

*"All the days collided
One less perfect than the next
I was stuck inside someone else's life and always second best
Oh, I love you now 'cause now I realize
That it's safe outside to come alive in my identity*

*So if you're listening
There's so much more to me you haven't seen
Living in the shadow
Of someone else's dream
Trying to find a hand to hold but every touch felt cold to me
Living in a nightmare
A never-ending sleep
But now that I am wide awake
Then I can finally see
Don't feel sorry for me"
~ "Shadow" Ashlee Simpson*

I looked around the dorm. I looked over at Ellie and sighed. I picked up my backpack and headed for the door. There was no way I was going home and this was the only way I knew to avoid it. I was running from Starlight.

Ok maybe it wasn't my brightest move but there was no way I'd ever step foot in Blue Bay Harbor again. That place was evil...that place turned me into the monster I am. That place is the source of all the darkness. Starlight really was full of hope and...well...light. Jesse was my light...he made me happy for the first time in a long time...I didn't feel so lost when I was with him.

I opened the door and started out when someone tackled me. We tumbled a couple of times and the person landed on top of me. I opened my eyes and saw Jesse.

"Going somewhere Sunny?" he asked.

"Jesse! What are you doing?!" I cried.

"Well, you're going home in the morning. I thought you might try running tonight." Jesse said.

"Ok, you were right. Now let me go."

"Let you run? Right...that'll happen."

"Can you at least get off me? You're not exactly feather light." I asked.

"Fine. But don't think you're taking off." He said.

"Oh, and how exactly do you think you're gonna stop me?"

"By going to wake up Julia."

"You wouldn't"

"Wanna bet?"

"Fine, go for it. It'll save you the trouble of offing yourself cause I'll do it for you."

"Ok I won't go get Julia...I'll get Michelle." He said running towards the Bradley house.

"Stop!" I cried tackling him. This time I landed on top of him. "We have to stop doing this."

"I kinda like it." He said smiling.

"I bet you do."

"Oh, like you mind it?"

"I didn't say that...it just tempts me."

"Tempts you? To do what?" he asked.

"To do this." I said kissing him. He kissed me back but when the kiss broke he looks like a deer in headlights. "I just freaked you out didn't I?"

"Um...no..." he said with a squeaky voice.

"Yes, I did..."

“Will you please go back to bed?”

“I’m not going back to Blue Bay Harbor”

“Sunny, you have to. You have to face it at some point.”

“Why? You haven’t faced your home.”

“That isn’t by choice. My aunt doesn’t want me there...truthfully I’d like to go back to at least visit my parents’ grave if nothing else.”

I sighed, “Yeah well I have no reason to go back.”

“Your parents Sunny. Your parents love you so much. You should go at least to spend time with them.”

“You act like it’d mean a lot to you if I went.” I said.

Jesse nodded, “I guess it would. Please go and try to enjoy yourself...as much as you ever enjoy anything...for me?”

I sighed, “Fine...for you.”

“You promise?”

I nodded, “I promise.”

“Thank you. I’ll walk you back to the dorm.” Jesse said. We got there and he hugged me goodnight and I went back to bed. I felt defeated but what could I do?

The next morning Ellie woke me up.

“Melanie, come on. We need to get ready.” She said.

I groaned, “Ugh...no.”

“Yes. Come on. Dad and Daddy will be here any minute now.” She said.

“Fine.” I mumbled getting out of bed. I stomped to the bathroom and got dressed. When I came out Ellie was waiting, backpack on her shoulder. “I take it you’re waiting on me?”

“Yup. You ready?” she asked cheery.

“God, turn off the perky. The princess is rubbing off on you.” I said putting my shoes on and grabbing my backpack.

“Fine, let’s hit it.”

“Ok...by Tiff. I’ll miss you.” Ellie said hugging the princess.

“I’ll miss you too Ellie. I’ll see you in a couple of days.” Tiffany said hugging her back.

“Ugh...can we get this over with?” I asked.

“Yes, yes...coming.” Ellie said.

We went outside and Jesse was waiting for me.

“Hey Sunny, just wanted to see you before you left.” He said.

I cracked a smile. “I’m glad you came by.”

“Have a nice trip. I’ll miss you.” He said.

“I’ll miss you too. See you when I get back.”

“See ya.” He said hugging me.

When he let go Ellie and I continued on our way.

“Wow...” Ellie said as we walked.

“What?” I asked.

“You actually smiled. I haven’t seen that in awhile.”

“And you won’t again. Come on.”

We got to Hunter’s office and waited. About 10 minutes later our parents got there. Daddy (Derrick) was the first to walk in. He was followed by Dad (Kyle...remember it like this, Derrick is longer than Kyle and Daddy is longer than Dad...I hate having two dads).

“Daddy!” Ellie cried running and hugging him.

“My girl...Ellie, how are you?” Daddy asked hugging her tight.

“I’m good. I missed you so much.” Ellie said.

“Melanie?” Dad asked.

I admit it...I did kinda miss him. “Hey.” I said hugging him.

He hugged me tight. Ok so no one ever said our parents didn’t love us.

“Thank you for everything.” Derrick said to Hunter and Michelle.

“Don’t mention it.” Hunter said.

“We’ll see you girls in a few days.” Michelle said.

Ellie and I nodded and left with our parents.

A couple hours later we got back to Blue Bay Harbor. It was weird being back. We finally pulled up to our house. We went in and first place I went was the refrigerator. What they served at the Academy was not real food and most caffeinated beverages were banned too. I grabbed a Pepsi then Dad shut the 'fridge door. "HEY!" I cried. "We're going out to dinner after you get settled in. No snacking." He said. "Fine, let's settle Ellie, I'm starving." I said. Ellie nodded, "So am I."

I went to my room and looked around. I'd forgotten how much I liked my room. It was very me. From the dark red rug to the dark green walls...it was me. My incense table was just how I left it...my Japanese fan was still sitting by the incense burner. All my music books and writing folders were still laying on the shelves of my book case. My guitar still sat in the corner of the room. My bed, dark red and black, was as sloppily made as I'd left it. I threw my backpack on the chair in front of my vanity and fell back on my bed.

Ok...so it was kinda nice to be home.

Ellie

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*Dear Diary,*

*My first day back at home was fun, yet odd all at the same time. When I first walked in my room it was nice to see everything where I left it. My bed was still neatly made, the sheets were white as ever, the familiar white and light green bedspread was very comforting to see again. The rugs matching the bedspread still covered my white carpet. My dresser was still neat, pictures standing up. I felt safe surrounded by the familiar white and light pink walls. I put my backpack on my white vanity and sat on my bed. It was so great to be home.*

*A few minutes later Daddy called us and we left for dinner. We went to Blue Bay Café. I got the catfish. It was so good to get real food. Even Ellie seemed to enjoy it (she got the turkey club). During dinner Dad and Daddy asked us about school.*

*"Do you like Starlight? Are you making friends?" Daddy asked.*

*I happily nodded, "I made one really good friend. Her name is Tiffany Jennings and she's my best friend."*

*"You look much happier." Dad commented.*

*"I am! And did you notice, you didn't even have to make me come out." I said.*

*"I did notice. I'm so proud of you sweetie." Daddy said.*

*"What about you Melanie, are you enjoying the school?" Dad asked.*

*"I guess." Melanie mumbled.*

*"Melanie has a boyfriend." I informed them.*

*"A boyfriend?" Daddy asked.*

*"He's not my boyfriend you moron! He's just a friend." Melanie said glaring at me.*

*"What's your friend's name?" Dad asked.*

*"Jesse Foster. He's just tutoring me. It's not a big deal." Melanie said.*

*I rolled my eyes at her, "Whatever you say."*

*"Well you both sound like you're doing well at Starlight." Dad said.*

*"It's a nice place." I said.*

*"It's ok." Melanie mumbled.*

*After dinner we went and got ice cream then went home. Daddy insisted we all watch a movie as a family so he put in a movie and popped some popcorn. I curled up on the sofa next to Daddy and ended up putting my head in his lap and dozing during the movie. Melanie sat on the floor next to Dad. By the middle of the movie I noticed Dad was laying stomach down on the floor and Melanie was using his back as a pillow. It was great, almost like the old days. If it could stay this way I wouldn't want to go back to Starlight but I know this can't last. I know this is just because we both missed home, even if Melanie won't admit it. We both have a long way to go before we're ready to stay home, but we're making nice memories and that's a good way to counter all the bad ones. I'm about to go to bed and as I look around*

*my room I'm happier than I can remember being in awhile.*

*Ellie*

Melanie

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After we finished watching the movie Ellie and I went to bed. We were exhausted. I went to my room and turned on my CD player then crawled into my nice familiar bed. It was so nice...even I had to admit that...to myself anyway. I closed my eyes and was asleep in no time.

The next day I woke up to the smell of pancakes. It was a yummy smell so I got up and went to see what was going on. Turns out I was right. Daddy was making pancakes in the kitchen.

"Yes, finally, a real breakfast." I said.

"I take it food at Starlight isn't great?" Daddy asked.

I shook my head, "Not even good."

"It's barely edible." Ellie agreed walking in the room.

"Then you better enjoy the next couple of days." Dad said coming in with a gallon of juice.

"Is there anything you girls wanted to do today?" Daddy asked.

"And hanging out with friends is not an option Melanie." Dad said.

I sighed, "Fine...can Ellie and I just go explore town or do we need chaperones 24/7?"

"If Ellie stays with you then you can go hang out in town." Dad said.

"But Ellie, that means we're trusting you to make sure Melanie doesn't go off with any of her so-called friends." Daddy said.

Ellie nodded, "Fine."

I rolled my eyes, "Of course, put the good twin in charge."

"Melanie, we're sorry, but you really haven't given us a reason to trust you." Dad said.

"Yeah, yeah...why start now?" I asked.

"Melanie, it's not that we don't want to trust you. We do. But we just don't know if we can yet." Dad said.

"Yeah, cause I screwed up so many times. I know." I said.

Daddy sighed, "Let's eat." He said putting plates in front of everyone.

After breakfast we went into town, Ellie and I.

"So where to first oh mighty chaperone?" I asked.

"Melanie, don't. I didn't ask to be left in charge." She said.

"You didn't have to. You're the good twin."

"It's not like you didn't have a million chances to be 'the good twin'."

"Yeah, and I screwed that up...so where to, seriously."

"The mall?"

"Sure, why not?"

We walked into the mall through the food court area. At a table close to the door we saw my old crew.

"Oh great." Ellie and I both mumbled.

"This was a bad idea." Ellie said.

"Ya think?" I asked as I was spotted and they walked over to me.

"Melanie, good to see you. We thought you fell off a mountain or something." Dina, my former best friend and guitar player, said.

"Yeah, well ya know, that fresh forest air is addicting." I said.

"We got something better than fresh air if you're interested." Blade, our drummer and my ex...fuck buddy, said.

"Nah man, I'm going back to that school. They do drug tests there and stuff. I can't get busted." I said.

"Oh look whose turned goody good on us guys...come on, dump your loser sister and let go have some fun." Dina said.

"Sorry guys, I can't do that." I said.

"Melanie, come on...we gotta have some fun while you're in town." Blade said.

He was as attractive as ever but I couldn't stand the thought of sleeping with him again. Every time I did I thought of Jesse and what he would think about it. I knew I had to get rid of these guys...if I went with them and Jesse found out

he'd be so disappointed and suddenly what someone else thought of me mattered...what he thought of me mattered... but these guys were my friends...my band...I guess I'd outgrown them. "Hey guys, the name is Sunny now." "Sunny? What the hell? What did they do to you?" Dina asked. "They made me grow up...you should try it." I said. "Looks like we need a new singer guys. Come on, let's split." Dina said walking away with the others.

"Wow...I'm impressed." Ellie said when they were gone. "Don't be...I did what I had to. They're idiots anyway...I outgrew them." I said. "You're growing as a person...maybe there is some hope for you after all." "Don't count on it. Now come on. I want to check out Hot Topic." I said. "But those clothes are so dark." Ellie said. "So go to Charlotte what's her name and get something white and pink. I'll stick to black thank you." "It's Charlotte Russo and I think I will...but it'd be nice to hang out." She said hopeful. I sighed, "Fine, come with me to Hot Topic and I'll go with you to the preppy bright light store." Ellie smiled so bright I thought I'd go blind, "Ok!" I rolled my eyes and we went into Hot Topic. We had 40 dollars each that our parents gave us. I grabbed a black shirt with a blue glittery fairy on it and a black mesh long sleeved shirt to wear under it. I was about to check out when I saw a pair of black cargo pants on sale. I picked those up and some black bracelets then I paid and we went to Ellie's store. She got a pair of white fitted jeans and a pink and white checkers sleeveless button up shirt. She grabbed some new hair ribbons while she was at it then she paid.

After we finished our shopping we went for a walk through town. "So when will you admit you're Jesse's girlfriend?" Ellie asked. "We're not dating!" I cried. "Oh right...what was that goodbye about then? 'I'll miss you'" she mimicked. "Oh you are so gonna pay for that." "Gotta catch me first." She giggled as she took off running. "Get back here so I can kill you!" I cried running after her. "Jesse and Sunny sitting in a tree..." she started to sing as she ran. "Hey! Only Jesse can call me Sunny!" I cried. "...k-i-s-s-i-n-g! First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Jesse with the baby carriage!" "That's it!" I cried tackling her. "Let me up!" she cried trying to tickle me to get me up. We ended up in a massive tickle war. We finally quit and sat up on the ground. "Do you realize how long it's been since we spent the day together?" she asked. "Awhile." I said standing up and helping her up. "It's been fun." I smiled, "Yeah, it has been." "I missed you Mellie." "I guess I missed you too...but don't start crying on me or anything." Ellie smiled, "I'll try not to. I have to know though...why did you leave me?" I sighed, "Because I could barely stand being around myself." "But I needed you...you were the strong one." "That's just it Ellie, I'm not as strong as you always thought I was. You needed me to protect you and I couldn't. In fact, if anything, you were the stronger one. You had the inner strength to be alone over falling into the wrong groups." "You could have stood by me." "No, I couldn't have...I was resentful of you." "Resentful? Why?" she asked. "Because when we were growing up you got the good grades, you did best in ninja training...it was all about you and I felt like I was in your shadow. That's part of the reason I rebelled. I didn't know how else to be seen." "You're kidding...Melanie...I've always felt like I was in your shadow. That's why I started hiding out. I felt like there was no way I'd be anything but 'Melanie's twin'." "I never meant to make you feel that way...I never meant to abandon you." "We used to be best friends Mellie..."

I sighed, "I know...I'm really sorry."

"So am I." she said.

We hugged and the crying started...even I cried. Finally I got sick of the mushiness.

"Come on, let's go home. Dad and Daddy will be worried if we miss dinner." I said

Ellie nodded and looped her arm through mine and we walked home.

When we walked in the house Dad was cooking.

"Hey, where's Daddy?" Ellie asked.

"He had to go to work for awhile." Dad said.

"Oh ok." Ellie said.

"Ellie, can you set the table? And Melanie, pour drinks?" Dad asked.

"Sure." We said at the same time.

"You girls seem like you're getting along better." Dad said.

"We are. Mellie and I had fun today." Ellie said.

"Mellie? Wow, been awhile since I heard you call her that." Dad said.

"Yeah, been awhile since we actually hung out" I said.

"I'm glad you girls made up." Dad said.

"Me too." I said.

"I'm home!" Daddy said walking in the door.

"Daddy!" Ellie cried running up and hugging him.

"Just in time sweetheart, I just finished dinner." Dad said greeting Daddy with a kiss.

We all sat around the table and had a nice family dinner. It really was like old time and even I had to admit it was great...this one I even admitted to Ellie later that night.

After dinner we watched TV for awhile then Dad and Daddy went to bed and Ellie asked if she could hang out in my room. I agreed and we sat on my bed flipping through some past issues of Teen People and listening to the radio. After we both were tired she went to her room and went to sleep. I did the same.

Ellie

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*Dear Diary,*

*As I write this we're on our way back to Starlight. I have to say I had a great time being home and I'm gonna miss Daddy and Dad way more than I did before. They've promised to try to visit more often though. Mellie and I are friends again...our friendship is still a work in progress but it's getting there. Mellie never told Dad about her dissing her friends so I didn't say anything either. I don't think she's ready to let go of her dark image entirely yet.*

*As for Starlight, I guess it won't suck going back. I do miss Tiff. It's nice having a friend around. Being a Ranger is also nice and we really can't leave Arissa and the others alone. I know the Wild Cats are around but Arissa and Savannah really want to be Rangers and Harley won't let them.*

*Anyway, all in all I had a great time and I'm so happy right now...there's a chance for life to be normal again...I'm very optimistic for the first time in a very long time.*

Ellie

Melanie

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When we got back to Starlight I was happy and sad all at the same time. I missed Jesse a ton but I finally had a good time with my family and I'd miss that too.

"So how did it go?" Hunter asked when we got back.

"I don't know what you did but thank you Hunter. This was the first time we've been a real family in a very long time." Daddy said.

Hunter smiled, "Good. I'm glad to know we're making progress."

"I'm amazed how far both of them have come." Dad said.

“Let’s hope for continued progress then.” Hunter said.
“We’re very proud of both of you.” Dad said.
“Very proud. And we love you both very much.” Daddy said.
We hugged them both. “I love you guys too.” Ellie said.
“We both do...very much...I’m sorry.” I said.
“We forgive you.” Dad said.
I started crying. I needed to be forgiven so much.

After our parents left we rejoined the Wildcats.
“Hey losers.” I said when we got to the lodge.
“Hey guys!” Tiffany said.
“Tiff!” Ellie cried running over and hugging her. They went off to a corner to chat. I rolled my eyes then noticed Jesse was walking over to me.

“Hey Sunny. So, you survived I see.” He said.
“Yeah, well it wasn’t easy. All that emotion and crap.” I said smiling.
“Well, you look happier for it. See, I knew Sunny was in there somewhere.”
“You know...I actually missed you.”
He smiled, “I missed you too.”
“I’m sorry if I freaked you out with that kiss before I left...I’ve never been subtle I guess.”
“It’s fine...it was a very nice kiss...it just caught me off guard...and was my first kiss.”
I looked at him, “Serious?”
“Yeah.”
“I’m sorry.”
“Don’t be. I just didn’t want it to mess up our friendship.”
“Nothing could do that. So is it something you wanna do again?” I asked.
“Well...I think I could stand some practice...if you’re willing to teach me.”
I looked around. “Come on, no one is watching. Let’s slip off to the wood shed. We’ll get some practice in.”
Jesse smiled and followed me. “Good to have you back Sunny.”