to tame the flame burning inside my body. I laid back on the hospital bed and felt myself cool down slowly or surely. That was until I let my thoughts run wild:

Did Mom even have company outings or was she just hanging out with him. Is that why they kept talking about each other or why Mom was always on the phone with him? I asked myself, thumping my fist against my forehead then instantly regretting it.

The door to the room opened, and Mom peeked her head in with a huge smile on her face. “Did he leave already?” she checked, looking around.

“Yes, he’s gone,” I replied, pasting a fake smile on my face. “Come on in.”

Mom walked into the room with a pile of my clothes in her arms. There was a new pep in her step that wasn’t there before I noticed. *Well, I wonder why*, I thought sarcastically as I took my clothes away from her with a bright grin on my face.

“Damien said that all I need to do is check you out of hospital, and we can go home,” she informed me.

“Check out?” I repeated. “I thought he said he needed to run more tests on me or something. That’s what he told me.”

“We were talking”—yeah, *talking*—“and decided that as long as we were careful enough that you wouldn’t have a seizure,” she said, brushing away my hair behind my ear lovingly. “He has given me a doctor’s note to miss the next three days of school, so I can watch over you.”

My eyes widened. “Three days!” I mimicked. “Do you know how much schoolwork I will miss? I’m going to be so stressed out when I have to make everything! I’m fine, Mom! Really I am.”

She frowned and traced the large lump on my head. “I don’t think so, Andrea. This is for the best.”

“You want me die from a heart attack?” I asked, but it came out more as an accusation.

Mom narrowed her eyes at me. “Don’t talk to me like that. I will get either Emily or Vivian to bring your work home,” she explained slowly. “Now please get dressed. I’ve been here way too long.”

I just shot her a small smile but thought bitterly, *Probably because you come to visit your boyfriend all the time.*

Only when she left the room to give me privacy did I let it fall of my face and a scowl to take place. *How long is she going to wait to actually tell me? Never?* I scoffed angrily to myself, getting up from the hospital bed.

“And when I thought she was me like an adult,” I sighed out, my anger quickly evaporating into sadness.



“I’m never talking to him again,” Vivian said seriously, laying on her stomach across my bed. “That was so uncalled for! Anyone who hurts my friends will remember the feeling of me beating them up for the rest of their lives!” By the end of her little rant, Vivian’s cheeks were bright red and her chest moved up and down heavily.

I placed a hand on her shoulder and suggested lightly, “Why don’t you just talk to him about it? I’m sure he can explain. Plus, I’m not even mad.”

“Well, you should be!” she exclaimed, sitting up and giving me a dubious look. “He could’ve killed you. And if you had died, then it would’ve been his funeral next for sure.”

Emily let out a sigh. “I agree with Andi on this one, Viv. Give the poor boy a chance. I mean, you really liked him and that can;t just go away. Right?”

“Well, when he hurts one of my best friends then it can just go away,” Vivian replied stubbornly. “I don’t care if he grovels at my feet.” She paused and thought about what she just said. “Well, maybe. But I can’t forgive him right away. He’s going to have to work for it.”

“Agreed. Just talk to him, and he’ll clear any misunderstandings up,” I advised, pressing a hand to my head. “Besides, my head doesn’t hurt anymore.” They both shot me looks. “Okay! Fine, fine! It hurts a little!”

Emily made herself situated on my beanbag chair and let her short legs sprawled out in front of her. “Did anything interesting happen yesterday?” she inquired, tugging at a piece of her hair.

“Doctor D and my mom are dating, and she never told me about it,” I blurted out with a straight face.

Emily and Vivian stared at me in shock after I spilled the words that I was keeping inside. “I know!” I shouted, yanking the covers off of my body to march downstairs. “I can’t believe she would keep this from me! I’m—”

Before I could even get a foot out the door, they both grabbed my arms and pulled me back. “I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Emily warned, shooting me a look.

I rolled my eyes at them and tried to escape their grasps but failed miserably. They pushed me back on my bed and stood in front of me. “Why are y’all on her side?” I asked in disbelief. “I’m your best friend!”

“We’re not on any side,” Vivian answered, sitting beside me. “We just want you to see this whole position from her point of view, okay?”

“Imagine the love of your life struggling his whole life and eventually dying from one all the while leaving you to take care of two young children,” Emily carried on. “And you try your hardest to make sure that they don’t end up like their dad. Then years later your daughter keeps getting head injuries, and it spikes fear in the midst of your core. What would you do?”

Before I had the chance to respond, Vivian already beat me to it, “You would do everything in your power to make sure she was okay even if it made you look like a crazy person.” My face heated up in humiliation. “Then your daughter starts to drive herself crazy from thinking about the seizures and dead father so bad. What if during that time you found someone that made you happy and really liked? Would you tell your daughter or not?”

“Of course I would tell my daughter,” I scoffed, crossing my arms annoyed. “That’s just something you don’t keep away from your family. Especially your daughter.”

Emily and Vivian glanced at each other. “So you wouldn’t feel betrayed in a way if she had told you what was going on?” Vivian challenged with raised eyebrows. “Like your mom wasn’t helping you in your time of need and was betraying your dead father.”

I opened my mouth to refute that statement but snapped it shut when I couldn’t. “I guess I would at first,” I confessed honestly. “How couldn’t I? I mean, I’m just learning about Dad and everything he went through. Wouldn’t it be natural?”

“That’s why your mom did what she did,” Emily replied.

“But I would’ve gotten over it,” I defended. “I would’ve thought over my actions and see that I acted irrationally. And I would’ve apologized and given

my blessing because I see how much he makes her happy! But lying is a terrible thing and unnecessary!”

They both sighed. “It wasn’t the best thing to do,” Vivian admitted. “But she did what she thought would be the most beneficial. Can’t you see that?”

After a few moments of silence, I eventually nodded my head. “Now I can. Thanks guys. Sometimes I act on the spur of the moment, and that’s not always the best thing to do.”

It was then that everything around me felt like it was slowly disappearing. I could only focus on what spot on the wall, and I was confused as to why the wall color was that dull. Two people were trying to get my attention, but they were like two annoying gnats flying around my ears. Who were they again?

One of them placed something on my shoulders, but I couldn’t tell whom it was or what it was. Just why was that color so dull? Then everything went black.

Chapter 16

The next thing that happened was the sound of Mom crying and speaking to someone. I opened my heavy eyes to the blurry image of sideways Mom with a phone pressed to her ear. My head felt fuzzy and there was some metallic substance in my mouth.

Bile slithered its way up my tight throat, but I forced it back down. Why was I laying on the floor like this? Why was Mom crying? Where was Emily and Vivian? What happened?

Mom noticed me opening my eyes and widened her own eyes. Her mouth formed various shapes as a voice far away shouted something I could barely even hear. Very easily, I could feel my eyes closing in own their own accord. I fought to keep them open but ended up succumbing to the peace of sleep once again.



It felt like seconds after that I woke up again in the comfort of my own bed. My eyes weren't hard to open, and Mom wasn't anywhere near me. Actually, the room was quite dark with the way my blue curtains were pulled over my window. *Wait . . . curtains?* I thought to myself.

I stood up from my twin—?—bed and looked around. My room didn't look anything close to *my* room. The walls were a light blue color and my bed was pressed up against the wall rather than in the middle of my room. Paintings hung all over my walls, and it almost look like . . . my signature?

I peered closely at the bottom right corner of one of the paintings and nearly stumbled back in shock. My signature was right there where the real artist's painting was supposed to be! And the painting was done really well. It was of a family with two parents and four children. "That can't be right," I muttered. "Because the girl looks exactly like me."

My heart skyrocketed at the thought. As fast as I could, I sprinted open to the window and drew open the curtains so hard that the rod holding them up rattled. But my insides rattled even harder when I got a glimpse on the window. I might not have fallen looking at the painting, but I sure did when the landscape came into view.

Trees upon trees. Green upon green. My neighbor's house wasn't there anymore, and there wasn't even a spot for it if it suddenly got destroyed overnight.

The door to "my" bedroom busted open and a male voice called out, "Andrea, what happened?" It was the male voice that haunted my dreams and a select few of my memories.

Tears flooded my eyes, and, when I blinked them away, *he* was standing right there. His brown hair was cut closely to his head and grey eyes shined with worry. A stubble sprinkled over his cheeks and chin, but his lips were lifted in such a way that anyone would be friends with him even with his tall frame and muscles.

And to me he was. . . .

"Dad," I breathed out, jumping up from the floor and attacking him with the biggest hug I'd ever given so much. Waves of tears came pouring out my eyes as I clung onto him and buried my face into his shirt to breathe into his wonderful scent. "Daddy, daddy, daddy," I kept repeating.

"Yeah, Andrea, I'm right here," he soothed, running his hand up and down my back. "Is everything okay?"

I pulled away to look up at him. "I just really missed you, Dad," I choked out, a few more tears trailing down my cheeks. "I'm so glad your back."

A smile lifted at his lips, but I could see the hint of confusion in his eyes. "I'm glad to see you too, kiddo. But I only went to the store for ten minutes."

I furrowed my eyebrows and just decided to play along. "It just felt like I hadn't seen you in years," I replied honestly, wrapping him up in another strong hug. Real or not, this was the only chance I'd ever get.

"Ew!" a child's voice complained from behind me. "Is Andrea being a girl again!"

"Well, she can't help it. She *is* a girl," the same exact voice argued stubbornly.

I ripped away from Dad and quickly wiped away my wet cheeks. Standing at the threshold of my room were two young, *identical* teenage boys. They both had bright green eyes and bleach blonde hair.

I took a step back out of surprise and was about to ask if they got lost when Dad laughed. "Evan, stop harassing your sister like that. Now let's leave her alone, so she can get ready." Both of the boys nodded simultaneously before shooting me cheeky grins and bolting away.

Dad just shook his head and shot me a look. “Mom’s cooking breakfast so come down as soon as you can.” He pressed a kiss to the crown of my head before leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Sister? I don’t have two obnoxious little brothers! I exclaimed in mead, running my fingers through my hair worriedly. *I only have an older one, and Dad . . . Dad is alive? How is that possible? What is happening?*

I steadied my breathing and sat on the edge of my bed to place my head in my hands. I had to be dreaming. There was no other way to explain what was happening to me. Right?

“To actually see if this is a dream, I have to hurt myself or something,” I told myself. I put my pointer finger and thumb together and squeezed a small piece of skin.

I yelped out at the pain and shook my arm out. Much to my disappointment, everything around me stayed the same. “But this is all so real,” I reasoned out to myself, trailing my hand over my comforter. “Dreams are never this real. They can’t be. It’s like I’m living another life or something.”

Deciding to spend all the time I had in this fairytale to spend it with Dad, I got up from my bed and put on some real clothes. Thankfully my person from this weird alternate life had the same clothing I did back at home, so I slipped some on and walked carefully down the stairs.

All over the walls were pictures of “our” family and paintings of various things. Mom’s voice carried through the house singing a song I couldn’t recognize. *But Mom hates singing*, I thought, taking slow steps to the kitchen.

My two “brothers” were already seated at the table and were shooting paper balls at each other. Dad was setting up the table while Mom flipped the pancakes. “Hello, Andi,” she sang, shooting me a smile. “How did you sleep?”

“Okay I guess,” I mumbled, sitting beside one of the identical boys. They stopped playing and stared at me with wide eyes.

The one next to me elbowed me in the ribs. “Andi! Why are you sitting right here?!” The tips of his ears turned red as he glared at me.

I let out a small sigh and stood up, feeling everyone’s gaze on me. “Sorry,” I apologized, going to sit by the other twin. “I . . . forgot that it wasn’t my seat.”

All four of them glanced at each other before going back to what they were doing earlier. It wasn’t long before Mom placed my plate full of pancakes on the table and pressed a kiss to me head. “Did you not sleep good?” she asked worriedly, pressing the back of her hand against my forehead.

“Yes. No. I don’t know. I’m just really confused right now,” I said, picking up my fork and digging in. The pancakes tasted so real. . . .

Dad grinned at me, little laugh lines around his eyes. “Well, I hope you’ll get a goods night sleep tonight.”

I nodded meeking while stuffing my face full of food. Everyone stayed rather quiet, and it wasn’t long before the two boys were trying to steal the food off my plate. I frowned and defensively pulled it closer to my body.

“Evan and Ethan, leave your sister alone,” Mom scolded, smacking them lightly over the head with a dish towel. “Y’all have had enough food to eat this morning. Now go upstairs and work on your homework.” They both opened their mouths to complain, but she shot them a look. “The sooner you get it done the sooner you can go play ball outside.”

The both of them glanced at each other and yelled, “Race ya!” in a blink of an eye. Dad just chuckled and shook his head, sticking a whole piece of bacon in his mouth.

The air around us was quiet for a few moments before I asked, “Have y’all talked to Emmon?”

Mom and Dad snapped their heads to me. Then they both glanced at each other seemed to be communicating through their eyes. “Of course, honey. We all did,” Mom answered as softly as possible. “Yesterday. At the cemetery. Don’t you remember?”

It felt like my whole world had fallen. “Emmon? At the cemetery? Wha . . . what happened,” I cried out, feeling the tears burn my eyes.

“The car accident a month ago,” Dad explained slowly. “How can you not remember? You were in it.”

My heart stopped completely in my chest, and I could feel the airways in my chest starting to squeeze. I struggled with each breath and looked down, so I wouldn’t have to see their confused faces.

But my body wasn’t even mine. Open wounds littered up and down with blood pouring out of them. Most of my skin was charred and pieces of glass impaled my stomach. I gasped out, pain erupting through my whole body.

My head slammed against the table, and I could hear Mom shouting something to me. Loud noises sounded all around me with the very prominent sound of a beep. It was an annoying sound that scarily represented my alarm clock.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Chapter 17

Beep. Beep. Beep.

I went to lift my arm to slap my alarm clock but found it too heavy to lift. My eyes also felt heavier than usual. Finding it difficult to do any basic motor skills, I decided to try and wiggle my toes. Because who would want wiggleless toes? Fortunately, they did move.

The next thing I tested was the movement of my fingers and my tongue. Both were capable of moving but literally everything else couldn't. I took a deep breath and forced my eyelids to unglue. And when they eventually did, I immediately shut them again due to the bright light above me.

After mentally preparing myself, I opened my eyes and averted them to the side so my retinas wouldn't burn to death. Sitting slumped in a chair their head lowered was a guy I vaguely recognized. His blond hair fell into his eyes, and he had a tense face.

Emmon, I realized. That's Emmon. He's not dead. That was all a dream. And now I'm awake. Awake and without Dad.

"Emmon," I croaked, the dryness of my tongue making me choke. Tears slipped out of my eyes as I stared at him. I licked my lips, but that didn't help any. "Emmon, please wake up."

The sound of the door clicking open reached my ears, and I could barely move my stiff neck but managed. Doctor Dragonslayer walked in with his head lowered and writing something down on his clipboard. His glasses sat on the bridge of his nose and a lock of his black hair rested calmly on his forehead.

I was waiting patiently for him to look up when he finally did. His brown eyes widened at the sight of me staring at him, and a loud gasp escaped his lips, "Andrea."

That caused Emmon to jump in his seat and look at me. His hair was messy on his head but the growing beard on his face scared me even more. He launched himself at me and started crying. My body cried out in pain, but I didn't complain once. I knew how much he needed that.

Dr. D hurriedly got me a water and patted Emmon softly on the back. "I know how much you missed her, but your sister desperately needs some water right now, Emmon," he explained.

Emmon shot off of me, wiping away the tears under his eyes. He shot me a small smile as he lifted my head up, so Doctor Dragonslayer could pour water in. The water was cold and relief hit me immediately. I licked my cracked lips and whispered a thank you.

“Where’s Mom?” I asked.

“She had to go home to freshen up,” Emmon told me lightly, pulling his chair up right next to me. “I basically had to force her.”

“Freshen up? Force her?” I repeated confusedly. “How long exactly was I asleep for?”

The both of them glanced at each other, and Dr. D let out a long sigh. “You were in a coma for about a week, Andrea.”

I shook my head at that in complete and utter shock. *Asleep for a week? Really a whole week?* “But . . . but how did I get into a coma in the first place? I was just talking to Emily and Vivian about something, and that’s all I can remember. What happened after that?”

“Why don’t we wait until Mom gets back before we talk about this?” Emmon suggested. “Did you have a dream or something while you were in a coma?”

I shrugged off the odd tone in his voice and nodded, glancing between the two of them. “How did you know?” I inquired slowly.

“You cried multiple times in you unconsciousness,” the doctor replied back, staring down at his clipboard. “Would you mind sharing what occurred in you dream?”

“Well, first off, it felt nothing like a dream,” I informed them. “It felt like the real thing. I woke up in a room that wasn’t my room and had a family that wasn’t my family. I was so in tune with every touch, smell and emotion.

“I had a fall from shock in the room that I had woken up in, and this man that strongly represented my father came to me,” I continued, the image popping up in my head stronger than any other memory I’ve ever had. “I was so shocked and scared, but I hugged him because I knew that it was the only chance I was going to be able to. Then apparently I had to younger twin brothers that were identical and named Evan and Ethan.”

I took a deep breath. “Mom was singing while cooking breakfast and everyone seemed happy, but I couldn’t find you Emmon. I sat down at the table and everyone seemed shocked at me and told me that I wasn’t supposed to sit there. Then I learned that Emmon had died, and I started crying. The last thing I remember is looking down and seeing my body burning and bleeding then there were voices and beeping in my ears.” I shook my head and clamped my hands over my ears to block out the noise.

Emmon grabbed my arms and brought them down to me sides. He held me in a comforting hug and whispered, “It’s okay, Andi. I’m here now. We’re here now. Everything will work out.”

I buried my face into his shirt and a realization hit me hard. *He smelt exactly like Dad.*



“My baby!” Mom cried, bursting through the hospital door and sprinting to me at full speed. She bundled my sore body into her arms and started to cry. “I should’ve never, ever left you side! This is all my fault!”

I shook my head at that. “No, this was just a freak thing that happened. I mean, whatever happened only happened once, right?”

Mom pulled back, a look of disbelief crossing her features. “Damien didn’t tell you what happened?” she asked.

“No, he wanted to wait until you got here,” I explained. “I was fine with that honestly. And I don’t even want to know what happened right now. I just really want to spend this moment together with you.”

Tears welled in Mom’s eyes before she pulled me into another hug. “I’ve missed you so much, my little optimist,” she gushed out, her fingers raking through my sweaty hair.

“Mom,” I groaned. “We’ve talked about this. I am not an optimist. I just happen to see the good in things when it most beneficial. *Not all the time.*”

“Same thing to me.”

I pulled away from Mom after a few moments. “Mom, there is something I really need to talk to you about,” I said seriously, locking my eyes with hers.

She pushed her blonde hair behind her ears and nodded with a confused look on her face. “Is everything okay, Andi?”

“I know about you and Doctor Dragonslayer,” I blurted out. Mom’s eyes widened in terror at that. She opened her mouth to talk, but I held up a finger to stop her. “Just hear me out first, Mom. Yes, in the beginning, I was completely livid that you had hid me such an important thing from me. It didn’t make sense to me that you would lie to me like that.”

Horror flashed across Mom’s face and her mouth opened once again, but I stopped her once again. “Emily and Vivian made me see things from your point of view, and I’m not upset anymore. As long as he treats you right and make you happy then what can I do to stop that?”

Mom grinned, a fresh set of tears in her eyes. *Seriously. Where does she get all those tears?* I questioned myself as Mom held her hand over her mouth.

“I haven’t felt this elated in a long time, Andrea. I feel like I can finally enjoy life again. He’s shown me that there’s more to life than stress, worrying and crying.”

She tucked a strand of my hair behind my ear. “There’s laughing, smiling, talking and so many other great things. My only wish for you now is that you’ll be able to experience this amount of life I’m feeling.”

“I’m so happy for you, Mom,” I expressed warmly. “This is what I’ve wished would always happen for you. I’m sorry for not understanding at first.”

“It’s okay, my dear,” Mom whispered, wiping the tiny tear that escaped the corner of my eye with a smile on her face.

Chapter 18

“Tell me what happened, Em,” I said, crossing my arms over my chest.

Emily shook her head, her brown hair twirling around her head. “I don’t want to. It was hard to watch it in the first place, and you’re asking me to go back and relive it.” She shivered, shaking her head. “I’m sorry, Andi.”

“Please,” I begged desperately, jutting my bottom lip out and shaking my clasped hands back and forth. “You’re the only one who can tell me what happened, and I really want to know. Emily, please!”

“Why can’t you just ask Vivian?” she asked with wide eyes.

I rolled my eyes at that. “You know she’ll just start apologizing, and I won’t get any real information out of her. Please, Em. Please, please, please, please, please.”

“Fine!” she exclaimed, effectively cutting me off. “If you will stop being so annoying, then I’ll tell you everything that happened.” I smiled brightly at her and situated myself so my body was facing her. I gestured for her to start.

“Well, you just started to understand your mom’s position on the whole relationship thing when you got this faraway look in your eyes,” she began, playing with her fingers on her lap. “You just kept staring at the wall with a confused look on your face. Vivian and I kept trying to get your attention but nothing worked.”

She took a deep breath. “Then you just kind of lost all the structure in your body and fell flat on the floor. Your body started to jerk and twitch in rushed, chopped movements. I told Vivian to get your mom and put you into the position you needed to be in, so you could breathe.”

“How did you know that?” I inquired, tilting my head to the side.

“Dr. D taught it to me in case you would ever have one. I’m glad he did or I would’ve felt completely useless,” she told me. “I’m actually surprised though. Your mom was really calm in the situation and handled everything like a professional.”

“Having a husband with seizures will do that to you,” I replied. “Did anything else happen?”

“Well, you nearly bit all the way through your tongue and a tremendous amount of blood came pouring out of your mouth. Your first seizure lasted a little over five minutes and you gained consciousness for a few seconds before going into your second one.”

“I had two seizures in a row?” I muttered in disbelief.

“Three actually,” she corrected. “You were just at the hospital when you had the third one, so you were in much better care. I’m just glad you’re okay.”

“No, I’m glad *you’re* okay,” I shot back with a tiny frown. “It must have scared you so much watching me like that. Emily nodded. After a few seconds of silence, I asked, “How did everything go with Adrian and Vivian?”

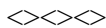
Emily rolled her blue eyes at that. “A day after you were in the hospital she hunted him down and demanded to know everything. He ended up telling her how much he likes her, they kissed and are now boyfriend and girlfriend.”

I grinned at her words and responded, “I’m glad it worked out for them. I really am. Now she can stop complaining about how lonely she is.”

“Tell me about it,” she muttered, looking up from the ground to stare at me.

“You and me against the world,” I joked.

“Well, since Vivian was my first choice, sure.”



“Your seizure happened right here in the frontal lobe,” Doctor Dragonslayer explained, pointing to the front of my brain. “It spread across your whole brain, and there was a lot of abnormal neurons in your brain.”

“My seizures were classified as grand mal, correct?” I checked, sitting upright in the hospital bed.

Dr. D nodded. “You had all the systems, and your body was going through all the right phases. The amount of time that it lasted also gave it away.”

“Is there a chance she might have another seizure?” Mom piped up, worriedly biting down on her bottom lip.

Doctor Dragonslayer ran a hand over his tired face and nodded. “By the severity of this one, it is almost certain that you will have a seizure again, and it could be soon. So we need to take action as soon as possible. There are many different routes you could take, but I strongly suggest that you go will surgery. With a case like yours, it could have the best outcome.”

“Are there any side effects?” I questioned, uneasiness bubbling at the bottom of my stomach.

“You could get an infection, stroke, paralysis, speech problems, loss of vision, loss of motor skills, memory loss and potentially more seizures,” he listed off carefully, trying to gauge my reaction. “Even though they may be

serious risks, the chance of getting them is slim. Not getting surgery will put your life in danger, Andrea.”

I pressed my lips together and weighed the options in my head. “Well, considering that my seizures started in the frontal lobe, the brain surgeons will have to do the surgery there and that’s the part of the brain that control memory,” I thought aloud. “So my risk of getting memory loss is higher, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Dr. D replied with a frown. “But don’t let that scare you, Andrea. This surgery will do far more good than bad.”

“As good as that sounds. . . . I can’t do it,” I answered. “These past months have been so important to me. I have explored a part of my life I didn’t even know about until now. Everything about Dad and what he went through. I can’t just throw that away.”

Mom turned to me with wide eyes. “Andrea. You need this surgery, you hear me? Listen to Damien. Please.”

I glanced at the both of them and shook my head. “I’m so sorry, but I can’t.”

Mom opened her mouth to object, but the doctor could hear the seriousness in my voice. “It’s okay, Makenna,” he whispered, giving her a soft look. “Just let her think about it overnight and give us a final decision tomorrow.”

Mom blinked away the tears in her eyes and nodded. She kissed his cheek before walking slowly out of the room. Doctor Dragonslayer turned to me and said, “Think about this, Andrea, and think about it hard. And while you think about it don’t think about just yourself.” Then he was out the doors.



Emmon just stared at me wordlessly, his grey eyes sparking with anger. “I think you’re being selfish about this. Not only does this affect you life, but the life of everyone around you. How can sit back and reject everything Doctor D has been trying to help you with?”

“In case you haven’t forgotten, this is my life and those are my memories on the line!” I exclaimed, furrowing my eyebrows. “I can’t just let a part of my life go like that. Why can’t you see that?”

“So you’d rather put your life at risk?” he scoffed. When I stayed quiet, he rolled his eyes. “Fine, whatever. But Mom is going to revert back to her old self

when you die. No, she'll be even worse. Do you really want that to happen? Now that she's finally happy?"

I opened my mouth to say yes, yes I could, but then . . . I couldn't. How could I sit there and let that possible happen? If I died like Dad, then my last days on Earth would be full of sorrow. Would I really be able to sit there and let my mom suffer?

The door to the hospital room opened and Mom, Dr. D, Emily and Vivian all clambered in. I could still feel Emmon's penetrating on the side on my face, but I focused on Mom's face. All of her makeup was wiped off and there were streaks of red on her cheeks. Her eyes were swollen and watery with a frown tugging on her lips.

How could I look at her face and still say no? How could I see all the stress it was causing my family and not go with it?

Doctor Dragonslayer grabbed his clipboard and took a deep breath. "What do you want to do, Andrea?" he asked warily.

I clasped my hands together and set them down on my lap. "I've decided to think this through, and I've decided that—for the benefit of everyone—that I'll go through with the surgery."

Epilogue

Six months later. . . .

In the end, everything does happen for a reason. Mom became close with Doctor Dragonslayer through all of my doctor visits. Emmon finally decided that he wanted to become a brain surgeon after seeing everything that happened to me. Vivian is still dating Adrian, and they are very happy together.

And Emily . . . well, Emily did finally finish the book she was writing. Turns out that she based all of it off of me. Me! Apparently, my life was interesting enough all those months ago to write a whole book off of it.

In the end, I did decide to go with the surgery, and it took a turn no one was expecting: I lost all of my memories from the couple of months Emily wrote about.

The only thing I can remember is trying to come up with a new word for my failing test then walking over to gym class. Everything after that is just blackness. The next thing I know, I'm waking up in a hospital bed with all my hair gone and IVs stuck in my arms.

When I first woke up, I was in denial of everything that happened. It didn't make sense to me that I could lose months of my memory in just a few minutes. It killed all of the people around me to see me be in denial and be grumpy all the time.

But could anyone really blame me?

It was when I finally got home that I got to see that they were right. I checked all the calendars I could find and scrounged around in my room to find anything that would help me to remember a smidge of what I lost. Unfortunately, that didn't happen, but I found a journal that I apparently wrote when I was obsessing about seizures.

They helped me understand everything that went on is the two months that I lost. It also opened my world up to Dad and seizure once again.

Dr. D was very patient with me and let me ask all the questions I wanted about seizures and my dad, so I could fully understand it once again. And, by doing that, I got to really know important Biology was and understanding the real health problems that occur in the world.

Mr. Jenson was very patient with me and stayed late afterschool with me every day, so I could catch up on everything I missed. I knew he was elated to actually see me engage and enjoy his class. And, with a lot of hard work, I managed to scrape by a three on the final AP exam.

I honestly don't think there was a moment in my life where I was more proud of myself.

It was the day that I got my results that I realized that I wanted to make a difference in the world about seizures. So I decided to major in Biology and Psychology to help people who went through the same things I did.

Mom was supporting my dreams and living her best life. When I woke up from surgery, I didn't believe that Mom wasn't a worry wart anymore. It was honestly such an impossible thought that I laughed at the thought of it. But it turns out that the statement was true.

Sure, she was worried and devastated when I woke up without a clue of anything that happened, but all mothers would be in that situation. She didn't constantly cry at the sight of me or force me to sleep all the time. She was just like any other mom. And that was kinda nice.

Another thing that freaked me out was the whole thing about Mom and Doctor Dragonslayer. My mother and my neurologist! It honestly confused me at first, but when I saw them together . . . it was true love.

He makes her laugh harder than anyone else I'd ever seen and all the stress seems to melt away from his face at the sight of her. My heart just warms at the sight of them together especially after knowing that Mom thought she could never love again after Dad.

And speaking of their love. . . . They decided that they had waited long enough to get together, so their engagement became official four months ago.

As today is their wedding day.

They are out on the dance floor, spinning slowly around the dance floor while staring deeply into each others eyes. Mom has her hair up in a braided bun—courtesy to yours truly—with tendrils framing her heart shaped face. Her dress hugs her torso and falls out about her waist in soft waves. There are lace sleeves on her dress that reaches her wrists.

Dr. D has his new jet black tuxedo on with a matching black tie. He has his hair gelled back, and he is freshly shaven. It is easy to tell that neither of them are very good dancers, but they are staring into each others eyes without a care in the world.

From across the table I am sitting at, Adrian wraps his arm around Vivian's shoulders and leaned close to her ear. "That's going to be us one day," he tries to whisper but ends of failing miserably.

Vivian just giggles, her cheeks turning a dark shade of red. I smile at their cuteness while Emily just gags.

“Adrian, you never did tell us what Andi said to you in the hospital room all those months ago,” Emily mentions, a sly smirk on her face.

The boy’s eyes widen and an innocent face takes over. “Oh . . . I thought I did.”

“Oh, no you didn’t,” Emmon jumps in, trying to conceal his laughter behind his hand.

Vivian looks over at Adrian with furrowed eyebrows. “I am curious as to what you said because you seemed like the most nervous guy in the world when you asked me out. Not to mention, you let muttered something about Andrea when I said yes,” she thinks aloud.

A blush covers his cheeks at his girlfriend’s words while everyone at the table—including me—laughs. He mock scowls. “She just gave me advice on how to win you over, Vivian,” he answers, a smile tugging at his lips. Emily shoots him a disbelieving look. “Fine, fine. And she may have threatened me too.”

“Glad to know I was still a savage during that time,” I joke, tugging on my ever growing hair. It is after I get those words out, does Mom call out my name.

I excuse myself from the table and make my way over to Mom’s outstretched arms. She pulls me into her arms and runs her fingers through my short hair. “Hey, Mom,” I whisper. “You look happy.”

She smiles so bright it almost hurts my eyes. “This has been one of the happiest days of my life,” she expressed, linking her hand with one of Dr. D’s they smile at each other.

“Does this mean I can call you Doctor DAD now?” I tease, giving him a tight hug.

I swear I see a tear in his brown eyes when he chokes out, “I’d be honored.”

Mom lets out an inaudible cry and tugs be into another embrace. “I love you,” she says with a slight quiver.

“I love you too.”

And after many ups and downs, we are opening a new chapter in our lives. A chapter free of any fears of the future but excitement of what is to come.