

Copyright © 2021 by Edwina Fort

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods without written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below:

Griot's Garden Publications

2533 Bert Kouns Ind. Lp.,203 #187

Shreveport, La 71118

[Griotsgardenpublications.com](http://Griotsgardenpublications.com)

Publisher's Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author's imagination. Locales and public names are sometimes used for atmospheric purposes. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, institutions, or locales is completely coincidental.

Stealing the Pastor's Daughter/Edwina Fort. – 1<sup>st</sup> edition ISBN



# STEALING THE PASTOR'S DAUGHTER

---

GATOR'S AND MACKENZIE'S TALE

EDWINA FORT





*Stealing*  
*the* **PASTOR'S**  
**DAUGHTER**

**EDWINA FORT**



*Stealing*  
*the* **PASTOR'S**  
**DAUGHTER**



# PART I

---



## THE NIGHT SHE BECAME HIS



“*D*on’t look over at that devil; just keep your eyes down and hurry past him!” my older sister hissed, giving my lower back a little push to hurry me around the cotton candy line. The devil she spoke of was none other than New Orleans’s Gator LaRue, the Creole Prince; at least that’s what everybody called him. He’s the biggest drug dealer from here in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward to the Big Easy. He was also the topic of many of my

daddy's sermons and a recurring figure in my dirtiest, darkest fantasies, something I've been asking God to forgive me for.

Of course, I was not unique. There wasn't a woman or a girl in this part of the South that didn't fancy themselves in love with the Creole Prince. He was the ultimate bad boy, every daddy's nightmare. I should know; my daddy hated him. I don't think I've ever seen him hate anybody more.

And it's not what y'all think.

No...

Somebody like me didn't catch the eye of the Creole Prince. He was only seen with the type of girls that ended up in rap videos, girls whose parents didn't control every waking breath of their lives, what they wore, what they ate, what they watched on television,

*who they're going to marry...*

Here I am, eighteen years old today and still needed my big sister to chaperon me while hanging out with my friend at the neighborhood carnival. This year I was graduating from high school; I'd wanted to go to Columbia College in Chicago and study creative writing.

My dad didn't even consider it an option. He said that I was going right here to Texas Southern University, getting my MBA. I was being primped to run the day-to-day operations of Mt. Baptist Little Rock, my dad's megachurch. He said since the good Lord didn't see fit to give him a son, and my sister was already married with a child, it was my job to make sure the church stayed thriving.

And my mother was no help. Although daddy was primping me to run his church by day, she was primping me to be first lady of the city by night. I'd been engaged to the mayor's only son, Sebastian Jr. since before I was born. She was always:

*"Elongate your neck, Mackenzie. How in the world can you walk in a*

*room on Sabastian's arm slouched over like that? What if he decides to run for president?"*

Or...

*"Put down that cookie! What is wrong with you? First ladies don't eat cookies! Look at my figure...and this is after having two children."*

Or my all-time favorite...

*"Flat iron those naps! I don't care what the latest trends are; first ladies don't have nappy hair!"*

My gaze drifted back to Gator, and a groan nearly left my throat. He leaned against his truck with his massive arms crossed over his bare chest. He looked as if he'd just finished a game of basketball with his friends.

God! He was past handsome. He had the face of a warrior, all hard angles and stuff. But it was his green eyes and long brown hair that he wore braided in cornrows down his back and the full brown beard that made all the girls' hearts go pitter-patter.

He didn't look real. His skin, hair, and beard were all the same color, and then those startling eyes. Kay, my best friend, who you guys are going to meet in a second, and the only person outside of Sabastian my parents really let me hang out with, said that although the LaRues of New Orleans are known for their signature brown hair, Gator had his grandmother's eyes.

Kay said that down there in one of those bayous, she was called the Creole witch because anybody that tried to harm her ended up missing without a trace. Of course, I don't know if that's true or not, but according to my best friend, it is.

Anyway, Kay says her daddy was a French aristocrat who fell in love with her mother and established a *mariage de la main gauche* or what was known as a left-handed marriage. When he died, he'd left Gator's grandmother the beautiful bayou land that had been in his family for generations. Of course, his legitimate wife and chil-

dren were not happy about that arrangement and tried to have Gator's grandmother and her mother lynched.

But it didn't go according to their plan. Rumor has it the night the legit wife's brothers and father donned those sheets and rode down into that bayou, had been a night full of terrors. The men's bodies were never found. After that, nobody else rode into Gator's grandmother's bayou to try and take what was rightfully hers.

Love, betrayal, murder... The writer in me would love to do a little investigating in that family's backyard. I have a feeling there is a best-selling novel somewhere in there. Kay knows everybody's business but doesn't always take the time to get all of her facts straight if you know what I mean.

However, I can tell you what I did know; there was something about Gator that my soul craved, which was very bad because like I said, I'm engaged. Well...maybe not engaged, I mean, I didn't have a ring or a contract or anything like that. I guess it was more like a well-known fact that Sabastian and I would eventually marry.

He was already a sophomore at Howard University. I didn't see much of him these days, but my father allowed him to call me every night after dinner; lucky him. Although he makes it sound like all he does is study, I know he was doing some partying too. He'd pledged Alpha Nu last year, so I know he was going to plenty of frat parties.

One of the guys standing next to Gator said something to him that caused him to sneer, and that golden canine tooth of his flashed in the waning sunlight. That was something else he was famous for, his one gold canine. Whenever he smiled, it winked at you, making him look like the very devil my daddy swears he is.

The police are the reason behind that golden tooth. Witnesses say five officers snatched Gator out of his car a couple of years ago, and they all tussled on the ground for a good while. They

said two of the officers used their Tasers on him, but it seemed to only make him angrier. Anyway, when it was all said and done and they had the cuffs on him, Gator smiled at the crowd of people who'd gathered around and through all the blood on his mouth, they saw that his tooth had been badly chipped. The next time anybody saw him, it had been replaced with a golden canine.

I don't know how the police feel about him in New Orleans, but they hated him here in Houston; probably because Mayor Birch, who was Sabastian's dad, hated him. He and my father often talked about ways to bring him down. He's been arrested more times than I can count. But daddy says Gator's drug money pays for one of the best lawyers in the Big Easy, and although the city of Houston tries, they can never get any of the charges against him to stick.

"Kenzie!!!!" Kay screeched when she spotted us through the crowd heading her way.

"That chile loud enough to wake the dead," my sister groaned. "The deacon should have enrolled her in mama's etiquette class a long time ago."

"Oh hush. Maybe she just excited to see me," I told her, trying to put some distance between us. I loved my sister, but ever since Tyler, my little nephew, was born, she's turned into our mother. She used to be so much fun; now, she always had her nose frowned up at something or another.

I don't know what made me steal a glance at Gator again, but when I did, I gasped to see him looking directly at me. And I don't know...that green gaze hit me like a Mack truck, and I nearly tripped over my own feet. But leave it to my sister not to miss an opportunity to point out my imperfection.

"And look...you've been in mama's etiquette class your whole life and still don't have the grace God gave a duck. But you let her

tell it, her sweet, perfect-in-every-way Mackenzie can walk on water.”

“Shut up, Fee! Don’t rub it in!” I cried, so embarrassed I could have melted into the ground. The one time I’d managed to catch the Creole Prince’s attention, I blew it and tripped.

Goodness!

I was not prepared for his direct gaze. It was like being hit with a million watts of power all at once. He’s a very serious man. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him laugh. The closest he’d come to it was that one-sided grin he does that shows one just how sharp that gold tooth is in his mouth. He always seems to be very reflective; his green gaze never giving anything away. It felt as if none of us were worthy of his thoughts.

“Happy Birthday, Bestie!” Kay yelled as she threw her arms around me.

My sister rolled her eyes. “Nope! I’m not getting ready to put up with this. I’m going to take Ty over there to the kiddy carnival. I’ll meet you back here in two hours.”

“Two hours?!” both Kay and I cried at the same time.

“Come on, Fee! It’s my eighteenth birthday! I don’t want to spend it at the house with mama and daddy!”

She shrugged as she began to lead my nephew toward the kiddy carnival. He turned to look back at me with his chubby cheeks that I loved to kiss, giving me a little wave.

“Bye, auntie baby... Tell your mommy to stop being mean,” I called after them.

“You better be lucky I came at all,” she shot right back. “I’ve been at the church all day on my feet. I’m tired and I want to go home. You got two hours. I suggest you get busy having fun.” And then she was gone in the crowd.

“Why she got to be that way?” Kay muttered as we stared after her.

I shrugged. "You know what? Forget her! If I got two hours, I don't want to spend them talking about her."

She nodded as her eyes brightened. "Guess what. I have a surprise for you, come here."

"Girl, slow down!" I laughed as she began to pull me through the crowd.

Kay was the youngest daughter of one of the deacons at the church. Deacon Radcliff, who was also one of my dad's good friends. Although she was two years younger than me, she and I had been best friends since we were little. She was really my only friend.

My whole life had been the church, so I really didn't know anybody outside of it, which really sucks because my parents had put me up on so high of a pedestal, none of the other youths at Mt. Baptist felt comfortable befriending me.

Sure, they spoke and complimented me on whatever outfit my mother insisted I wear but nothing past that. My mama says it's because they're all jealous of me, but I don't believe that 'cause my life was nothing to be jealous of. I was told what to eat, what to wear, where to go, what to think...and who I would marry.

My sister poked fun at me about those etiquette classes, but she had no idea how much I loathed them. Mama says just like my future husband was being reared to follow in his father's footsteps in politics, I had to be reared to be the pretty, shiny thing on his arm.

She told me not to worry about making friends at church. According to her, they were all beneath me, and I should only worry about making power moves that history would remember.

*"I want to be a writer, mama. Doesn't history remember writers?"*

She'd waved her hand. *"I told you to forget about those childish dreams. You were meant for greater things, and it's your responsibility to answer that call. You are not common like most of that trash you want so*

*badly to be friends with. You are black royalty. And by God, you're going to act like it."*

Fighting back tears, I would nod, but for the life of me, I wish I hadn't been born into this family. I just wanted to be able to have a normal life. I wanted to eat carbs and maybe have a pet. I wanted to walk out on the grass barefoot or roll around in the flowers. I wanted to wear my hair in its natural curls and wear bright colors like orange and yellow, or maybe even green.

I wanted...

"Drink this!" Kay said, shoving a soda bottle in my hand.

I frowned down at it. "Coke? You brought us all the way back here to drink a coke?"

She grinned, barely holding onto her excitement. "Just taste it!"

Shaking my head, I exhaled and twisted off the top and took a huge sip. But a split second later, I was spitting it back out.

"Oh my God! It's whiskey!"

"Actually, it's brandy, but...yeah!"

"Where did you get this from?!" I cried, staring down at the bottle.

"I stole it from my uncle's liquor cabinet. Take another sip."

I shook my head, trying to hand her back the bottle. "Uh uh, it's nasty."

Sucking her teeth loudly, she put her hand on her hip. "Ewww! Kenzie! Why you got to be so lame? Here I risked my life stealing this for you because it's your eighteenth birthday. The least you could do is drink some of it."

She angrily looked off toward the side to make sure nobody we knew was coming before her gaze came back to me.

"Ain't you tired of being so stiff? You eighteen years old today, and you ain't never had a drink!"

"And you have?" I asked, laughing at her.

She grinned. "For your information, I have. You the only one

closed up in that ivory tower. The rest of us live like normal teenagers.”

Yikes! She hit me below the belt. She knows how sensitive I am about that.

“Fine!” I told her before turning up the bottle and taking a much smaller sip, making a face as I forced the burning liquor down my throat.

Pleased with me, she took the bottle and took a bigger sip before handing it back to me. “Here, take another. We have to hurry before one of those nosy biddies from the church come this way.” Nodding, I took another, and back and forward we went until we finished the whole bottle.

“Tonight, you’re going to have fun! It’s my gift to you!” Kay screamed, throwing the empty bottle over her head before she grabbed my arm and took off at a run for the games and the rides.

She was wrong about me never having a drink. When I was eight and Fee fourteen, our parents had gone to Mayor Birch’s house for dinner; only he wasn’t the mayor yet, and Sabastian had dared us to take a sip of vodka. However, compared to that one sip, the ten or twelve sips I’d just taken were having a different effect on my body. Back then, I felt nothing. Now, I felt warm all over, and yeah...carefree.

For the next twenty minutes, Kay and I ran around the carnival laughing and having more fun than I’d had in a while. I just prayed my daddy’s church parishioners couldn’t tell that I was tipsy. But I’ll be honest with you guys, at the moment, I didn’t really care; I felt on top of the world.

And then the crash happened...

Laughing at something Kay said about Sister Pauline’s wig, I wasn’t watching where I was going, and BOOM! I crashed into what felt like a brick wall. A gasp tore from me when all the breath left my body before I felt myself falling.

Only...

I never hit the ground. Instead, I found myself being held in a pair of strong arms, staring into a sea of green. I parted my lips as my breath returned, but I couldn't look away from the deepest eyes I'd ever seen. There was so much in that gaze. I saw it... I saw the war taking place. He may can hide his thoughts from everybody else, but in this moment, I saw it.

As if it had a will of its own, my hand lifted, and I found myself gently tracing a scar that ran down the side of his face just below his brown eyebrow.

"What happened?" I asked, lost to everything else that was going on around me. It was like the lights and the noise...the people all faded. It was just me drowning in that green sea.

"A fight...they had a knife." His deep voice vibrated through my body, causing me to shiver.

"Oh my God, Kenzie! You crashed into Gator!" state-the-obvious Kay said from where she stood right next to me, staring at the scene Gator and I made with a shocked look on her face.

I blinked, looking around me as the sounds, the sights, and the noise of the carnival rushed back into focus, filling my senses all at once. Gator was still holding me horizontal to the ground. Kay's voice must have snapped him out of whatever trance he was in as well because he stood up straight, bringing me with him.

Quickly stepping out of his arms, I muttered, "Sorry for crashing into you." I was glad he'd put his t-shirt back on and was not still bare-chested. God knows my mind would have really been scrambled then.

"You drunk?"

I opened my mouth to deny it but then changed my mind. For some reason I wanted him to see the real me and not the image of perfection my parents had created for the world to see. I know this is going to sound strange, and maybe it's really the liquor talking,

but for some reason, it felt like he was the one person in the whole world it was okay to be me with. I had to put on the mask for everybody else, including my future husband. But not with Gator...never with Gator.

"I mean...it's my girl eighteenth birthday. Yeah, she had a little drink to celebrate it," Kay chipped in from next to me. I nearly rolled my eyes when I saw that she was in full posturing mode for him. If she stuck her chest and butt out anymore, she was going to snap in half.

For the first time, Gator's eyes left me and traveled to her. He took her in, seeming to weigh and measure her with his gaze before he turned and walked back to his truck that wasn't too far away, clearly not impressed.

However, his friends did not feel the same way and slowly began to surround us. Somehow, Kay and I had wandered over to the dark side. This was the part of the park decent folk didn't wander to. The carnival came to the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward once a year, and it set up in what everybody here called dope boy park.

Why did we call it that you ask?

Well, because of this group right here. These were the dope boys, the menaces that my father preached about nearly every Sunday. They were the bad boys of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward, and Gator was their king. I looked back toward the kiddy carnival to see if Fee was looking at me. If word got back to my dad that I'd let Gator touch me, I was dead, no questions about it, DOA.

Several of Gator's boys stepped to us; the one they called C'note took Kay's hand, holding it up away from her so that he could get a full view of her body.

"What's going on, li'l mama?"

"Nothing, what's up with you?" she responded, thrilled that she had his attention.

Let me tell y'all something about Kay. Like me, she was brought

up in the church. But unlike me, she was completely male crazy. And there was none she talked about more than Gator and his crew. She thought the girls that actually got the opportunity to hang out with them were the luckiest in the world. I can't tell you how many times she sighed, saying she just wanted to have one of Gator's brown-haired babies.

Yeah, I know, sounds ridiculous, right? But that's Kay for you. Ridiculous.

Will, Gator's cousin, who bore the brown hair that marked him as a LaRue, although it wasn't long like Gator's but cut short into a fade, stepped to me. But before he could say anything, a deep voice came from behind him.

"Will..." We all looked at Gator who leaned casually against his truck, big-booty Latasha standing in front of him, grinding all her junk against his private area to the carnival music.

"Not her..." he told him before giving Latasha back his full attention.

Hmmmm, that hurt. There was contempt in his voice. It was clear he was sending the message that I didn't belong here with them and that his cousin or none of his boys could flirt with me, because they too stepped away. Once again, the walls of what Kay called my ivory tower fell down to imprison me.

I bit my lip to hide my hurt as I took a few steps back, pretending to be enthralled with the group of kids that were dancing to the music on the stage. If he didn't want me here, then I didn't want to be here.

I didn't belong anywhere...

Kay and C'note chatted for a while longer before he asked her to take a ride with him. When I didn't immediately hear her say no, my gaze flew to her. Getting tipsy behind the carnival tents and indulging in a little harmless flirting with H-town's bad boys was one thing; getting in the car and leaving with them was a

whole other thing. Her gaze came to me, and I shook my head slightly, begging her with my eyes to say no.

"What you think, Gator? Should we take shawty and her friend out and show them a good time for her eighteenth birthday?" C'note asked without looking away from me.

C'note was bad news. It was a well-known fact that he was Gator's trigger man. If somebody even looked like they had a problem with his boss, he put them in the ground, no questions asked. My daddy has spoken over many a funerals that were due to this man. Even now, he had a gun sticking out the front of his pants that his t-shirt did little to hide.

"I don't know..." Gator responded, his deep voice drawing my attention. "It all depends if the pastor's daughter can bring herself to come near us sinners."

"Let me talk to her," Kay said, taking my arm, pulling me a couple of feet away.

"No, Kay..." I told her, shaking my head. "I know you're not seriously thinking about getting in the car with them."

"Why not?" she pleaded. "It's your eighteenth birthday. C'note said they can take us out tonight and show us a real good time."

I folded my arms. "Have you forgotten about Fee? She gon' be looking for me in about an hour."

"Forget Fee! Forget your parents! For one night, just think about yourself... Please, Kenzie! This is our only chance at seeing what it's like. After tonight, we won't get the chance again. It's your birthday!" she pleaded.

"So what, I'm just going to leave without telling anybody?"

She shook her head. "No, text Fee and tell her I'm taking you to the show for your birthday, and that you'll be home later."

My mouth dropped open. "Are you high? Do you remember who my father is? He will kill me dead if I did that."

Anger crossed her face. "Dammit! You're eighteen years old!

You have to stop letting them treat you like a kid! They're controlling your whole life! You can't do anything you want to do! Aren't you tired of it? Take this one night for yourself...worry about your daddy and his anger later. Just take this one night and have all the fun you can...just so you don't die always wondering what it can be like."

My gaze went back to Gator, who watched me like a predator. Big-booty Latasha was grinding her heart out in front of him, but he wasn't paying any attention to her. He lifted his lip in that half grin or what could really be a sneer, baring that golden canine that winked at me in the waning sunlight.

God! He looked like the devil...

I can't believe I was actually considering this. It's a good chance it was the liquor. But Kay was right. After tonight, when will I ever get this opportunity to walk on the wild side again? I've always wondered what it was like. And it was my eighteenth birthday.

"Will we be safe?" Before I could catch it, that question flew from my lips. Several of Gator's boys laughed at me including C'note. But Gator didn't laugh.

His gaze hardened. "You'll always be safe with me, *Mon cœur*."

I don't know what he'd just called me; I didn't speak French. But whatever it was caused Will's gaze to swing to him before settling on me with a little smirk on his face.

Something in his tone caused Latasha to stop grinding and turn to look up at him. "But I thought me and you was kicking it tonight."

He waved his hand. "Bounce..."

Her mouth opened as if she had been slapped before she gave me a look that said she wanted me dead. But she wasn't stupid. Nobody in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ward was stupid enough to challenge Gator. Instead, she flipped her weave before sauntering away, her booty jiggling the whole way, reminding him of what he was passing up.

Not going to lie...that gave me a rush out of this world. At that moment, my daddy would have said the devil got into me because I didn't ask any more questions. Instead, I walked toward Gator as if I was a puppet on his strings. His deadly grin grew as he watched me approach.

"You sure about this?" he asked when I came to a stop in front of him.

More nervous than I've ever been in my whole life, so glad the liquor was fueling my bravery, I nodded. "Yep."

He didn't move right away. His big body still rested against his truck. He let his gaze travel down my body, making me self-conscious of the summer dress my mother insisted I wore today. I'd wanted to wear jeans and a t-shirt like everyone else my age. But it was something I was rarely allowed to do. Today, I wore a cream summer dress that buttoned up in the front with a matching shawl for modesty's sake. As his gaze raked over me, I hugged myself, drawing the shawl tighter around my shoulders. I couldn't help but feel like prey, especially when his tongue came out and slowly swiped over his bottom lip.

"Go ahead and text your sister," he muttered.

With hands that shook, I took my phone out of my purse and quickly texted her what Kay told me. When I was done, I put my phone back in my purse and looked up at him, waiting to see what he was going to do next.

Finally, he stood and walked to the passenger side door, opening it. "Hop in."

"Yes!" Kay squealed as I slid in the front seat, she and C'note getting in the back.

The sound of my heartbeat was loud in my ears as I watched Gator walk around the truck to get in. He told his cousin that he would be back and that he knew how to reach him if he needed him. Will grabbed his arm before he slid into the truck.

“You sure about this, you’ll be riding hot?”

Gator didn’t answer him right away. His gaze came to me and I saw he fought a battle with himself. I was the forbidden. Everybody knew it. Sadness washed over me. I will forever be the pastor’s daughter...the Untouchable.

As if he could hear my thoughts, he nodded to his cousin. “Yeah, I’m sure. I’ll holla at you later.” And then he slid in, starting the truck and peeling out of the parking lot.

*Oh my God!* I can’t believe I was actually doing this...

I looked back at Kay, and she grinned at me, giving me two thumbs up. Neither of us had ever done anything like this. It felt like we were playing Russian Roulette. Gator turned the music up in a way that would make the frontseat and backseat conversation private. Kay and C’note were talking, but I couldn’t hear what they said to each other.

My phone dinged in my purse. I took it out and wasn’t surprised to see it was my sister.

**Fee: Whhhhhhhat!!!**

**Fee: Mackenzie, don’t play with me!!!**

**Me: I’m not playing...**

**Fee: Sister Johnson’s daughter said she just seen you get into Gator’s truck!!!!**

**Me: You know just because you use all those exclamations doesn’t mean your messages are having more of an impact on me!!!!!!!!!!**

**Me: LOL**

**Fee: Okay, how about this...Daddy is going to Killlllllll you!!!**

**Me: Just cover for me, will you? Tell him**

you felt sorry for me and let me go to the movies with Kay because it was my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Fee:** Dad is not going to care about that. And how long do you think it's going to take for word to get back to him that you got in the truck with Gator?

Oh yeah! I hadn't thought of that. Hmmmm...  
What to do?

**Fee:** He's not even that cute.

**Me:** Who?

**Fee:** Gator. You girls go crazy over him cuz he has green eyes and is a thug. Sabastian looks way better. You sure you're willing to risk messing up what you have with him for a guy that won't even remember your name tomorrow?

MY HAND PAUSED on my text as my gaze went over to Gator and surprisingly, he was reading my text.

"Hey!" I cried, laughing at him as I put my phone to my chest. "Nosy much?"

He grinned. "What do you have going on with Sabastian?"

"You know Sabastian?"

"Yeah, I know him." That contempt was back in his voice. "I know his punk-ass father too."

Well, I know he knew the mayor, seeing how Gator was public enemy number one here in H-town.

My phone dinged again.

**Fee:** Fine, don't answer me. Okay, I know you're safe. I'll try and hold off dad, but I doubt I will have any luck. He's going to kill me too, so thanks for that! If you want some advice, turn off your phone. It won't be long till word gets back to dad and Sabastian. They're going to both try and ruin your night. Have all the fun you can, because in the morning, you're going to wish you were dead. Happy Birthday, lil sis.

**Me:** Thanks, Fee, I love you!

**Fee:** Love you more...

I TOOK her suggestion and turned my phone off before putting it back in my purse. She and Kay were right. If I was going to take this night for myself, then I had better enjoy it, because my parents were going to make the next few months of my life miserable for this.

"Answer my question, Mackenzie," Gator drawled from next to me.

"What question?" I was surprised he knew my name.

His thoughtful gaze came to mine then. "What's up with you and Sabastian?"

I shrugged. "My parents say that we'll be married one day."

"Is that what you want?"

I shrugged again. "I don't know."

"Why isn't he here with you for your eighteenth birthday?"

"He has finals this week."

He fell silent after that, doing that pensive thing that he does, and I couldn't help but wonder what he was thinking about. Dare I ask him?

“What are you thinking about?”

My question must have surprised him because he turned to look at me for a second before looking back at the road.

“How do you know I was thinking about anything?”

I grinned. “I can tell...”

He chuckled a little bit. But he didn't answer my question. Instead he asked, “Are you hungry?”

I thought back to the bowl of oatmeal and fruit I'd had earlier this morning and nodded.

“I could eat.”

He nodded. “I know a place...” And then he turned up the music a little louder, officially closing our conversation.

