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**COLLEEN
HOOVER**

 Montlake

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Published by Montlake, Seattle
www.apub.com

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ISBN-13: 9781542016421
ISBN-10: 1542016428

Cover design by David Drummond

*This book is for the brilliant and fascinating Scarlet Reynolds. I can't wait
for this world to feel your impact.*

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CHAPTER ONE

MORGAN

I wonder if humans are the only living creatures that ever feel hollow inside.

I don't understand how my body can be full of everything bodies are full of—bones and muscles and blood and organs—yet my chest sometimes feels vacant, as if someone could scream into my mouth and it would echo inside of me.

I've been feeling this way for a few weeks now. I was hoping it would pass because I'm beginning to worry about what's causing this emptiness. I have a great boyfriend I've been dating for almost two years now. If I don't count Chris's moments of intense teenage immaturity (mostly fueled by alcohol), he's everything I want in a boyfriend. Funny, attractive, loves his mother, has goals. I don't see how he could be the cause of this feeling.

And then there's Jenny. My little sister—my best friend. But I know she's not the source of my emptiness. She's the primary source of my happiness, even though we're complete opposites. She's outgoing, spontaneous, and loud and has a laugh I'd kill for. I'm quieter than she is, and more often than not, my laughter is forced.

It's a running joke between us that we are so different, if we weren't sisters, we would hate each other. She'd find me boring and I'd find her annoying, but *because* we're sisters, and only twelve months apart, our differences somehow work. We have our moments of tension, but we never let an argument end without a resolution. And the older we get, the less we argue and the more we hang out. Especially now that she's dating Chris's best friend, Jonah. The four of us have spent almost every waking hour together as a group since Chris and Jonah graduated high school last month.

My mother could be the source of my recent mood, but that wouldn't make sense. Her absence isn't anything new. In fact, I'm more used to it now than I used to be, so if anything, I've become more accepting of the fact that Jenny and I got the short end of the stick in the parent department. She's been inactive in our lives since our father died five years ago. I was more bitter about having to parent Jenny back then than I am now. And the older I get, the less it bothers me that she's not the type of mother to meddle in our lives, or give us a curfew, or . . . care. It's honestly kind of fun being seventeen and given the freedom most kids my age would dream of.

Nothing has changed in my life recently to explain this profound emptiness I've been feeling. *Or maybe it has, and I'm just too afraid to notice it.*

"Guess what?" Jenny says. She's in the front passenger seat. Jonah is driving, and Chris and I are in the back seat. I've been staring out the window during my bout of self-reflection, so I pause my thoughts and look at her. She's turned around in her seat, her eyes moving excitedly between me and Chris. She looks really pretty tonight. She borrowed one of my maxi dresses and kept it simple with very little makeup. It's amazing what a difference there is between fifteen-year-old Jenny and sixteen-year-old Jenny. "Hank said he can hook us up tonight."

Chris lifts a hand and high-fives Jenny. I look back out the window, not sure I like that she likes to get high. I've done it a handful of times—a by-product of having the mother that we do. But Jenny is only sixteen and partakes in whatever she can get her hands on at every party we go to. That's a big reason why I choose *not* to partake, because I've always felt a sense of responsibility for her since I'm older and our mother doesn't regulate our activities in any way.

Sometimes I feel like I'm Chris's babysitter too. The only one in this car I don't have to babysit is Jonah, but that's not because he doesn't get drunk or high. He just seems to maintain a level of maturity despite whatever substances might be running through his system. He has one of the most consistent personalities I've ever encountered. He's quiet when he's drunk. Quiet when he's high. Quiet when he's happy. And somehow even quieter when he's mad.

He's been Chris's best friend since they were kids, and they're like the male versions of me and Jenny, but opposite. Chris and Jenny are the life of every party. Jonah and I are the invisible sidekicks.

Fine by me. I'd rather blend in with the wallpaper and quietly enjoy people-watching than be the one standing on a table in the center of a room, being the one people are watching.

"How far out is this place?" Jonah asks.

"About five more miles," Chris says. "Not far."

"Maybe not far from here, but far from our houses. Who's driving home tonight?" Jonah asks.

"Not it!" Jenny and Chris both say at the same time.

Jonah glances at me in the rearview mirror. He holds my stare for a moment, and then I nod. He nods too. Without even speaking, we've both agreed we'll stay sober tonight.

I don't know how we do it—communicate without communicating—but it has always been an effortless thing between us. Maybe it's because we're a lot alike, so our minds are in sync a lot of the time. Jenny and Chris don't notice. They don't need to communicate silently with anyone because anything and everything they need to say rolls off the tips of their tongues whether it should or not.

Chris grabs my hand to get my attention. When I look at him, he kisses me. "You look pretty tonight," he whispers.

I smile at him. "Thank you. You don't look so bad yourself."

"Wanna stay at my house tonight?"

I think about that for a second, but Jenny spins around in her seat again and answers for me. "She can't leave me alone tonight. I'm a minor about to spend the next four hours ingesting a lot of alcohol and maybe an illegal substance. Who's gonna hold back my hair while I vomit in the morning if she stays at your place?"

Chris shrugs. "Jonah?"

Jenny laughs. "Jonah has typical parents who want him home by midnight. You know that."

"Jonah just graduated high school," Chris says, talking about him like he's not in the front seat listening to every word. "He should man up and stay out all night for once."

Jonah is pulling the car into a gas station when Chris says that. "Anyone need anything?" Jonah asks, ignoring the conversation being had about him.

"Yeah, I'm gonna try to buy some beer," Chris says, unbuckling his seat belt.

That actually makes me laugh. “You look every minute of eighteen. They aren’t going to sell you beer.”

Chris grins at me, taking that comment as a challenge. He gets out of the car to go inside, and Jonah gets out to pump gas. I reach into Jonah’s console and grab one of the watermelon Jolly Ranchers he always leaves behind. Watermelon is the best flavor. I don’t understand how anyone could hate it, but apparently he does.

Jenny unbuckles her seat belt and crawls into the back seat with me. She curls her legs beneath her, facing me. Her eyes are full of mischief when she says, “I think I’m gonna have sex with Jonah tonight.”

For the first time in ages, my chest feels full, but not in a good way. It feels like it’s being flooded with thick water. Maybe even mud. “You just turned sixteen.”

“The same age you were when you had sex with Chris for the first time.”

“Yeah, but we had been dating longer than two months. And I still regret it. It hurt like hell, lasted maybe a minute, and he smelled like tequila.” I pause because it sounds like I just insulted my boyfriend’s skills. “He got better.”

Jenny laughs but then falls back against the seat in a sigh. “I feel like it’s commendable that I’ve held out two months.”

I want to laugh, because two months is nothing. I’d rather her wait an entire year. Or five.

I don’t know why I’m so against this. She’s right—I was younger than her when I started having sex. And if she’s going to lose her virginity to someone—at least it’s to someone I know is a good person. Jonah has never taken advantage of her. In fact, he’s known Jenny for an entire year and never made a pass at her until she was sixteen. It was frustrating to her, but it made me respect him.

I sigh. “You lose your virginity once, Jenny. I don’t want this moment to be while you’re drunk in a stranger’s house, having sex on someone else’s bed.”

Jenny moves her head from side to side like she’s actually contemplating what I’ve said. “Then maybe we could do it in his car.”

I laugh, but not because that’s funny. I laugh because she’s making fun of me. That’s exactly how I lost my virginity to Chris. Cramped in the back seat of his father’s Audi. It was absolutely unremarkable and wholly

embarrassing, and even though we got better, it would be nice if our first time had been something we could look back on with fonder memories.

I don't even want to think about this. Or talk about it. It's hard being best friends with my little sister for this very reason—I want to be excited for her and hear all about it, but at the same time, I want to protect her from making the same mistakes I made. I always want better for her.

I look at her sincerely, trying my best not to seem motherly. “If it happens tonight, just stay sober, at least.”

Jenny rolls her eyes at my advice and crawls back into the front seat just as Jonah opens his door.

Chris is back too. *Without* beer. He slams his door and folds his arms over his chest. “It really sucks having a baby face.”

I laugh and run my hand across his cheek, pulling his focus to mine. “I like your baby face.”

That makes him smile. He leans in and kisses me but pulls away as soon as his lips meet mine. He taps Jonah's seat. “You try it.” Chris takes cash out of his pocket and reaches into the front, dropping it on the console.

“Won't there be plenty of alcohol there?” Jonah asks.

“It's the biggest graduation party of the year. The entire senior class will be there, and every one of us are underage. We need all the reinforcements we can get.”

Jonah reluctantly grabs the cash and gets out of the car. Chris kisses me again, this time with tongue. He pulls back pretty quickly, though. “What's in your mouth?”

I crunch down on the Jolly Rancher to break it. “Candy.”

“I want some,” he says, bringing his mouth back to mine.

Jenny groans from the front seat. “Stop. I can hear you slurping.”

Chris pulls back with a grin but also with a piece of Jolly Rancher in his mouth. He bites down on it while putting on his seat belt. “It's been six weeks since we graduated. Who has a graduation party six weeks after graduation? Not that I'm complaining. Just seems like we should be past the graduation celebrations by now.”

“It hasn't been six weeks. It's only been four,” I say.

“Six,” he corrects. “It's July eleventh.”

Six?

I try to keep the sudden onslaught of tension in every single muscle in my body from being visible to Chris, but I can't help but have a reaction to

what he just said. Every part of me stiffens.

It hasn't been six weeks. *Has it?*

If it's been six weeks . . . that means I'm two weeks late for my period.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

The trunk to Jonah's car pops open. Chris and I both spin around, just as Jonah slams the trunk shut and walks to the driver's-side door. When he gets in the car, he has a smug smile on his face.

"Motherfucker," Chris mutters, shaking his head. "She didn't even card you?"

Jonah puts the car in drive and begins to pull out. "It's all in the confidence, my friend."

I watch as Jonah reaches across the seat and takes Jenny's hand.

I look out the window, my stomach in knots, my palms sweating, my heart pounding, my fingers quietly counting the days since my last period. I haven't given it any thought at all. I know it was graduation because Chris was bummed we couldn't have sex. But I've just been expecting to get it any day now, thinking it's only been a month since they graduated. The four of us have been so busy doing a ton of nothing during summer break that I haven't even thought about it.

Twelve days. I'm twelve days late.



It's all I've thought about all night while at this graduation party. I want to borrow Jonah's car keys, drive to a twenty-four-hour pharmacy, and buy a pregnancy test, but that would only make him ask questions. And Jenny and Chris would notice my absence. Instead, I have to spend the entire evening surrounded by music so loud I can feel it cracking in my bones. There are sweaty bodies in every part of this house, so there's nowhere I can escape to. I'm too scared to drink now, because if I am pregnant, I have no idea what that could do. I've never given pregnancy much thought, so I don't know exactly how much alcohol can harm a fetus. I won't even take that chance.

I can't believe this.

"Morgan!" Chris yells from across the room. He's standing on a table. Another guy is standing on a table next to him. They're playing a game where they balance on one leg and take turns downing shots until one of

them falls. It's Chris's favorite drinking game and my least favorite time to be around him, but he's waving me over. Before I make it across the room, the guy on the other table falls, and Chris raises a victorious fist in the air. Then he jumps down just as I reach him. He wraps an arm around me, pulling me to him.

"You're being boring," he says. He brings his cup to my mouth. "Drink. Be merry."

I push the cup away. "I'm driving us all home tonight. I don't want to drink."

"No, Jonah is driving tonight. You're good." Chris tries again to give me another drink, but I push it away again.

"Jonah wanted to drink, so I told him I'd drive," I lie.

Chris looks around, spotting someone nearby. I follow his gaze to see Jonah sitting on the couch next to Jenny, whose legs are draped across his lap. "You're DD tonight, right?"

Jonah glances at me before answering Chris. It's a two-second silent conversation, but Jonah can see in my pleading expression that I need him to tell Chris he's not.

Jonah tilts his head a little in curiosity but then looks at Chris. "Nope. I'm getting hammered."

Chris slumps his shoulders and looks back at me. "Fine. I guess I'll have to have fun all alone."

I'm trying not to be insulted by his words, but it's hard not to be. "Are you saying I'm not any fun when I'm sober?"

"You are fun, but drunk Morgan is my favorite Morgan."

Wow. That kinda makes me sad. But he's drunk, so I'll excuse his insults right now, even if it's just to avoid an argument. I'm not in the mood. I've got more important things on my mind.

I pat Chris's chest with both hands. "Well, drunk Morgan won't be here tonight, so go find people you can have fun with."

Right when I say that, someone grabs Chris's arm and pulls him back to the tables. "Rematch!" the guy says.

With that, my level of sobriety is no longer Chris's concern, so I take that as an opportunity to escape from him, this noise, these people. I walk out the back door and am met with a quieter version of the party and a blast of fresh air. There's an empty chair next to the pool, and even though there's a couple in the water I'm almost certain are doing things that should

be deemed unsanitary in a swimming pool, it's somehow less of a nuisance than being inside that house. I position my chair so that I can't see them, and I lean back and close my eyes. I spend the next few minutes trying not to obsess over any symptom I may or may not have had this past month.

I don't even have time to start thinking about what all of this might mean for my future when I hear a chair being dragged across the concrete behind me. I don't even want to open my eyes and see who it is. I can't take Chris and all his drunkenness right now. I can't even take Jenny and her combination of wine coolers, weed, and being sixteen.

"You okay?"

I sigh from relief when I hear Jonah's voice. I tilt my head and open my eyes, smiling at him. "Yeah. I'm fine."

I can see in his expression that he doesn't believe me, but whatever. There's no way I'm telling Jonah I'm late for my period because (a) it's none of his business and (b) I don't even know if I'm pregnant and (c) Chris is the first person I'll tell if I am.

"Thanks for lying to Chris," I say. "I just really don't feel like drinking tonight."

Jonah nods in understanding and offers me a plastic cup. I notice he's holding two, so I take one from him. "It's soda," he says. "Found a rogue can buried in one of the coolers."

I take a sip and lean my head back. Soda tastes so much better than alcohol, anyway. "Where's Jenny?"

Jonah nudges his head toward the house. "Taking table shots. I couldn't stay to watch."

I groan. "I hate that game so much."

Jonah laughs. "How did we both end up with people who are our exact opposites?"

"You know what they say. Opposites attract."

Jonah shrugs. I find it odd that he shrugs at that. He stares at me for a moment, then looks away and says, "I heard what Chris said to you. I don't know if that's why you're out here, but I hope you know he didn't mean it. He's drunk. You know how he gets at these parties."

I like that Jonah is defending Chris right now. Even though Chris can sometimes be a little insensitive, Jonah and I both know that his heart is bigger than both of ours put together. "I might be mad if he did this all the time, but it's a graduation party. I get it—he's having fun, and he wants me

to have fun with him. In a way, he's right. Drunk Morgan is way better than sober Morgan."

Jonah looks at me pointedly. "I wholeheartedly disagree with that."

As soon as he says that, I pull my eyes from his and look down at my drink. I do this because I'm afraid of what's happening right now. My chest is starting to feel full again, but in a good way this time. That emptiness is being replaced with heat and flutters and heartbeats, and I hate it because it feels like I've just pinpointed what has caused me to feel so empty these past few weeks.

Jonah.

Sometimes when we're alone, he looks at me in a way that makes me feel empty when he looks away. It's a feeling I've never gotten when Chris looks at me.

This realization scares me to death.

Until lately, it seems I've gone my whole life without experiencing this feeling, but now that I have, it's as if part of me disappears when the feeling disappears.

I cover my face with my hands. Out of all the people in the world to want to be around, it's a shitty realization to know Jonah Sullivan is starting to top that list.

It's like my chest has been on a constant search for its missing piece, and Jonah is holding it in his fist.

I stand up. I need to get away from him. I'm in love with Chris, so it makes me uncomfortable and itchy when I'm alone with his best friend and having these feelings. Maybe it's the soda making me feel this way.

Or the fear that I might be pregnant.

Maybe it has nothing to do with Jonah.

I've been standing for all of five seconds when, out of nowhere, Chris appears. His arms tighten around me right before he propels us both into the pool. I'm both pissed and relieved, because I needed to get away from Jonah, but now I'm sinking into the deep end of a pool that I had no intentions of getting into fully clothed.

I surface at the same time Chris does, but before I can yell at him, he pulls me to him and kisses me. I kiss him back because it's a much-needed distraction.

"Where's Jenny?" Chris and I both look up, and Jonah is looming over us, glaring down at Chris.

“Don’t know,” Chris says.

Jonah rolls his eyes. “I asked you to keep an eye on her. She’s drunk.” Jonah walks toward the house to find Jenny.

“So am I,” Chris says. “Never ask a drunk person to babysit a drunk person!” Chris moves a few feet until he can touch, and then he pulls me with him. He rests his back against the wall of the pool and positions me so that I’m holding on to his neck, facing him. “I’m sorry for what I said earlier. I don’t think any version of you is boring.”

I purse my lips together, relieved he noticed he was being an ass.

“I just wanted you to have fun tonight. I don’t think you’re having fun.”

“I am now.” I force a smile because I don’t want him to notice the turmoil beneath my surface. But I can’t help but be worried, no matter how hard I try to put it off until I know for certain. I’m worried for myself, for him, for us, for the child we might be bringing into this world way before either of us is ready. We can’t afford this. We aren’t prepared. I don’t even know that Chris is the person I want to spend the rest of my life with. That’s definitely something a person should be certain about before they go and create a human together.

“Wanna know what my favorite thing about you is?” Chris asks. My shirt keeps floating up to the surface, so he tucks the front of it into my jeans. “You’re a sacrificer. I don’t even know if that’s a real word, but that’s what you are. You do things you don’t want to do to make life better for the people around you. Like being the designated driver. That doesn’t make you boring. It makes you a hero.”

I laugh. Chris becomes complimentary when he’s drunk. Sometimes I make fun of him for it, but I secretly love it.

“You’re supposed to say something you love about me now,” he says.

I look up and to the left, like I’m having to think hard. He squeezes my side playfully.

“I love how much fun you are,” I say. “You make me laugh, even when you frustrate me.”

Chris smiles, and a dimple appears in the center of his chin. He has such a great smile. If I am pregnant and we do end up having a child together, I hope it at least has Chris’s smile. That’s the only positive thing I can think of that could come from this situation.

“What else?” he asks.

I reach my hand up and touch his dimple, fully prepared to tell him I love his smile, but instead, I say, “I think you’ll make a great dad someday.”

I don’t know why I say that. Maybe I’m testing the waters. Seeing what his reaction will be.

He laughs. “Hell yeah, I will. Clara is gonna love me.”

I tilt my head. “Clara?”

“My future daughter. I’ve already named her. Still working on a boy name, though.”

I roll my eyes. “What if your future wife hates that name?”

He slides his hands up my neck and grips my cheeks. “You won’t.” Then he kisses me. And even though his kiss doesn’t fill up my chest like Jonah’s looks sometimes do, I feel a comforting reassurance in this moment. In his words. In his love for me.

Whatever happens when I finally take a pregnancy test tomorrow . . . I’m confident he’ll support me. It’s just who Chris is.

“Guys, we should go,” Jonah says.

Chris and I separate and look up at Jonah. He’s holding Jenny. Her arms are wrapped around his neck, and her face is pressed against his chest. She’s groaning.

“I told her not to get on that table,” Chris mutters, climbing out of the pool. He helps me out, and we squeeze as much water as we can from our clothes before heading to Jonah’s car. Luckily, the seats are leather. I get in the driver’s seat since Chris assumes Jonah has been drinking. Jonah gets in the back seat with Jenny. Chris is flipping through songs on the radio when we pull away from the party.

“Bohemian Rhapsody” has just started playing on one of the stations, so Chris turns it up and starts to sing. A few seconds later, Jonah is singing along.

Surprisingly, I quietly join them. There’s no way any human can hear this song while driving and *not* sing along. Even if they’re in the midst of a pregnancy scare at the age of seventeen while feeling things for someone in the back seat of a car that they should only be feeling for the person in the front passenger seat.

*How do you pick up the pieces without the
glue holding everything together?*

Morgan Grant and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Clara, would like nothing more than to be *nothing* alike.

Morgan is determined to prevent her daughter from making the same mistakes she did. By getting pregnant and married way too young, Morgan put her own dreams on hold. Clara doesn't want to follow in her mother's footsteps. Her predictable mother doesn't have a spontaneous bone in her body.

With warring personalities and conflicting goals, Morgan and Clara find it increasingly difficult to coexist. The only person who can bring peace to the household is Chris—Morgan's husband, Clara's father, and the family anchor. But that peace is shattered when Chris is involved in a tragic and questionable accident. The heartbreaking and long-lasting consequences will reach far beyond just Morgan and Clara.

While struggling to rebuild everything that crashed around them, Morgan finds comfort in the last person she expects to, and Clara turns to the one boy she's been forbidden to see. With each passing day, new secrets, resentment, and misunderstandings make mother and daughter fall further apart. So far apart, it might be impossible for them to ever fall back together.

ISBN 978-1542016421



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