

Three

I can't believe this! What the hell smells so bad? Oh I so hate waking up; especially now that I realize that the smell is Brutus's seriously gross doggie breath, and his nose is only inches from my face, and he's panting. Oh joy! Well this is just perfect! "Max! Max?! Come get your damn dog out of my room!" *Oh God! Max.....* I start crying so hard as I remember all of the shit that happened from yesterday. Brutus leaps up onto my bed and starts to nuzzle me and I just grab on to his fur, burying my face into it, sobbing away.

"Meghan? Sweetie? Oh honey..." I can feel my Mom wrap me into a hug which causes Brutus to wiggle around under me trying to free himself. I let go of him and turn around into her arms blubbering and tell her; " I...I...I yelled for hi...hi...him to come ge...ge...get Brutus and then, then, I...I... Oh God Mom I miss Max so much..." My Mom strokes my head and murmurs into my ear. "It's gonna be okay honey, We'll get him back. Max is not going to let us down sweetie, he knows how much we love him."

She tilts my head back and gently wipes the tears away from my eyes and asks me;

"Meghan, are you really sure that you're ready to go back to school today?"

"I'm going to be okay Mom, really, I just freaked out is all. I have to go to school, everyone is gonna want to know about Max anyway and I can tell them that he's okay so far, right?" Mom's eyes are the same grey colour as a thunderstorm's clouds. Right now though I can see that they are all teary like mine as I search her facial expression to see what she's feeling. "Yeah honey, tell them he's doing as well as can be expected for now. Oh, which reminds me, your father went back to the hospital to spend some time with him, and said to tell you that if you needed to, come by his office after school and you can ride home with him. I'm probably going to stay at the hospital with your brother tonight. Okay Meghan?" I nod and then I untangle myself from her arms and get off my bed. "I'm going to get in the shower now and uh, then I guess grab some yogurt or something before I head out, Mom."

She gets up too, nods, and gives me a kiss. "I'll see you downstairs honey."

Brutus lifts his head up from the corner of my bed and his tail starts thumping as he gives me the *'What? Aren't you gonna feed me?'* look.

I give Brutus the finger and head into the bathroom. 'Wow! Lucky me! Gee, I don't have to pound on the damn door cause Max isn't in there pimping for once. This so sucks a big fat furry one!' I am getting really pissed at the fuckers who shot my brother, freakin ass-wipes. The warm water feels great and I start to think about what I am going to tell people when they ask about Max.

Mom's busy on the phone talking away as I walk into the kitchen. I leave my backpack on a stool in front of the island-counter in the middle of the kitchen and rummage through the fridge looking for something to eat. I grab a yogurt cup and the OJ carton and set them down on the counter. I can see out the front windows and it looks like those loser press parasites are gone so at least I can head out to school without dipping out thru the backyard. That's a major relief since our neighbor, Mrs. Butler, is always so bitchy about us kids cutting thru her backyard and her so-called prize veggie garden. Ha! The only ones that eat stuff from her garden are those fat ass squirrels and the crows. Mrs. Butler looks like a walking ad for somebody who freaking needs to be on the Jenny Craig weight loss program, so there's no freakin way she eats healthy. I hear my phone go off and the ring tone sounds like my best friend texting me. I unzip the pocket in my backpack its stuck in, pull it out, and flip it open. Yup, its Suze. I set the phone down and scroll her text as I slurp down my yogurt:

'u k? ur going 2 school? WTF? Max k or real bad? tlk2me pls!!!!!!'

I text her back quickly: 'c u in 5 @ corner k?' She replies immediately: 'k ill b there'

I put the phone back into its pocket and open a nearby cupboard to grab a glass out of it and quickly pour a glass of OJ. I down it and then I put the glass along with my spoon in the sink. I toss the empty yogurt cup in the trash and give Mom a huge hug. She's still chatting away and she gives me a quick kiss and makes her 'You okay?' gesture while she continues with her phone call. I nod, grab my backpack, wave, and head out the front door. "Bye Mom!" I hear her start to say something, but the door closes on her response.

Suze is already at the corner and 'whoa,' she really looks like hell. All red eyes and a face that looks like she just ate a megaton of lemons. 'Not freakin good!' It's sad, cause I know she really cares about Max and would love to have him as her boyfriend, but she's known ever since I found out that he is Gay; and not even the slightest bit interested in girls, that there's no chance to hook-up with him that way.

Still she loves to tease him and make really suggestive, make that really gross sexual comments. *'I mean seriously, he's my brother and eww! Her and him having sex!? Yuck! That's so nasty! That's almost as bad as me catching Mom and Dad doing it.'*

Suze spots me and bolts towards me crashing into me and smothering the crap out of me in a hug. "Shit Meghan! Why didn't you call me? You didn't answer me last night! I must have you left a million voicemails and text messages! Are you okay!? How is Max? What happened? Did you see the news?"

"Suze! Slow down girl! I turned my cell off cause it was annoying as hell and I didn't want to talk to anyone. I'm sorry, I know that was really a shitty thing to do, but, I just couldn't handle all the crap yesterday. So, like you understand why, right?" She nods but I can tell that her emotions are really raw, like mine.

"Okay, first, Max is in a druggie sleep that the Doctors put him in. They operated forever and I think that they got most of the bad stuff fixed, okay? They said that in a few days, they will take him off the drugs and let him wake up by himself. Oh, and yeah I saw, well listened to the news on channel 7 last night. Have you talked to Chad?" Chad is Max's best friend and is like never more than a few feet way from Max, seriously, they should be twins.

"Yeah, he called me last night and we IM'd too. He's so scared and hurt Megs, he didn't hear from anyone and the cops gave him shit too about what happened."

"What the fuck for?!" I am now officially pissed off. "Chad saved Max's life! He dragged him out of the street and called 911! What the hell! Where is he anyway Suze? He's usually waiting for me and Max here."

"Um I dunno Megs, he was really fucked up about all this shit. I mean like, he's in shock or something he kept saying over and over "it's my fault," or something was his fault. Megs, he wasn't making any sense to me. It's like he's on this huge guilt trip or weirded out." She looks really upset so I just shrug instead of saying anything and shift my backpack off my shoulder so I can grab my phone out of it.

"It's cool Suze, I'll text him and maybe we can meet up at school or, huh, we're gonna walk by his house, I'll tell him to be out front and meet us." I quickly text Chad and wait for a minute to see if he'll answer me. **'hey can u meet me n suze ur place in 5???'**

'Whoa! He answers almost right away.' 'k megs ill wait 4 u>>>> what about max??????'

Suze is looking over my shoulder at the screen and her face scrunches up as she reads. "Megs, he is so worried about Max you should tell him that he's ok, you know? Cause he's losing it big-time." I nod and text back; 'max is k 4 now ill explain 2 u ltr k? gtg b right there' Chad fires back, 'k cu' as Suze I head for his house.

As we head down the street I notice that there's a Montgomery County Police cruiser parked up at the next intersection next to the Montgomery Ride-On bus stop. Suze and I walk by and the cop sitting in it nods at us so we wave at him. Suze nudges me in the ribs and says; "He's hawt! I'd like to see more of him!" She giggles and I just shake my head. "Suze, I swear to God, you are so pathetic sometimes. Quit your perving already will ya!?" But she's right, he is cute, well for an old guy. We turn the corner and cut across the side-yard to Chad's front door. Before I can even reach up to press the doorbell the door flies open and Chad is standing there. '*Gee, he looks like shit too. Okay Megs, be nice, this is not good times for anybody.*' Chad falls forward, grabs me, and bursts into tears.

"I'm sssorry, I...I...I...he...he...Max..uh..ohhhhhh ffuckkk Megssss...aaannddd they sss..hot him..." He stops making any sense and just shudders. His shoulders heave as he cries and I hug him tightly and look over at Suze whose eyes are filling with tears as she watches. With my arms completely around him holding him, I suddenly realize that Chad is sorta short and built skinny like Max. I wanna try to say something to comfort him, but my mouth won't work. The way I am holding him puts my face right in his hair which smells like apricots. '*Huh, that's weird, a guy smelling like fruit? Must be the conditioner. Okay, I am standing here holding my brother's best friend who is having a major meltdown and I am thinking about how his hair smells? Yeah right, I SO need to get my shit, ah um, yeah act ,together.*'

I feel Suze's arms wrap around Chad from behind him and gently squeeze him as she comforts him too. Perfect, so now here we are standing on the front steps of Chad's house in a group hug and I am so feeling like shit because there's nothing I can do to change things right now. '*This so sucks!*'

"It's okay Chad, really dude it's cool, I swear to you, okay?" He just cries harder and shakes more than ever. I look across at Suze and she has tears streaming down her cheeks, plus her make-up is all smeary from hugging Chad. '*What a freakin mess!*'

I can see a clock hanging on the wall through the open door and its nearly 7:05 which means that we need to get going or we're gonna be seriously late for first period and I most definitely don't want to put up with any crap from Mr. Kuhn, my homeroom teacher. Especially since he's a dick to us students most of the time anyway unless you're one of his Varsity football players. *'Go figure right?'* I gently pull away from Chad and his teary blue eyes are filled with pain as he looks at me. *'Ah shit.'*

“Chad? Hey-you didn't do anything wrong, k? I know this sucks and we'll figure this shit out. But right now we've gotta go cause I've got Coach Kuhn for homeroom and he's a real dickhead when you're late for class.” Suze gives Chad another big hug from behind and steps around him and stands next to me. She reaches into her backpack and pulls out some napkins and hands them to him. He takes them and wipes the snot off his face and blows his nose. “Thanks Suze.” She just grins at him, “It's okay Chad, seriously.” He tosses them into a bush by the front door and shrugs. *'Eww! Gross!'* Then he looks sadly at me.

“Megs? Why didn't you call me back? I left you lots of voicemails! What about Max? Is he, is he...” Chad stutters so I interrupt him before he loses it again.

“The Doctor said that they are going to keep him drugged up, at least for now. I honestly didn't want to hear that shit Chad so I didn't pay attention. My Mom and Dad told me later that they thought he'll be okay. So, like for now, we all hafta wait. K? I 'm sorry about not answering your calls or texting you guys last night or even yesterday, but first we were in the hospital waiting room and you can't use your celly's in there and then I felt like major shit and didn't wanna talk afterwards okay?” Both he and Suze nod at me.

Chad turns around and closes the door. He reaches inside his T-Shirt, pulls out his lanyard with his student ID and a key on it, and after taking it off, locks the door and then slips the lanyard back on around his neck. “Um, guess we'd better go Megs. Oh here, this is Max's.” He hands me Max's cell phone. I glance at it and see that its covered in some dried brown sticky crap which I realize is my brother's blood. *'Oh fuck me!'* “Um, thanks Chad.” I stare at it for a sec and then I shove it angrily into my backpack wishing for a painful and tortuous nasty death to the fucking ass-wipes that did this to Max.

He asks me. “Uh Megs, can we like not walk by, oh shit, um, yeah, you know...there?” I nod and we take off.

We head up Whittier Blvd and finally get to school. As we cut across the student parking lot we can see a bunch of those white Television Vans with the retractable pole antennas and satellite dishes on them parked by the bus entrance. Then Suze points to a bunch of police cruisers in front of the school's main entrance. Chad looks upset and like he's gonna lose it again and Suze has that *'I just ate lemons'* look again. I pull out my cell to check the time realizing that we are so gonna be majorly late if we don't hurry up so I grab onto Suze's arm on one side and Chad's on the other and kinda speed walk us towards the cop cars.

There's a crowd by the front entrance and cops everywhere checking ID's and looking like they're expecting a war to break out right here. *'Oh freakin perfect!'* There's a bunch of loser press-parasites with cameras mixed in too, interviewing students and teachers and anybody else walking in to the school. I whisper loudly to Suze and Chad; "Come on we're gonna jam by this shit. Pull your ID's out and head for the door!" There's a tall cop by the door who barely looks at us and lets us by him as we dodge some press-parasite who tries to get us to stop and talk to him. *'Yeah, Fat Chance of that happening buddy.'*

We get inside and then I stop and give Chad a big hug, "Chad, dude, its cool. I promise that we can talk more. You still have second lunch?"

"Yeah Megs, um I do." His bottom lip is quivering and he looks like a freakin zombie.

"K. Suze and I will see you in the cafeteria at lunch time. I seriously gotta get to class so that Coach Kuhn doesn't give me detention or some other ignorant shit. Chad? It's gonna work out. Trust me?" He nods and then takes off across the atrium towards his first period class. Suze looks at me and I look at her. "This so sucks Megs!" "Yeah, basically the world sucks right now Suze."

As we head to class I hear somebody's voice call my name so I stop and look around. *'Oh freakin perfect! It's Dr. Carroll, the Assistant Principal, and she's headed right for us.'* "Ms. Galloway? Can I see you for a moment please?" I nod; "See you after third period Suze? Oh you might wanna fix your make-up too." "K. See you, bye Megs." Dr. Carroll looks at me with that *'I'm so sorry that life sucks for you'* expression on her face. "Let's talk in my office Meghan." *'Well, this is sure as hell not gonna be one of my favorite days,'* I tell myself as I follow her to the office.