

This book is dedicated to the men in my life: Justin, Benny, and Sully. I love you more than you could ever know.

I'd also like to acknowledge the women who are past or current members of the Fit Chicks organization in Ravenna, OH. You inspire yourself, each other, and the people around you every day. Thank you for letting me become a part of your group.

Can Moments Like These Last Forever?

I wish that sometimes I would just learn to shut my big mouth. Or perhaps it's not my mouth that keeps getting me into trouble. No, it might just be my emotions that I have to learn to check before they start running wild. Apparently, today, my sentiments are trying to get me into some kind of awful mess.

While telling someone that you love them is not a terrible thing to do, it does often produce a moment of anxiety on behalf of the speaker. I now find myself in that precarious situation. My ex-boyfriend, Nathan Hamilton, called me a few moments ago. I probably shouldn't have answered the phone, but I desperately wanted to talk to him.

Even though Nathan had initially plunged right into a story about work, I wasn't listening. My mind was embarking on its own journey elsewhere. In the wake of a tidal wave of good news poured forth by all of my friends, I was feeling a bit personally underwhelmed. I was thinking that I should have something wonderful happening in my life too. Brooklyn was moving in with Duke. Adair was marrying Wesley. Oh, and Benson and Jack were going to leap across the country in search of superstardom. With their triumphs ringing in my ears, I knew what I had to do.

I wasted no time in my own quest for happiness. As soon as I had the opportunity, I told Nathan that I loved him. Now that I have said it--now that I have put myself out there--all I can do is wait.

The most perfect moment in the world is the one that occurs directly after you have taken the leap. In love, this usually means that on impulse you've said something life-altering . . . and most often the words "love" are tangled in this act. There is a mystical time span that exists between your utterance and when other people respond to your actions. In that interim, all is right in the world. You may be laughing or you may be crying, but in that moment, you experience elation. You have just done something that no one, including yourself, thought that you could (or would) ever do. In that moment,

you are free to bask in your own glory and soak up the internal praise that is certainly coursing through your head. Congratulations, you have just put your heart on the line.

But, as with all moments of perfection, this good feeling will come to an end.

If your original actions were heroic, you might be greeted by applause on the other end. If your intentions were sneaky, you might be rewarded with a sly wink from a co-conspirator. But, if your moment of daring was like mine and it involved telling the former love of your life that you are still smitten by him, your moment of happiness will be shattered by laughter. And it won't be the kind of laughter that you want to be a part of. It will be the kind of laughter that echoes in your ears and comes back to haunt you later. It will be the kind of laughter that hurts and continues to penetrate your feelings even after it has died away.

A few moments ago, I got swept up in the moment, and now I am sorely regretting my actions. But really, I feel like I'm not totally to blame here.

I think that I will place the culpability on my friend, Jessica Adair. She knew that I was feeling lousy and a little worthless. She could read it in my face. Everyone else in my life, all of my other friends, had something magnificent happening to them, and here I was, floating. I'm not trying to make the situation worse than it is here. I'm just trying to say that my life was stagnant, while they all seemed to be soaring. She picked that very moment to spring on me the most important news of her life: She was getting married.

This was no small feat; for Jessica Adair to be the first of my friends to take a trip down the altar really meant something. She had always been the loudest, wildest, most promiscuous one of the bunch, and I felt a little betrayed to learn that she was going to be getting married.

In a fit of what can only be called insanity, I told Nathan that I love him. The two of us have a very long history that is riddled with cheating and fighting. But, when it comes down to it--I can't live without him. He's my air. And so it was, as I mulled over Jessica Adair's gigantic glittering engagement ring, that I decided to take matters into my own hands.

Instead of telling me that he loved me back and professing that he just couldn't live without me, he started laughing. I'm sure that he meant it in a good-natured way, but it still stung. What I wanted and what I was going to get were not meant to coincide today.

"Why aren't you laughing?" he finally asked. I wondered if he was wiping away at his moistened eyes. Anytime that Nathan was in the midst of enjoying a really good joke, he would tear up. This is a strange trait that he and I shared. A long time ago, we would spend hours making each other cry and laugh at the same time just for sport.

Why wasn't I laughing? That was a pressing question. Here's the thing, girls. (Be sure that you listen closely on this one.) When it comes to matters of the heart, there are times when it's okay not to laugh. It's perfectly acceptable to stand your ground (and maybe feel a little bit saddened) even when everyone else around you is celebrating, or laughing jovially. If you have conviction and you truly believe in what you're saying, there's no need to slough it off. I loved him, and I didn't want to laugh about it--not that I could tell him any of that.

"I dunno," I said, then shrugged. I realized as I was doing it that the gesture was useless. He couldn't see me, of course.

"Missy," he said, pulling my name out long in an almost-taunt, "Is something wrong with you?" I thought about my response for a minute, and then I opted for the high road.

“Nothing’s wrong, Nate. I just wanted to tell you how much I loved having you in my life again. Remember when we didn’t talk for like two months last year? That was awful.”

“That was awful,” he agreed mechanically.

“So, what’s going on with you tonight?” I asked.

“I don’t plan on getting into too much trouble, if that’s what you mean.” I could tell that he was smiling.

“You’ve got a date with your video games, don’t you?” I questioned.

“Yep,” he replied. From the immediate contrast in his voice, I wondered if he had just started up the game console. He already had that glazed over sort of tone and I thought that I probably better get out while I could.

“Hey, listen, before you get too caught up in your games tonight, I just wanted to let you know that Jessica Adair is getting married.”

I had his attention now.

“Adair? Really?” He really didn’t have to sound that incredulous, I started to chide, but then caught myself—I couldn’t believe it at first, either.

“Yep! She just showed me the engagement ring.” I felt a little weird gushing about something like this to Nathan, but I wanted to tell someone Jessica’s good news.

“Are you in the wedding?” he asked.

“Sure,” I said, involuntarily shrugging again.

“That’s cool. If you need a date, I’ll go with you.”

I couldn't believe he said the words, even as they were coming out of his mouth. Did he just volunteer to go as my date to a wedding? Unfathomable.

"Really?" My right eyebrow began to twitch. Sometimes my right eyebrow has a mind of its own. Whenever I'm slightly suspicious of someone or their motives, my face goes a little haywire.

"Sure," he replied in a nonchalant way. I could hear his fingers start to move on the game controller. I knew that I had to hurry this conversation up before he was completely gone.

But before I could chime in, he added, "Remember, Missy, I knew all of those girls in college, too. I know Jessica Adair. I wouldn't mind seeing her get married."

"Wouldn't mind seeing her get married" . . . I repeated that phrase silently to myself. This was a first for Mr. Nathan Hamilton. To my knowledge, he wasn't really a weddings kind of guy. For the first time in a long time I began to question how much I really knew about Nathan. Maybe he'd grown up just a smidge. A girl could hope.

"That's pretty nice of you, Nathan. Thanks for the offer."

I pretended to check my watch. This didn't compute for two reasons: 1. Again, he couldn't see me and 2. I don't wear a watch. I must've been really flustered to keep making all of these strange and totally unnecessary body movements.

"Well, look at the time. I better let you go," I said quietly into the phone.

"Thanks, Miss--g'night," he replied. I couldn't even bid him a good night as well, because the connection suddenly ended. I pictured him sitting on his couch, video game blaring, a bowl of Cheesy Puffs to his right, and the phone falling into his lap. Before I could get too entangled by this vision of Nathan, I decided to consider his wedding date proposition.

I would want *someone* to accompany me to the reception. Nathan did feel like the logical choice because he knew the bride. But . . . why couldn't he just say that he loved me? I couldn't help but think this over. Even if he had to qualify it in some sort of way, I'm sure that he could have said it. I mean, we have enjoyed getting to know each other again, and certainly somewhere deep inside of him, he is relieved that we are friends now. So perhaps he could have just said that he loved me, but added a tag on the end like: "I love you, Missy. I'm so glad that we can be friends again." That sounds okay, right?

The truth was: I really *needed* him to say it. I really needed to hear that someone out there in the world loved and cared about me. Feeling shaken and downtrodden, I decided to continue my moping in the privacy of my own apartment.

As I trudged towards the landing that was just outside my apartment complex, I took a look around. When I left the Pond earlier this evening, I had not taken much notice of the weather. I knew that it was unseasonably cold for May, and I had thought to bring a blazer with me, so I was covered. But now that I was leaving the blustery winds for the warmth of my apartment, I looked around to see that a massive storm was brewing just overhead. I sprinted up the stairs quickly, unlocked the door, and rushed around the place, closing all of the windows.

When I finished my chore and finally circled back into the living room, I was stunned to see that neither of my roommates--Eve, nor my little sister, Hope--were around. It was getting to be pretty late, and I had expected them home. I didn't like the idea that they were outside right now. Judging by the wind, it would be raining here within the next few minutes. I did my best not to worry about them. They were grown adults, I told myself.

Instead of fretting about my roomies, I decided to do a few more household tasks. After I finished folding the laundry and putting it away, I found that my mind was still preoccupied by Nathan and his dismissal of my feelings. Wanting to win back some of my glorious outlook from earlier in the

evening (before Nathan discharged my declaration), I changed the sheets on my bed and put on a new pair of pajamas. As I crawled into bed and turned on the television, I began to feel calm. This had been a really exciting day, and I was glad that it was coming to an end. I allowed myself to nestle down into the soft cream-colored pillowcase and for the first time in what seemed like a really long time, I had peaceful thoughts.

I was still feeling pretty spectacular and almost serene, until the next morning when my alarm started beeping. It was fairly early in the morning. For someone like me who works in television, to say that it was early means that not even the birds were up at this hour. But if I wanted to be ready by the time Autumn came pounding on my door, I had to get myself up and motivated.

Yesterday, before we met all of the girls at the Pond, Autumn came across a pair of running sneakers that just ventured into “cute” territory. When she tried on the pair of shoes, she said that it felt like “coming home again.” Autumn had always enjoyed working out and had even been on the cross country team in high school, but she had not given any serious thought to running in the last few years.

Inspired by the sale price that was attached to the running shoe, and the fact that Paul--a particularly handsome previous boyfriend--had drifted back into her life, she made the purchase. Minutes later, she was telling me that the shoes were a sign from God: She was meant to run a marathon.

Some people might laugh about this, but if you knew Autumn, you wouldn't laugh. She took her shoes very seriously and if she believed that one pair of them was a signal from the universe to change her life; she was going to do it. It was funny because Autumn and I had just been teasing each other about Shoe Karma. I totally believe that shoes can make a world of difference in how you feel and how well your day will go. Autumn's skepticism is always bouncing back and forth on the topic, but after reuniting with Paul--the man with the most incredible hair I have ever seen-- and agreeing to go on a

date with him, she was feeling that perhaps the theory of Shoe Karma wasn't so silly after all. (Frankly, I can't account for why she and I continue to have this argument as it is perfectly clear that Autumn believes in Shoe Karma, but we do. I think this is just one of Autumn's special quirks. She doesn't want to put her total faith in anything cosmic.)

On our way to the Pond yesterday, Autumn told me that I didn't have to run the marathon with her, to which news I was able to release a huge sigh of relief. I don't think I could pound out a half marathon, let alone a full; thankfully, she just wanted to train with me. Autumn knows--and I'm sure that most other people guess--that since I make my living by appearing on television, I have to stay fit. I work out every day and I try to run about four or five times a week. I don't do anything severe, like running marathons, but I jog anywhere from two to five miles a session. I used to try to keep up with Heidi Klum when she would blog about her running, but I found that task to be a little bit tedious. I design my own workouts, and generally I run alone. I was willing to make an exception for Autumn. Even the fact that she wanted to run really early in the morning didn't bother me. I figured that if I got my workout out of the way early, then I'd have the rest of the day to focus on other things that I enjoyed. It was sound thinking, and for the most part, I was glad to have Autumn as a new running partner. I would never recommend running through the city's morning darkness by oneself. I make it a strict priority to consider my own safety in this world. Safety first, that's the rule.

I quickly slid out of bed and pulled on a pair of jogging shorts, a sports bra, and an old t-shirt. I was just lacing up my tennis shoes when Autumn opened the door. I knew that she was on her way, so it was no surprise when she entered without knocking. I didn't want to wake my roommates, after all. During one of my nighttime treks to the bathroom, I noticed that both girls had made it home safely. I was less than exuberant to see that Eve had left her muddy shoes by the door and Hope had made messy sneaker tracks all the way to her bedroom, but I (or they) would have time to clean it all later.

After fretting over the possible carpet stains again, I turned to look at Autumn. She was electric--literally. From head-to-toe, she was clad in neon colors, except for her running shoes. She had on a blazing pink headband that matched her Adidas printed shirt. Her shorts were a kicked-up azure blue, and her socks, if you can believe this, were lime green.

"What's with this outfit?" I said, snickering simultaneously. My hand quickly flew to my mouth as I remembered that I should try to not wake my roommates.

Autumn pulled me quickly out into the hallway. She waited patiently while I locked the door and stowed the key in my shoe.

"Nothing," she said, and shrugged. She seemed to enjoy the motion, so she began rolling her shoulders back and forth. "I was just really excited about going for a run today so I dug out all of my old favorite running clothes."

"Seriously?" I asked.

"Yep," she answered, and nodded enthusiastically.

"Well, I guess the good thing about this outfit choice is that I'll be sure not to lose you once we get started."

"Actually, that is the whole idea. Haven't you ever been told that when you run in the dark, you're supposed to wear light colors so that you can be spotted by other runners, and cars, if you go into the street?" She asked this question and began looking over my own outfit selection. My grey t-shirt and black shorts admittedly looked a little shabby next to her knockout neon attire.

"Uh-huh, I've heard that. But I wasn't under the impression that you were supposed to illuminate the night with your running clothes." I tried to joke with her.

She looked down now at her own outfit. "Is it really that bad?"

I contemplated her question before answering, "Yes," I said calmly. "It's really that bad."

We both smiled at each other, and started to bounce down the staircase.

"Look," I continued, "you should wear neon colors, with this I agree. But you could tone it down a tad."

"What do you mean?" Autumn said, giving me a quizzical look.

"I mean that you could wear only one piece of neon at a time, or you could throw some white in the mix. White is considered a light color as well, and it's not nearly as blinding as this ensemble." I gestured to her wild outfit again.

"Okay, okay, I get it. You hate my outfit," she said in a resigned way.

"No, no, I love your enthusiasm, but it does feel weird for *me* to be giving *you* fashion advice. You're normally so capable. Is something else going on?" I looked her way quickly and then I nodded my head. It was time to start running.

She did one final calf stretch and then caught up with me. "Nothing's wrong," she said slowly. I could tell that she was already thinking about her breathing and wanting to make it flow naturally during this first marathon training session.

"You sure?" I asked, and decided to slow my run to more like a jog. I knew that Autumn was ambitious, but I figured that I probably shouldn't start out our runs together by sprinting away from her.

She nodded gratefully at the pace decrease and took another deep breath. "Nothing's wrong, really. I just feel like so much is changing."

I laughed, which was hard to do while I was jogging. “You think?” I snorted.

“You don’t think?” she asked. She hadn’t picked up on my sarcasm because she had been checking her pedometer.

“No, no, I totally agree with you. Last night was amazing. I can’t believe what is happening to all of our friends.”

“I know,” she exhaled. “I thought that my encounter with Paul was pretty great, until I heard everyone else’s news.”

“Yeah, and you haven’t even heard the best part yet.” As soon as I had the words out of my mouth, I wanted to retract them. I wasn’t sure if Adair had given me permission to talk about her engagement. I tried to replay our conversation in my head, but that just brought up the echoes of Nathan’s laughter. I shook my head quickly, as if I could wipe away that painful memory, but it just wouldn’t work.

“What’re you talking about? What’s the best part?” Autumn was now right beside me. Her lengthy legs managed a slightly longer stride than mine, so I had to readjust my pacing again now so that I could run in time with her.

“Did you hear about Jack and Benson?” I thought that I might be able to throw Autumn off by bringing up something that was fairly obvious.

“Yeah, I caught it,” she grunted and looked at me in a weird way.

“What?” I asked.

“Don’t *what*, me. You weren’t talking about Jack and Benson. Were you?” Apparently, her endorphins had started to kick in by this time. Even though her statement began a little hard-nosed, she

was smiling by the end. It was lucky for me, because I didn't actually want to deceive Autumn; I wanted to tell her about Adair, but I also didn't want to spoil the surprise.

"I was totally talking about Jack and Benson. I just assumed that you missed all of the excitement because you were busy gloating over Paul," I said in a teasing manner, hoping that the mention of Paul again would be enough to keep her preoccupied.

"Paul is sort of great," she sighed and luckily her breathing was relaxing now. I could tell that she was enjoying this run, almost as much as she was enjoying the memory of their impromptu rendezvous yesterday. I allowed her to wallow in that memory for a few minutes. I focused on the path ahead of us, and just sort of coasted in the morning breeze. The morning after a storm is always pleasant, I think. It's like the world has been renewed.

After a span of time, I turned my head slightly, so that I could evaluate my running companion. She seemed to be doing well, so I delved back into the conversation.

"So, when are the two of you going out? I can't remember. Too much happened yesterday," I said and checked my iPod. I realized that we had been jogging for a while now. I didn't want to exhaust Autumn on the first day, so I pointed towards a small path that would lead to a park.

We veered slightly to the left and she let the question sit for a small amount of time. She seemed to be thinking about her answer, "I think that we're going to go out next weekend. I was actually hoping that we'd see each other on Saturday night, but now, I don't know."

"What's up? Is something wrong with Saturday night?" I frowned a little.

"Well, we put together a lot of different plans before Jack and Benson are supposed to leave. I just don't want to miss out on any of those, but it seemed like a lot of obligations."

“Really?” I hadn’t actually thought about this fact. When the girls had started to plan out the next two weeks of our lives, I hadn’t been paying attention. I mean, I knew that Jack and Benson were leaving for L.A. in two weeks, but I didn’t know what we had planned beforehand.

“Really,” Autumn sighed heavily. “The girls want to get together and do something almost every night. You know that I love Jack and Benson, but I was feeling a bit overwhelmed.”

“I get it--I do,” I added quickly. I didn’t want Autumn to feel guilty. I loved my friends too, but I didn’t think that it would be necessary to spend every waking minute with them before they left, either. (Nor did this arrangement seem pragmatic; Benson and Jack would have a great deal to accomplish before their trek across the country.)

Suddenly, I was struck with an idea.

“Autumn, tell me what you think about this plan: What if, instead of us trying to carve out a piece of time every day to spend with the girls, we all just devote one weekend?”

Autumn looked thoughtful.

“Here’s what I’m thinking: Next weekend, we’ll all meet at your house for a slumber party. We’ll do it up old-school style. We can watch girly movies, read fashion magazines, paint our nails, and whatever else. Then, in the morning, we head to the Pond. After some brunch, we’ll do a quick shopping trip, and then cap off the night with a small, but fun, going away party. What do you think?”

She didn’t even have to think it over. “Yes, Missy! That would be so much better. Can we make this happen?”

“Can we make this happen?” I scoffed. “Yes, my dear, we can.” With that, I took off at a sprint.

I wasn't actually trying to be annoying. I usually try to sprint the last two hundred meters of my run. It was about that time.

A few seconds later, Autumn caught up to me.

"Why can't moments like this last forever?" Autumn said, and the statement was spot-on. This was a wonderful moment. I felt good. My muscles felt warm. The air was luxurious. I didn't really want this moment to end, either. I fell into an easy walk and took a few moments to suck in air.

"You know," I said, "I really don't want Jack and Benson to leave."

"Me neither," she replied. "It won't be the same without them."

"We won't be the same without them," I amended and gave Autumn a small smile.

We continued to walk back to my apartment complex. When we reached the door, Autumn and I went our separate ways. As I was climbing the stairs back to my home, I couldn't help but be grateful for Autumn. I silently thanked my lucky stars for allowing Autumn to come into my life.

"I can't believe this is it," Adair said loudly. We were sitting at brunch on Saturday morning. Our last weekend with Benson and Jack had been priceless, so far. The sleepover last night felt reminiscent of the times that we would camp out in each other's dorm rooms in college. Waking up this morning and rolling out to the Pond also seemed like something that we used to do a long time ago. I didn't want to have that feeling just yet about the Pond, but even as it was happening, I knew that this place would never be the same for our group. This restaurant would very soon become one of the places that we *used* to go.

“Me neither,” I agreed. I hugged my mug of hot chocolate to my chest. Even though it was pleasant outside today, I still felt cold.

“Stop! You guys,” Benson whined a little. Tiny tears were shining in the corners of her eyes. I was fairly certain that she was rethinking her offer to join Jack. Since the school year was over, Benson didn’t have any work obligations, but she was going to be forced to get a job this summer. She knew that since she was moving she was going to be incurring all sorts of unexpected debts. To that end, she’d been searching online all week, trying to find a decent summer job. I felt sorry for her. She was leaving her friends; her boyfriend, Brian; her family; and her comfortable living, for what? A chance to hang out with Jack? Not to Jack’s discredit, because I love her dearly, but it didn’t sound like such a bargain for Benson. I was hoping with all my might that this would be a good decision for her.

While we all took turns soothing Benson, I allowed myself a second to check out Jack. The aura around her was shining. I don’t actually believe in any of that celestial nonsense (aside from Shoe Karma, of course), but I do maintain that when people have a sunny disposition, it will shine through. Today, Jack was luminescent. She seemed much calmer than I’d expected, but she also appeared to be totally radiating energy. I wanted to scoot my chair in her direction so that I could soak up some of her good vibes. As luck would have it, she caught me staring at her. She shot a wink my way and I nodded in response.

Then, we all settled into a comfortable silence. I sipped my hot chocolate while Brooklyn poured more coffee into her cup. Autumn cut her pancake into small pieces and Benson put some Tabasco Sauce on her eggs. I noticed, while I watched everyone go about their brunching routines that we functioned like a small family unit. We knew who would need the syrup on their side of the table (Jack) and on which end the coffee pot should rest (Brooklyn). We knew when it was okay to have small side

conversations and when it was appropriate to devote all ears to a particular speaker. I couldn't help but to echo Autumn's sentiments from our first running session: Why can't moments like these last forever?

I didn't want Jack to leave, but I knew that it would be best for her. Once I could accept that fact, I handled her moving appropriately. But my mind floated back to Benson. What was she going to do? She was even going to be leaving her boyfriend. I couldn't let her do it. I just couldn't allow her to make this colossal mistake. My mind (and my eyes) flooded with tears. I had to stop her.

At that moment, it was as if Adair sensed that I was about to do something stupid. She put her hand in front of me, pushing me back a little ways from the table. It was the same motion a parent might make when they suddenly pull to a stop in the car. She was protecting me (like a child) from making a huge blunder. She shook her head twice and I ducked mine in shame and frustration. I knew what I thought was best, and I just couldn't see the sense in concealing it any longer.

"Guess what, ladies?" Adair said loudly and all eyes swiveled in her direction. It had been a long time since Adair had shared any news with the table. Since she had been dating Wesley, her wild stories weren't quite so reckless. As a matter of fact, she hardly graced us with tales of her escapades at all anymore. I knew then that she was saving me from looking the fool by sacrificing her own very good news. I didn't actually understand why she had chosen to keep her engagement a secret from the girls, but I was relieved that she was finally deciding to tell them about it--even if she was only doing it to shut me up.

"I have big news, everyone, but I refuse to share it if . . ." she nodded at each one of us in turn, "any of you decide that now is the time to be hysterical." She stopped her eyes right on me and I knew what she was really threatening. *"If you bother Benson and try to detract her from moving, I won't share my engagement news."*

“We’ll behave ourselves; we promise,” I said solemnly and realized that I actually meant it. I desperately wanted to keep Benson here, but I also knew that my opinion didn’t really matter in this situation. Both Benson and Jack were grown adults. If they wanted to catapult halfway across the country, my only job was to be there when they needed someone to man the safety nets.

“What? What’s going on? Just tell us already,” Brooklyn said, busily buttering her bagel, so she wasn’t really catching the solemn looks that passed amongst our group. As she reached for the jar of honey to add to her spread, she noticed that everyone was sitting on the edge of their seats.

“Why so tense?” Brooklyn jabbed at me with her butter knife. I nodded my head towards Adair and Brooklyn noticed for the first time that she was the only one at the table who was not staring at the massive engagement ring now covering Adair’s ring finger.

“Well, hot damn,” Brooklyn said under her breath. I only caught this phrase because I was sitting directly next to her.

“No way,” Jack mumbled in a small voice. Even though we must have looked mighty strange, our group of girls just sat and marveled. We all looked from Adair to the ring and back, but somehow no one was able to coax real speech from their lips.

“I’m engaged,” Adair whispered, with a smile gracing her lips. The Pond had never been as quiet as it was during this blessed announcement. I always hear people describing a splendid moment in time when the whole world stops and pays attention to them. This was Adair’s moment. The atmosphere was saturated by her joyous news.

“Congratulations,” I finally said, remembering my manners, and hoping to break the ice. Since I had known about the engagement previously, it was easier for me to snap out of the trance. But I must

admit, the whole situation was a bit breathtaking. If I hadn't already been aware of Adair's new relationship status, I probably would've been awestruck for quite some time.

"The ring's beautiful," Benson said and wrapped her arms around Adair's neck. Both girls hugged and laughed. Then, I saw Adair wipe at some tears. I couldn't recall the last time that I'd seen Adair cry, but I was happy to see the tears sliding down her face now. Autumn, with her quick thinking ways, thrust a few napkins in Adair's direction. Jess quickly dabbed at her face, trying to capture the tears before they ruined her flawlessly applied makeup.

Then, for what seemed like no reason at all, I began to cry. I wasn't sure if I was upset or happy, to be perfectly honest. I should clarify: I knew that I was ecstatic for Adair. I could feel my happiness for her (and Wesley) deep down in my bones. But I wasn't really sure if that emotion warranted the presence of tears. Just as I was about to place my finger on the source, I decided that it didn't matter. It felt good to allow the tears to flow freely. I even managed to allow a laugh to escape my quivering lips. I know that I was mixing emotions here, but I couldn't help myself. My mind was frenzied.

The finality of this moment was palpable. Perhaps that was the real reason I was crying. As we all sat around the Pond together--Brooklyn, me, Autumn, Adair, Benson, and Jack--I knew that this would be the last time we would all be together like this. There was something surreal and infinitely bittersweet about this moment. While I knew that the girls were moving on to bigger and better things, I didn't want to let them go. Autumn pushed napkins in my direction and I dabbed at the large tears that were cascading down my face. I looked her way and noticed that she too had grabbed a stash of paper products. Even Brooklyn, the most stoic of us all, was allowing herself to enjoy a moment of weakness. She was crying softly.

What would I ever do without these girls?

