

## Excerpt from *Entangled*:

We walked on without speaking, letting the symphony of the night play on our ears; a cricket's chirp blended with the whisper of the wind in the vines and away in the distance a lone dog howled at the moon. Handel reached out and took my hand again, making it appear a natural thing to do, guiding me around a low spot in the trail as though I wouldn't have noticed it.

"Don't you find it strange that your memories of this place and the weeks you spent here are forgotten?" he finally asked. "I know you were young, but so was I. Those weeks are very clear in my mind."

"Everyone's not the same. Our brains don't all work the same. Maybe you remember that time because it meant something special to you. I forgot it because it wasn't special to me." I pushed the hair back from my face and sighed. Why did he care whether I could remember three weeks of my life at the age of eight?

"Now you're just being mean. Your mother said you were very excited about the winery. You spent a lot of time with your uncle, learning and exploring. And we became friends. I know we were just kids, but a bond like that doesn't disappear." He shook his head when I looked at him. "It might fade with time, but it doesn't disappear."

I stopped, his gaze piercing my psyche like a needle in my thumb. "We were children, Handel. Just children."

"I know." He reached up and pushed a strand of hair behind my ear that the wind had pulled loose. "Children that found solace in one another."

I narrowed my gaze, a questioning frown furrowing my forehead. "What do you mean?"

He shrugged, his eyes filled with sadness and an underlying anger. "I came here at night to get away from my father. He was an abusive alcoholic. I was his favorite target." He paused. "I don't know what your personal secret was. You didn't say."

My eyes widened with comprehension. "You think my father was abusive too," I gasped. I shook my head, surety in the strength of a lifetime of memories not forgotten. "My father was a very passive man. Believe me, I would know. Just because he had a fight with his brother once doesn't mean he would ever hit a child. He didn't even believe in spanking."

Handel didn't appear convinced. He stood there, a towering block of disbelief in the middle of the vineyard. The dog howled again, sounding closer this time, and I looked back toward the house. The kitchen light gleamed from the window, a beacon to moths and a woman fluttering against life's realities, hoping for a safe haven filled with warmth and peace.

"We should go back," I said softly.

"If that's what you want." Handel pushed his hands in the pockets of his jeans and tilted his head back to look straight up. "Have you ever seen such a perfect night sky?" he asked.

I followed his gaze. The velvet expanse was riddled with stars, a thousand pinpoints of light making the moon's fullness appear like a big brother showing off. The star-strewn, midnight blue sky stretched over the edge of the horizon, God's blanket tucking us in for the night. I felt like a small child again, helpless to fight against... something.

He was watching me. I cleared my throat and glanced at the dark face of my watch. "Well, I'm tired. If you want to stay out here for a while, be my guest, but where I come from it's past my bedtime."

He nodded. "I'll finish my walk if you don't mind, then I'll be on my way."

I didn't know if I liked the idea of his being outside in my vineyard while I slept, but I couldn't bring myself to tell him so. I hesitated, unsure of how to end the evening between us. Should I leave him here without another word, or tell him what a good time I had and thank him for dinner?

While I debated, he leaned in and kissed my forehead. "Goodnight, Billie. Sweet dreams." He didn't wait for a response, but turned and started walking away.

I headed in the opposite direction, picking up my pace as I neared the house. I suddenly wanted to be inside where the shadows could be dissipated with the flip of a switch, and strange sounds could be wiped out entirely by the noise of a television set. I turned at the door and looked behind me, but the only movement was the listing of the trees as the wind picked up and blew everything eastward.