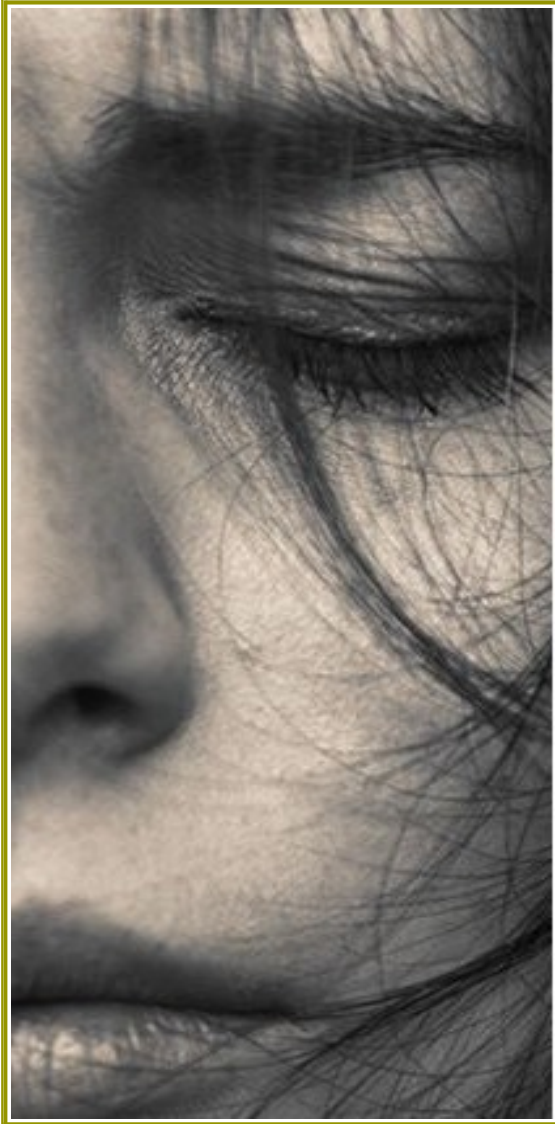


*Ashleigh & Megan*  
*Book I: Friendship*



*Wednesday, April 25*  
*Can't Wait*  
*Any Longer*

*Day 15 of Book I*  
*(Thirteen Days since Megan and Christopher went*  
*Bowling)*

*Part Five of Six*

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*I hope you enjoy this pioneering format I call, "A Story Cast."*

*What the term "Story Cast" means; is this story is designed to be read in small to medium intervals. This particular story is broken up into "days." These portions are broken up into part or all of a particular fictitious "day" of the story. Each day surrounds the characters lives, relationships, adventures, struggles, mishaps and triumphs. This story is very different from a Novel or conventional story in many ways. Again, THIS IS NOT A NOVEL AND IS NOT WRITTEN IN A CONVENTIONAL NOVEL FORMAT. Instead; as the reader you are following the characters thoughts and actions during the course of this "day." This fiction story is set up like a TV series and or a third person journal. It always starts with one or more character getting up and ends with one or more characters going to bed; while during the day you experience the Characters actions, feelings, and their thoughts. On a large overview; there is a beginning, a middle, and an end to this "Story Cast"*

*R. P. Voght*

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## **April 25 Can't Wait Any Longer Day 15 of Book I**

*(Thirteen Days since Megan and Christopher went Bowling)*

**J**ulie stepped up to her locker. A couple buttons were unbuttoned on her conservative looking yellow cuffed button shirt. This was far from inappropriate because of the tank and bra she was wearing underneath. She was still wearing her capri style jeans.

As she opened her locker she again felt her bra slip.  
She sighed.

Before the previous class, she stepped into a secluded section of the hallway, she adjusted her bra, and called her Momma. Nicole promised she would take her shopping and purchase her new ones. Julie could have easily purchased as many bra's as she wanted but she hated to spend her own money.

She: opened her locker, behind the door she quickly adjusted her bra hoping this would keep it in place, she removed the books inside of her bag, set them inside of her locker, she placed her accounting book, and accounting folders into her bag. She: swung her bag over her shoulder, and grabbed her orange colored lunchbox; she decorated with stickers. She shut her locker and headed to the cafeteria.

While walking toward the cafeteria she could tell students were talking about her. This hurt a great deal. Over the weeks she heard how: she gave a couple guys blowjobs at the schools pool, she slept with a male teacher, many guys claimed to have had sex with her, a girl claimed they had done it, and everyone claimed to have spotted her masturbating in numerous places in school. As a virgin this was hurtful. What irritated Julie these rumors were being spread from students who were sexually active. She especially disliked her

nickname Fingerpainter. She found this irritating because she believed just about every student indulged in masturbation. What added to this hurtful feeling was this name was given to her by a supposed friend.

Julie's impulse was to have sex. She reminded herself, if she had sex today there was a high possibility of becoming pregnant. Another fear was contracting a venereal disease. This was one of the reasons she would never have sex with any guy who attended any sex party. There were a handful of guys she was considering having sex with. They never attended these parties and were likely virgins. The other reasons she was considering these guys: they were often teased, they treated her nice, and it was her personal way of getting back at all of the popular guys who wanted to have sex with her. She correctly assumed they wanted to have sex with her, more important; she believed they would appreciate anyone having sex with them.

She turned into a hallway running parallel of the building, at the end of this hallway was the horizontal hallway leading into the cafeteria; this horizontal hallway was filled with many students. The current hallway she was walking in had a small amount of students. Standing to the right against the wall was Ralph. He was the guy she performed breast sex on. He had one or two friends in every social group but was never considered "popular". This happened because he was involved in everything. He: was the third string running back, he was in band, helped the drama club build sets, then helped out with the sound and lights, was on the chess team, took a lot of art classes, and seemed to help out anyone who needed it. These were the reasons he was invited to the sex party by mistake and why he was picked on during the party.

Julie braced herself for rude behavior when he stepped up to her.

Somewhat nervous but pretending to have confidence he said, "Julie."

She stopped. Kids walked around them.

Ralph made a face.

Because of Ralph's body language she was nice, "Yeah."

"Uh.."

He paused.

She made a face. She was expecting him to suggest a time when they should have sex. Just about every guy who went to the parties asked to have sex with her sometime after the party. She correctly reasoned, guys assumed she was reluctant to have sex at the party, but was willing to have sex somewhere else. The fact was, even though the rumors said otherwise, she was unwilling to have sex with any of the guys who went to the parties.

"Yes."

He managed, "Would Y'all want to go to a movie?"

Annoyed she asked, "Why do Y'all want to go to a movie with me?"

He was honest, "I'm hoping we'd date."

She sighed, "Y'all don't want to date me."

He made a face, "Uh-huh."

"What Y'all want is to have breast sex with me again."

He blushed.

She gave him a face, turned around, and headed to the cafeteria.

"Wait."

She stopped.

He stepped up to her.

"It's not why..."

She glared at him.

He stopped.

She was about to turn away.

He said, "I wanted to ask Y'all out before I ever went to the party."

She asked, "Then why didn't Y'all ask me out before?"

"I didn't think Y'all liked me."

"Y'all just want to have sex with me."

"No."

"So you don't want to have sex with me?"

"Yes. But..."

She found it sweet when he blushed.

"What?"

"I was hoping if we dated Y'all would only have sex with me."

Very serious she asked, "Do you believe I've had sex?"

He answered, "I don't care."

"It ain't what I'm asking. Do Y'all believe I've had sex?"

"I don't know."

She sighed and answered, "Then I don't know we should be dating."

This upset him but he remained proper, "If while we date Y'all don't sleep with anyone else I don't care."

She asked, "Did Y'all end up sleeping with someone at the party?"

He answered truthfully, "None of the other gals wanted to be with me."

"So I'm a consolation prize?"

"No. I've liked Y'all for a long time."

"But Y'all didn't have the courage to ask me out until I let you have breast sex with me? And none of the other girls wanted to have sex with Y'all"

He answered, "I don't want to have sex with any other gal."

She gave him a face.

His body language slumped.

"There are a lot of gals who would love to date Y'all."

"I don't want to date them."

"I ain't interested in dating anyone from around here. You've heard what everyone is saying about me. Why would I date anyone from here?"

"I don't care what they've said."

She looked at him, "But you believe I've had sex."

He was honestly unsure.

A moment of silence

Ralph broke into the silence, "I don't care if you have or not."

Very serious, "I'm a virgin."

He looked at her.

Based upon this look she said, "I could use a friend."

He gave her a look and said, "I hate the friend zone."

She thought about some of her friends and other girls she knew who liked him.

She repeated, "There are a lot of good gals who'd be happy to date Y'all."

They started to head to the cafeteria.

“There are?”

She rolled her eyes, “Yeah.”

“Who?”

“What about the gals in drama club. Or Victoria-Lynn?”

He made a face, “From chess club?”

“Yes from chess club.”

“She likes me?”

She rolled her eyes and stated, “Guys.”

He said, “It’s difficult knowing.”

She gave him some advice, “Start paying attention.”

“Sure.”

She decided to ask him, “Since Y’all are my friend.”

He made a face, “Yeah.”

“Why do Y’all like my boobs?”

He glanced at them.

“Look at me.”

“I apologize.”

She sighed, “It’s okay.”

“Is the reason Y’all like my boobs is because they’re big?”

Blushing and with the oddest face she ever witnessed, “I love it when they get hard.”

“Why?”

Blushing and staring, “I love their shape and what happens to your nipples.”

She recoiled, “Y’all like them?”

He nodded his head, “Uh huh.”

She stepped up to him, changed her voice, and whispered; “Y’all are the only guy I’ve ever had breast sex with.”

He became hard. This turned her on. She especially loved teasing teenage guys because she felt they were so immature and pitiful. It surprised her how much he liked her torpedo shaped breasts and her large nipples. She wished they would have stopped developing a long time ago.

Again in a seductive voice, “You have a thing for torpedo tits?”

He nodded his head.

She pulled back and smiled and said, “I’m glad we’re friends.”

He said, “I guess.”

With a lot of sincerity she said, “I could use a good friend.”

“Okay.”

She said, “I’m hungry.”

“Me too.”

They headed toward the cafeteria.

She asked honestly, “Are Y’all about to tell everyone you’ve had sex with me?”

“I’ll tell em’ Y’all are a virgin.”

“I’d appreciate it.”

They stepped into the cafeteria.

Ralph went to his group of friends and Julie stepped over to the table with her true friends.

Everyone in the cafeteria witnessed Ralph and Julie step into the cafeteria together. This immediately caused talk.

Julie sat to the left of Hanna. Across from Hanna was Beth, Zoe was sitting next to Beth, Monique was next to Hanna, and Brenda was to the right of Hanna. There were other girls at the table as well. On the other side of the cafeteria she spotted: Bobby-Sue, Billy, Jeff, and Bette all sitting together with an assortment of their friends. Julie purposely looked for Belinda and Mindy-Lynn. They were sitting a few rows up with other jock girls. She noticed both had bags with them. Julie correctly assumed they were carrying their accounting materials. She glanced over at Amanda. Amanda casually nodded her head. They both considered themselves best friends. They were separated by teenage social standards. She glanced at the rest of the Snob Club; Jeannie spotted Julie's glance and gave her a scowl. Julie sighed and looked away.

Monique asked, "You headed to the library?"

"I'm helping Belinda and Mindy-Lynn with accounting."

Julie opened her lunchbox and one at a time removed her items.

Beth commented, "Your lunch looks better than ours."

Zoe added, "It ain't the best today."

Hannah pushed up her glasses, "It ain't the worst."

Julie joking asked, "What is the dessert?"

Brenda mentioned, "What we know for sure is it has peaches in it."

Monique added, "The mystery is our main meal."

Julie asked, "Is it chicken and gravy?"

Brenda answered, "I believe it's turkey."

Hannah again pushing up her glasses, "Whatever it is. It's dry."

They all giggled.

For the next twenty minutes they all enjoyed being friends. At this twenty minute mark Belinda and Mindy-Lynn stepped up to the table. All of the girls greeted one another. Julie was in the process of packing up and excusing herself.

Zoe mentioned, "Julie helped me through Accounting."

Mindy-Lynn added, "She's helped me before."

Julie said with a smile, "It ain't a big deal."

Brenda nudged Mindy-Lynn and pointed.

The rest of the table looked over to where she pointed. Approaching the table was most of the snob club.

Amanda at the table tried to signal for Julie to get out of the lunchroom.

Hannah and Beth spotted this, they glanced at one another.

Hannah blurted out, "Julie why not get a move on."

"Why?"

Mindy-Lynn tried, "Lets get to the library."

Belinda added in her Jersey accent, "I'm clearly struggling. So we better get started."

Julie casually shut her plastic lunch box with all the stickers and swung her backpack over her shoulder. She was just about to say goodbye when: Pamela, Chelsey, Tiffany, Leslie, and Marissa showed up at the table.

Pamela immediately commented in a scowl sort of voice, "Look at traitor?"

Chelsey added, "We ain't liking traitor's."

Julie looked at Brenda and Mindy-Lynn, "Let's head to the library."

Julie turned and started to walk out of the library.

Kendall and Marissa stepped in front of Julie.

Julie asked, "Y'all are doing this?"

Marissa answered in her New Jersey accent, "We have a beef with U."

Tiffany quickly was near Kendall, "Y'all ain't getting it."

"Getting what?"

Jennie let out an obnoxious sigh.

Pamela stated, "Y'all need to learn what respect means."

Monique was about to stand up.

Hannah grabbed her and shook her head.

Monique and Hannah had a silent argument with facial expressions.

Zoe leaned in and whispered, "It ain't the time."

Monique whispered back, "When is it?"

Beth reluctantly said in her Wisconsin accent, "This is between them. But let's make sure it doesn't get out of hand."

Monique asked, "If it does?"

Beth answered, "I'll help."

Zoe was surprised at this, "You'd get into it?"

"There was a bunch of girls like that in Wisconsin."

Hannah with a disappointed look asked, "They live there too?"

Beth answered, "Unfortunately."

Brenda wished with all of her heart no one picked on one another; her heart went out to Julie. She wanted to have the courage to defend Julie but she lacked this at the time.

Jennie sneered, "We were friends?"

Julie answered bluntly, "If Y'all didn't spread rumors about me maybe we'd still be friends."

Jennie moved to the side and put her hands on her hips, "What rumors?"

Tiffany added, "Being truthful ain't a rumor."

Julie asked, "When have Y'all ever been truthful?"

Pamela stepped in. Her green eyes were piercing and full of plotting, "We're always truthful."

Chelsey answered, "What we say is the truth."

The Snob Club banded together and gave Julie sneering looks.

Pamela answered, "We run this school. So everyone believes us."

Jennie added, "It ain't like the rest of the school ain't in the knowing Y'all are..."

She paused, "What should I say?"

Chelsey answered, "A slut?"

Kendall sarcastically added "As ladies we should never use such language."

Jennie said with her arms on her hips, "A whore?"

Pamela again glared at Julie, "We're ladies we ain't using them terms."

Julie's impulse was to be violent. The other response was to brake down a cry.

The girls at the table looked at one another.

Julie managed to say, "I'm a virgin."

The Snob Club laughed.

Pamela moved in and whispered, "Even if it's true. Who'll believe it. Everyone knows Y'all are a pervert."

Tiffany said in a mocking voice, "Everyone knows you can't help yourself from touching your button."

Julie said, "It ain't like Y'all don't masturbate."

Pamela said, "What news is this? We don't have to get ourselves off in the girls bathroom because guys like us."

Julie answered, "For opening Y'all legs?"

Pamela stepped up to her and pointed, "We ain't the whore of this school."

Tiffany said, "Yeah."

Julie upset repeated herself, "I'm a virgin."

Jennie in a mocking tone replied, "I'm a virgin."

The girls laughed.

Julie defiant said, "I am."

Chelsey glared and sated, "Y'all might be. But who'd believe you?"

This crushed Julie but she managed to keep the pain of this comment hidden.

Kendall spotted a teacher approach and tapped Pamela.

Pamela spotted what Kendall saw, she turned toward Julie.

Being spitefully stated, "Jennie's right. Y'all are a teasing whore."

Monique jumped in between, "You better move on."

Belinda gently took Julie by the arm.

Julie turned.

Belinda shook her head.

Mindy-Lynn said loud enough so the teachers and everyone else could hear, "We're headed to the library."

Belinda said, "I need help with my accounting."

Monique still standing in front of Julie said, "It's a good idea."

Julie answered, "Okay."

Monique blocked the snob club.

The Snob Club would never admit it but they were relieved Belinda led Julie away. They were afraid to physically fight either Monique or Julie. The Snob Club was wise enough to never fight when the two were together.

Pamela said, "Gals lets talk to someone important."

They followed Pamela to where Ralph was sitting.

Mindy-Lynn, Belinda, and Julie headed to the library.

Julie managed to avoid breaking down in tears.

Both Mindy-Lynn and Belinda tried to cheer Julie up.

What brought some comfort to Julie was helping her two friends with accounting.

*J*ulie stood at her locker.

The confrontation with the Snob Club was all the talk. Of course the play by play of this conversation was now far more extreme than what actually happened. The direction of the telling boiled down to five groups. The first group agreed with the Snob Club and felt Julie was a teasing slut whore. The second group supported Julie if she was a virgin or not. There were a group of students who believed Julie was having sex but believed the Snob Club were a bunch of hypocrites for accusing Julie of being a slut or a whore. Then there was the group who could have cared less and disliked high school drama. There were those who wondered what the big deal was and even admired Julie for experimenting. Just about all of the students in school believed the Snob Club was out of line. Most felt the Snob Club were a nuisance. The problem was no one tried to stop them.

Julie looked up at the hallway clock. The least thing she wanted was to go to track. She was considering removing all the money from all of her accounts and heading to the Caribbean. She wanted to live an adult life. She felt she had the money and the intelligence to be successful as an adult. She felt, living as an adult would be much easier than being forced to suffer through high school. What kept her from fulfilling this plan was her family and the desire to play collegiate sports.

The other impulse was to become sexually active. If everyone believed she was having sex and believed she was a whore why wait. She was feeling a strong curiosity of what sex felt like. Masturbation and porn were becoming less satisfying. This was traumatic for her. The way she dealt with the stresses of her life was by watching porn and masturbating. One of the reasons she wanted to skip track practice was to find a secluded spot on the beach and enjoy herself. Her other impulse was to go buy some condoms and have sex. This was a very strong impulse. She believed the encounter would have been terrible but she wanted to escape the stresses of everything she was feeling. She assumed if masturbation was no longer working sex would.

Her plan was to have sex with either Burt or Bradly. Both were constantly being picked on for being virgins. She knew they found her attractive and they always treated her well. She was currently unsure of where Bradly was but Burt worked at a local computer store. A part of her wanted these guys to tell others she had sex with them. She wanted all of those guys who assumed she should have sex with them or lied about having sex with her to be jealous.

She was about to skip out of practice, buy condoms, and have sex with Burt.

She started to cry as she unloaded her books into her locker.

Out of the corner of her eye she spotted two female teachers approach her. She immediately shut off her tears and wiped them away.

The two teachers were Ms. Bright and Ms. Conner. Julie spotted the two of them together more than once. Out of all the female teachers in the school these two were the ones she admired the most. Both were dressed in conservative spring flowered dresses, both had their hair up, and both were serious. Ms. Conner was carrying two bags and had her glasses on. Ms. Bright was carrying a tote and a laptop back pack was over her shoulder. Julie often wondered what these ladies looked like outside of school. She felt Ms. Conner's future husband was handsome; she spotted a picture of him on her desk. Julie would have suggested Ms. Bright date Mr. Bob; but Mr. Bob was dating Susan. She wondered if Ms. Ashleigh and Ms. Bright would get along. Julie assumed this would be important to Mr. Bob.

Ms. Conner sternly said, "Ms. Steward."

Julie looked over at them, "Yes Ma'am."

"Hasn't track practice started?"

"I was running a little late."

Ms. Bright commented, "It isn't like you to be late."

"No Ma'am."

Ms. Conner with compassion said, "If you ever need to talk we're here."

Julie lied, "I'm fine."

Ms. Bright added, "We're here for you."

"Yes Ma'am."

Ms. Conner commented, "We've heard you had a successful softball season."

"Not really."

Ms. Conner tried to be encouraging, "It's been a long time since the softball team made it into the playoffs."

"I guess."

All Julie could think about was how bad she played the night before.

Ms. Bright said, "Make up for it next year."

Julie answered, "I guess."

Ms. Bright commented with compassion, "A friend of mine says. You can't fix yesterday. You can only do better today to make tomorrow better."

Ms. Conner said, "Good saying."

Julie smiled. Julie now knew Ms. Bright personally knew Mr. Bob.

Ms. Bright smiled, "See there is the Julie we know."

"Yes Ma'am."

Stern the only way Ms. Bright could be, "You get to practice."

Julie answered, "Yes Ma'am."

Ms. Conner asked, "You promise?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Julie immediately replied, "I have to go."

They smiled when Julie quickly shut her locker and headed to the girls locker room.

Ms. Bright yelled, "Julie."

Julie stopped and turned around.

Ms. Bright answered, "They need you."

"Yes Ma'am."

Julie turned. She teared as she headed to the girls locker room.

Julie was curious to know how Ms. Bright and Mr. Bob knew one another.

She glanced at her watch and was suddenly angry at herself for being late. She went around a corner. She was in front of the stairs headed down to the girls locker room. This is when she spotted Brenda and Hannah waiting by the steps.

Hannah said, "Julie."

"I have to get to practice."

She pushed up her glasses, "It will only take a second."

"Okay."

Julie stopped and waited.

Hannah looked at Brenda, "Give it to her."

Brenda sheepishly opened a small pocket of her backpack and took out a homemade pin of a Siberian Husky face and volleyball earrings.

“What’s this?”

Hannah tapped Brenda.

Brenda answered sheepishly, “For being a friend.”

Brenda was surprised when Julie hugged her. They brought one another comfort.

Julie pulled away, “I have to get to practice.”

The two girls could see Julie was tearing.

Hannah pushed up her glasses and said, “They need you.”

Julie looked at Brenda, “We could use a shot putter.”

Brenda shocked, “I can’t go out for track?”

Julie asked, “Why not?”

Brenda shook her head, “No.”

Julie demanded in a question, “Are Y’all coming to Hannah’s house this Friday?”

“Yes.”

Julie smiled, “I’ll enjoy seeing Y’all there.”

She turned and headed down the stairs.

Hannah looked at Brenda, “She liked it.”

Brenda answered, “It wasn’t great.”

“Y’all are an awesome artist. It was great.”

Brenda said, “Momma is making us dinner.”

They smiled and left the building as fast as they could.

Julie ran down the stairs, pushed open the door to the locker room, ran to her locker, before opening it she carefully put the pendant and earrings into her backpack, she quickly changed, she hoped her sports bra would stay in place, ran out of the building, and to the running track.

She felt terribly guilty for being late.

*A*shleigh: picked up a Kiwi, inspected it, grabbed two more, and placed them into the cart; she then stepped away pushing the cart.

She was wearing a yellow light green and white striped crochet edge tunic, the stripes were horizontal except on the bottom and alongside the long V-neck hem; where they were in a zigzag pattern. To remain modest she was wearing a yellow t-shirt underneath the tunic. She matched this with yellow Chico pants. She accessorized with: yellow spring inspired wedges. a thin yellow belt with a silver buckle, looped silver earrings, five plain bracelets on her right wrist, large yellow rimmed sunglasses were resting on the top of her head, and she used a multi-colored floral scarf like a head band to pull back her hair (this worked with the outfit because of the yellows in the pattern). As spring blossomed she was observing a lot of Floridian women wearing bright colored head bands. In the cart was a large pink and white canvas tote with a retailers name embroidered on the side; a tote she received free with a large catalog order. Her small plaid red and white colored purse was inside of the tote. Putting on this outfit on at the YMCA she felt she looked attractive; she could see the benefit to working out. She strongly believed without Megan and Julie she would have never found the value in working out.

She now recognized how important Nicole and Diana's advice was. They explained to her, as a leader in the community she should always be conscience of how she dressed. Their theory was, she never knew who she would meet, and she should always have a good presentation. Sometimes this irritated Ashleigh but she found this advice to be accurate. Listening to this advice kept her from finding herself in embarrassing moments.

She stopped at the grapefruit. She picked one up and smelled it; she loved the smell of fresh citrus. The only thing she liked better than the citrus in Florida was the sea food. Her plan after buying produce was to head over to the seafood section of the store. She wanted to make a seafood salad and a shrimp dish. The receipt for the seafood salad came from Nicole and the shrimp dish receipt came from Ma. She choose a couple big pink grapefruits; a half of a grapefruit was becoming a go to breakfast item. She stepped over to the cucumbers. Without looking like she was being picky she chose four cucumbers. She: placed them into a plastic bag, tied the bag, and set them into the cart. She went over and grabbed a bag of already chopped salad and placed this over the cucumbers.

She stepped into the meat department. She spotted Sgt. Marcus standing at the meat counter having ribs wrapped. She stopped pushing her cart and quickly adjusted her clothing. She felt this outfit was perfect at this moment. Ashleigh felt Sgt. Marcus was handsome without wearing his police uniform. He was wearing a nice pair of jeans, cowboy boots, a cowboy hat, and a plaid button shirt. Even though she believed he could dress better she was still attracted to him.

She casually pushed her cart up to the counter pretending she never noticed him.

The ladies in the deli department were watching this develop. In spite of the rumors Ashleigh was Bisexual, the more people were getting to know her, the less people were believing this. One of the ladies in the deli department heard Nicole tell a mutual friend of theirs Ashleigh liked Marcus. There were rumors Ashleigh was showing up at the early church service. Everyone who worked at *Renewed Mastery* could confirm Ashleigh was not an early riser.

Ashleigh checked Marcus out. She was attracted to him and wanted him to ask her out. He was five ten, his sunglasses were hanging from his right front pocket, she liked his thin lips, his squared chin, his brown eyes, light brown hair with a part in middle, and liked the fact he was clean shaven.

She was aware, his Fiancee' broke up with him because he refused to quit as a police officer. A woman at their church confided to Ashleigh, another reason she broke it off, was his refusal to have sex before being married. This impressed Ashleigh a great deal. It was one thing for a woman to force a guy to wait but it was completely different to have a guy force a woman to wait. When she took care of a stack of tickets at the Eastbank Police station she felt Marcus liked her. She made sure to take care of all these tickets at a time when he would be at the police station. She later thanked Officer Janet Foster for helping her know when this would be. She was counting on Janet's promise she would encourage him to ask her out.

She wanted to see if he noticed her.

This plan ended when the guy behind the counter asked, "Ms. Ashleigh may I help you?"

She smiled and said, "I could use a pound of hamburger."

She decided she should purchase hamburger, she made this choice because they could use it at anytime; even though they already had some frozen in their freezer. She liked Billy-Bob. She was correct in believing he had worked at the store for years.

“Yes Ma’am.”

She immediately said, “Could I have the ninety-five percent lean?”

“Huh?”

She slowed down her speech and this time even pointed, “I’d like the ninety-five percent lean.”

He understood this time and answered, “Yes Ma’am.”

She paid attention as a college student handed the ribs to Sargent Marcus.

She was happy when Marcus, after thanking the guy for handing him the ribs, turned to Ashleigh, “Ms. Ashleigh.”

She pretended to be surprised he was there, “Oh.”

She waved her arm and touched him.

“Sargent Marcus. I didn’t recognize you without your uniform. I’m so glad to see you.”

Everyone standing there was surprised someone could say everything she said in one breath.

A mature lady who was waiting to be served smiled. She missed all of what Ashleigh said but she was wise enough to know what Ashleigh was after.

He smiled, “It’s understandable.”

She immediately answered, “I don’t want you to feel like I don’t like you out of your uniform.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Of course I’ve been seeing you at church.”

“Y’all go to the early service?”

She clarified, “A few times. But the few times I was at the early service I believe I saw you there.”

“Okay.”

Billy-Bob said, “Ms. Ashleigh.”

Ashleigh winked and turned, “Oh thank-you.”

“Enjoy.”

“We will.”

(When she said we, she was referring to herself and her brother.)

She took the hamburger and placed it into the cart. He stood there. This was encouraging to Ashleigh.

She asked, “You having a party?”

Marcus asked, “What makes Y’all think I’m having a party?”

“You bought a lot of ribs. I was told this is a staple at parties down here.”

He smiled, “I ain’t hosting a party.”

“Then why all the ribs?”

“A few of the guys and their wives are coming over for a small barbecue tomorrow night.”

“On a week night?”

Both Billy-Bob and the mature woman looked at the two as they stepped away from the counter.

"With our schedules it's better during the week."

"Makes sense."

He asked, "You like ribs?"

Ashleigh being her flirty self, "I love how you guys make ribs."

"I'd like to think I make delicious ribs."

Ashleigh felt like she was dying, but she smiled, and said, "I'd love to try them."

There was an awkward silence.

They stopped in the middle of the aisle.

They looked at one another.

She could tell he was about to be his polite self and excuse himself.

She quickly said, "We appreciate the daily patrols."

"It's our pleasure."

"I'm not sure you know about it or not. We have this awesome cafeteria. We're giving those people who service our community a discount on lunch."

"Y'all are?"

"We sent the information to the station."

"When did Y'all send it?"

"A couple days ago."

He thought about something, then said serious; "Our officers would appreciate it."

She added, "We have an excellent cook. We always post what's going to be on the menu on the cafeteria bulletin board a week ahead of time. We're thinking about posting it on what's called Facebook and on our website."

"Y'all have a web page?"

"It's one of the best in the industry."

He asked, "Is this discount for all of the officers?"

"Oh yeah."

He smiled at her Midwestern accent.

In a serious tone answered, "We'd all appreciate it."

She touched him and said, "We're happy to help."

They again stared at one another.

She thought about something, something Megan liked doing with Christopher, "Did you see there's a pot luck this Sunday?"

He answered, "No."

"They're calling it *The Spring Get Together*."

"Are Y'all bringing anything?"

"I haven't decided yet."

She asked, "What are you bringing?"

"Maybe I should bring ribs?"

Not thinking she said, "You know I'd love to taste your ribs."

He looked at her and laughed.

She felt like it was hopeless.

She managed to say, "I guess that did sound funny."

He became serious, "I ain't meaning any disrespect."

"None taken."

Ashleigh was disappointed when he said, "I have to get a move on."

“Oh.”

He stood there.

She said, “I hope to see you at the pot luck dinner.”

He said, “Ma’am.”

The way he said it made her say, “Why not call me Ashleigh.”

He smiled, “If I called Y’all Ashleigh wouldn’t it mean we’d be more than associates?”

Very serious, “Exactly.”

He asked, “Y’all interested in coming over to the barbecue tomorrow?”

“I’d love too.”

They looked at one another.

Ashleigh was concerned he’d chicken out.

He asked, “Would Y’all like my number?”

Her heart was pounding.

She quickly pulled out her purse, “I’ll put your number and address into my phone.”

“Y’all have a nice phone.”

She commented, “I need a good phone because of work.”

She took out the little keyboard, “What’s your phone number and address?”

He answered and she keyed it into the phone.

He said, “Ashleigh I’m looking to see Y’all tomorrow.”

“Me too.”

He was about to step away, she stopped him, “Marcus should I bring anything?”

“It’s casual. Don’t worry. Just bring yourself.”

In her mind she had a list of dishes she could make and was already thinking about what to wear.

He again tried to step away, “Marcus.”

“Yes.”

“Is it outside?”

“It’ll be in my back yard.”

“Okay.”

He grabbed his sunglasses and hung onto them, “It starts at six and will end around ten.”

“Okay.”

Before putting on his sunglasses she said, “See Y’all tomorrow.”

“Y’all will.”

They smiled at one another and he stepped away.

The mature woman pushed her cart up to Ashleigh, “It took some arm turning didn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

She smiled at her Midwestern accent.

The mature woman said very serious, “With Marcus asking Y’all out means he really likes Y’all. There have been many gals since his engagement who’ve tried to get his attention.”

“They have?”

“Yes Ma’am. He ain’t one to take dating lightly.”

Ashleigh answered truthfully, “It’s one of the reasons I’m looking forward to going out with him.”

She smiled, "Y'all are a good girl."

"I try."

She smiled, "I believe Y'all."

Ashleigh then recognized her.

"I'm so sorry. You're Brenda-Lee? You go to Nicole's Bible study?"

"Yes Ma'am."

Brenda-Lee held back tears, "I was impressed with the testimony Y'all shared."

"It was difficult given it."

"It's why we'all knew you were given it to us straight."

Ashleigh teared.

Brenda-Lee smiled, "We're hoping Y'all show up again."

"I will."

Brenda-Lee became serious, "If Y'all need anything you reach out to me."

"I will."

Brenda-Lee was about to step away but she stopped and said, "I hope Y'all are in the knowing. For Ms. Nicole to invite Y'all and give a testimony means she respects Y'all. You understand what it means?"

Ashleigh said, "She's like a big sister to me."

"Y'all are a good girl. Don't be disappointing us."

"I won't."

Brenda-Lee winked, "I ain't meaning Y'all have to be perfect."

"I'm not."

"If Y'all said you were I'd have stopped trusting you. See Y'all again."

"You will."

Brenda-Lee smiled and pushed her cart into a near by aisle.

Ashleigh brushed away a tear. She focused. She immediately called Nicole for advice.

## *April 25<sup>h</sup>, Can't Wait Any Longer Part Five of Six*

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