

TO LOVE



AGAIN

BL CLARK

TO LOVE AGAIN

Preview Copy

TO LOVE AGAIN

BL CLARK



SAPPHIRE BOOKS
SALINAS, CALIFORNIA

To Love Again

Copyright © 2015 by BL Clark. All rights reserved.

ISBN EPUB - 978-1-943353-00-2

This is a work of fiction - names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

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.

Editor - Heather Flournoy

Book Design - LJ Reynolds

Cover Design - Michelle Brodeur

Sapphire Books

P.O. Box 8142

Salinas, CA 93912

www.sapphirebooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition – May 2015

This and other Sapphire Books titles can be found at
www.sapphirebooks.com

Dedication

This book is for my Grandma.
Thank you for always showing me unconditional love and support.
I love you!

Preview Copy

Acknowledgments

Chris and Schileen/Sapphire Books - Thank you for taking a risk and giving my writing a chance and me an opportunity to fulfill a dream that I have had since my early teens.

Heather Flournoy - Thank you for helping me to make this a better and stronger book. Also, thanks for trying not to scare me with the edits...I would love to say you didn't, but you did, and I am stronger for it.

Michelle Brodeur - Thank you for helping me to create an awesome cover.

Nicki Wachner and Tara Wentz - Thank you for your friendship and support. Both have made this process a whole lot less scary!

Teri Thomas - Hmmm, "thank you" doesn't really fit, but, we're going to work with that. It has been an honor working with you on our various writing adventures over the past couple of years. If you hadn't pushed me, I don't know that the idea of "To Love Again" would have fully formed, nor would it have been written. You have read everything, good and bad, that I have written since we met. I'm not sure what that says about you. I mean, I'm certain because it involves me, it says good things. Stop laughing; it could be true. Thanks for being a friend and an amazing writing partner. Oh, and thanks for helping to hide my comma phobia. Can you just imagine how embarrassing it would be if people truly knew?

Ashley Philmore - You are an amazing friend, and I feel very lucky to have met you. Thank you for helping to make my crudely drawn cover a reality.

Suzi Hautaniemi - Thank you for your support and help with hiding some of my writing flaws. You have been there driving and pushing me not to give up on myself when we all know I wanted to. Also, thanks for suggesting I submit my book to Sapphire Books. It appears to have worked out well for me.

Kristel Shaw - As one of my best friends - let me know if you see your influence in here. Thanks for the MANY years of support and kicks in the ass. Who would have pictured you and I would have become such good friends, even after I held your Tigger slippers for ransom?

Mom - Look what I did! Thank you for your love and support. We didn't always see eye to eye over the years, but we both grew from it. I love you!

Lexi Meyer - First off, you have no idea how hard it was not to list one of your various nicknames, you know like...What? I didn't write it. I'll attempt to behave - for once (it could happen). For a daughter, you were better than I deserved. As a friend, you are amazing. Your love and support over the years goes beyond words. Stop crying, sheesh. People are looking at us funny.

Kathy Meyer - My best friend, my partner, my soulmate...Anyone who really knows me knows that you have the patience of a saint. You have put up with me and my quirky ways for so many- Hey look, a chicken! Huh? Where was I? Oh yeah, you have put up with me and my quirky ways for so many years. How and why we won't say, but thank you! I love you!

Tony Clark - Meow!! You are the best, most opinionated and special cat. Even as an old fart, you rock, buddy. Your food is on the way, quit screaming.

Prologue

It was a crisp February afternoon as Jade sat outside the hospital chapel and thought back over the events of the last hour.

"Jade, I love you, always remember that," said the blond-haired woman from the hospital bed.

"You can't leave us. You need to fight this," cried Jade, looking at her frail, dying wife.

"We've been through this, sweetheart. That isn't what the fates want. I'm needed elsewhere. You are needed here to take care of our daughter."

"She needs you as much as she needs me. Please don't leave us, Amy."

"If there were any way that I could stay, I would, trust me. I love you both so much."

Amy started to cough and her oxygen monitor started to beep. Jade watched as the nurses and doctors piled into the room and worked to save her wife.

"Ma'am, you are going to have to step out of the room," said one of the nurses.

"That is my wife, she needs me here," said Jade.

"Jade, please, let them work. I won't leave you until I can say good-bye properly," said Amy, holding the oxygen mask away from her face and looking deep into her wife's blue eyes.

"Promise me," said Jade.

"I promise."

The doctors pulled the mask out of Amy's hand, replaced it on her face, and told her if she wanted a chance to survive longer, she needed to leave it there. Jade took one last glance and headed toward the door.

"I know what she means to you, I have your number, and as soon as we are done or if something changes I will call you immediately," said the daytime nurse.

"Thank you, Cindy," said Jade, walking out into the hall. She wandered around the hospital lost in thought and memories before finding herself standing outside the hospital chapel. Jade wasn't a religious person, but then everyone tends to pick up some form of faith when their loved ones are seriously sick or dying. If she went in would it be pointless? What if there were others in there? Would she be disturbing them? Would she be taking away from them getting their prayers answered?

Jade slowly opened the door and saw that there was only one person in the room. She quietly made her way inside. Looking at the large crucifix at the front of the chapel made her feel small, almost insignificant.

Taking a seat at the end of the pew at the back, Jade folded her hands together and prayed.

"So, I don't know what is appropriate, but please help Amy. I know that she is in pain even if she doesn't say so. Our daughter needs her, I need her. I don't need the miracle of her being healthy right away, I just need more time with her." Jade looked up at the crucifix and stared, looking for a sign, something to give her hope.

Jade felt her phone vibrate and her heart sank. She rapidly exited the chapel to answer it out of respect to the person left in the sanctuary.

"Hello?"

"Hi Jade, it's Cindy," said the voice on the other end.

"Is she..." started Jade, her voice shaking.

"She has been stabilized for now. Amy says she won't sleep until you see that she is okay. Are you still nearby?"

"I'm by the chapel, I will be there shortly," said Jade, and she hung up the phone and made her way up to Amy's room.

Slowly she opened the door and saw her wife lying there, watching for her. As she entered and allowed the door to close behind her, she saw her wife's frail hand rise and beckon her over.

"I love you," Jade said, taking her wife's outstretched hand and kissing it. Amy started to remove the oxygen mask and Jade stopped her. "Leave it on, you need it. Talk to me that way."

"It makes...it hard...to talk," Amy said, frowning.

"Tough, it keeps you alive, and I need that more than anything."

"Fine, you were always the stubborn one in this relationship." Amy smiled.

"One of us had to be, you are a pushover." Jade forced a smile as a tear rolled down the side of her face.

"Sweetheart, please, no tears," said Amy, reaching up and wiping away the tear and the one that fell to replace it.

"Easy for you to say, my love. You aren't the one that is going to be left here alone," said Jade as her breath hitched.

"You aren't alone, my love. You have our daughter who is going to need you more than ever."

"How do I explain this to her, Amy? She's only four. She has no understanding of any of this except that you can't be home and I cry a lot."

"You'll figure it out, Jade."

"Can I bring her to see you? Will you allow me to do that much?"

"You don't think all these wires and machines are going to scare the shit out of her?" asked Amy, a hint of anger in her voice.

"I don't have a clue, but she might understand more after seeing everything. Please...if you aren't going to come home she is going to need the closure and a chance to say good-bye," Jade said as another tear rolled down her face.

"All right, bring her in tomorrow. You have to be strong for us my love. Please," said Amy, holding her wife's hands. They sat together for a long time in silence before Amy fell asleep and Jade had to leave to go pick up their daughter.

Chapter One

Good-byes

“All right sweetheart, we’re going to go see Mommy. Remember she is very sick and has some wires and machines that are there to help her feel better.”

“C-can I hug her?”

“Of course you can. I just don’t want you to be scared when we go in the room.”

“Will you be there, too?”

“Of course, I wouldn’t make you go in alone. Come on baby, let’s go.” With that, they headed upstairs to the critical care unit. As they were walking down the hall, Jade saw Cindy coming out of Amy’s room.

“Good morning, Jade,” said Cindy. “And who is this little cutie?”

“Cindy, this is Brianna. Bri, this is Cindy, she is taking care of Mommy.”

“Hi,” said Brianna as she clung to her mother’s leg.

“It’s very nice to meet you.”

“How is she doing?”

“She had a rough night, but she’s excited to see you both.”

“Thank you...for everything.”

“It’s a pleasure. Have a great visit,” Cindy said as she moved toward the nurses’ station.

Jade picked up Brianna and they walked into Amy’s room. They moved slowly to give Brianna time to absorb what she was seeing and to make sure she wasn’t scared and overwhelmed by everything.

“Hey, Baby Girl,” said Amy as she saw them enter. She went to remove the mask but chose to leave it on due to the darkening expression Jade could feel crossing her face. “Come give me a hug.”

Jade walked them over and set their daughter up on the bed, and watched as Brianna quickly grabbed Amy and held her as tight as her little arms would let her.

“I miss you, Mommy. When are you coming home?” asked Brianna, a quiver in her voice.

“Baby, I’m not going to be able to come home.”

“Why not?” her daughter asked. Tears started to well in her eyes and tears fell from Jade’s.

“Mama told you I was sick, right?” asked Amy, and her daughter nodded. “Well this sickness is really bad.”

“Like Mindy’s Mommy?” Brianna asked, referring to her friend’s mother that had passed away about two months prior.

“Exactly like Mindy’s Mommy.”

“But I don’t want you to go to heaven. Mama and I need you here.”

“I know, baby, but I’m afraid that isn’t going to be able to happen. I will watch over both of you and will always, always love you,” said Amy as she started to cry and pull her daughter closer, reaching her hand out for her wife’s.

Jade took Amy’s hand and then leaned in and hugged her wife and daughter. She knew deep in her heart that this was going to be the last time that they were together as a family. She could feel that Amy was too exhausted to keep fighting. The cancer was winning and going to claim another good soul.

They lay there together for a long time, until they heard Cindy come in to take Amy’s vitals.

“I’m sorry to interrupt,” Cindy said softly.

“It’s okay,” said Jade, taking Bri out of Amy’s arms and feeling her turn and wrap her arms around her Mama’s neck tightly.

“She isn’t going to hurt Mommy, is she?” asked Brianna.

“No baby, she isn’t going to hurt me.”

“Would you like to help?” Cindy asked Bri.

“Can I, Mama?”

“Just listen to exactly what Cindy says,” said Jade.

Cindy took Brianna from Jade’s arms and set her on the bed and showed her which button to push to take Amy’s blood pressure and temperature. She then showed her where to read how much medicine her Mommy was using. After Cindy was done she left Bri on the bed and smiled at Jade, and nodded for her to step out into the hall.

“I’ll be right back. You take care of Mommy,” said Jade, exiting the room.

“I just wanted to let you know that her stats are low, she is getting close. I know that isn’t the news you wanted to hear, but I always try to be honest with my patients and their family.” Cindy placed a caring hand on Jade’s arm.

“I-I appreciate your honesty,” Jade said as a tear rolled down her face.

“I wish I could have given you better news. The doctor I’m sure will want to discuss things with you. Now, get back in there and spend as much time as you can together.”

Jade entered the room and saw her wife looking at her with a concerned look. Their daughter had lain down and fallen asleep in Amy’s arms.

“What did she say?”

“Your stats are down,” said Jade, sitting down on the bed and taking her wife’s hand.

“I love you so much, Jade,” started Amy. “I don’t want you to close yourself off because it hurts or because you don’t want to move on.”

“You can’t ask either of those of me, dammit. I love you...you and Bri are my world,” Jade said as tears streamed down her face.

“I know, and Bri will continue to be your world, but babe, you have a long life left to live yet. I don’t expect you to be out dating the day after, but I do expect you to move on after you grieve for me.”

“And if I don’t want to move on?”

“Jade, you have to move on. You are going to find someone to make your life worth living again. You need to do that and be a happy influence for our daughter.”

“I will promise you that I’ll make sure our daughter has a good life, but that’s the only thing I can promise,” cried Jade.

Amy adjusted on the bed so she could sit up without disturbing their daughter, and wrapped her arms around her wife and held her close. They stayed that way for a long time, whispering words of love and devotion to one another until their daughter started to stir.

Jade composed herself as best she could and quickly texted a friend to come and get Brianna so that she could spend more time with Amy. In her gut, she knew the time was short.

“Bri, I love you so much,” said Amy, hugging her daughter close. “I want you to be the bestest girl you can for Mama.”

“I love you, too, Mommy,” said Bri as she hugged Amy tightly.

“Mama and Mommy have some talking to do so you are going to go spend the night at Aunt Kristel’s tonight,” Amy said. Kristel opened the door as if on cue, and Amy motioned for her to come in.

“Hey,” said Kristel, walking over and hugging Jade, then going to hug Amy.

“Hi, Aunt Kristel,” Brianna said. “Mommy said that I get to stay at your house tonight.”

“Yep, and I think that Jake wanted pizza for dinner. You think that might be okay with you?”

“Can we get Canadian bacon for Mommy? It’s her favorite,” she asked.

“Anything you want,” said Kristel, her voice breaking. She had known the two women for the past nine years and watched them fall in love, get married and bring this caring little girl into the world. She knew things were nearing the end, and had voiced she couldn’t understand why it had to happen to such a great couple.

Jade filled Kristel in on things and Kristel said that Brianna could stay with them as long as needed. They hugged and then Jade said good-bye to her daughter as Kristel hugged Amy and promised her that she would look after them here if she promised to look after them from above.

After Brianna and Kristel left, Jade curled up on the bed next to Amy and they held one another until the doctor came in. He told them that from the look of the stats it would be best to put their affairs in order as Amy had, at most, a day or two. They nodded and he left.

“Cindy was much easier to hear that from,” Jade said softly.

“I didn’t know there was an easy way to hear that.”

“There isn’t, but I knew she cared and understood what it was going to mean to me when she said it.”

“So, do we have everything in place?”

“Yeah, we do. You made sure you had it all planned when we found out that you couldn’t fight this anymore. I just really want more time with you. We aren’t done yet,” said Jade as Amy pulled her close.

“I just didn’t want you to have to deal with anything other than Brianna. I love you, never forget that.”

“I love you, too,” Jade said before kissing her wife softly on the side of the head.

They lay together that night holding one another and enjoying the closeness and the privacy that they were given. Morning arrived and Amy went into distress. The doctors were able to stabilize her, but Jade knew that she didn’t want to be kept alive on machines.

“We’ll give you guys a few minutes,” said Cindy.

“Thank you,” said Jade as everyone left the room. It was just her and Amy. “I know you don’t want to be kept alive on machines. I know I have to say good-bye...I’m not ready, though.”

“You’ll never...be...ready,” Amy panted.

“And that’s wrong?” asked Jade, brushing her wife’s hair out of her eyes.

“No, but...we have...to be...realistic.”

“I know, but if you were saying good-bye to me you wouldn’t be composed either.”

“I *am* saying good-bye to you, though.”

“You are, but...”

“No buts Jade. This is hard...for me as well. I don’t...want to leave you two...”

They cried together and kissed for a few minutes before Amy told Jade she was ready. Jade went and got Cindy and held her wife’s hand while they turned the machines off and they looked into one another’s eyes as Amy passed.

Jade stayed there holding Amy’s hand for a long time before they told her that they needed to take her. When she left, she called Kristel and told her the news and that she would be by in a couple of hours to get Brianna. She needed some time to process things.

Chapter Two

Acceptance

After Amy's funeral, Jade and Brianna tried to rebuild their life. Jade made sure that Brianna knew that her Mommy had loved her very much and that she wouldn't have left them by choice. After the first month, people started trying to get Jade to go out with them, but she wouldn't leave her daughter with a sitter or anyone.

"Jade, come on, you need to get out of the house," said Kristel.

"I do get out of the house. I go to work, and I take Brianna to the park," responded Jade.

"And that is fantastic, but you need to get out on your own, too."

"I can't, Kristel. I won't leave Brianna alone. She just lost her Mommy."

"I'm not asking you to leave her in the house by herself, I'm asking that you and I get a babysitter for Brianna and Jake, and for you and I to go out, get a cup of coffee or something."

"It's too soon," said Jade, starting to cry at the thought of Amy not being there. Kristel wrapped her friend in a hug and held her close.

"All right, but you are going to need to get out there eventually."

"I will, I just need time to grieve. We were together for almost ten years, which should allot me some time."

"It does, I'm just doing what she asked of me."

"I know, and I appreciate it," said Jade.

Four months later

"Jade, you are leaving this house," stated Kristel.

"Kristel, I'm not ready."

"Jade, you aren't being asked to date, or anything, I just want us to go out for coffee. We can plan Brianna's birthday party."

"Fine," Jade said, exasperated. She knew there was no way she was going to win this one.

Jade called the babysitter she and Amy had used and the girl came right over. Angie sounded as though she had been surprised to get the call. Jade knew this was because she hadn't needed her since Amy was first hospitalized.

"Hi, Angie," said Jade, answering the door when the teen arrived and motioning for her to enter.

"Hi! How are you doing?" asked the teen nervously as she entered the house.

"I'm okay. Bri is going to be very excited to see you. Kristel is bringing Jake over shortly."

"Great. We'll have a fun time!"

"Mama, can you help me?" called Bri from the top of the stairs.

"Sure, sweetie," said Jade, heading towards the stairs and up to her daughter's room as Angie made herself comfortable in the living room. "Whatcha need, Baby Girl?"

"Is this okay to wear today?" Brianna asked, holding up a pair of shorts and a T-shirt that Jade knew Bri and Amy had bought together.

"Of course it is. Why wouldn't you think it was okay?"

"Because it was something that Mommy and I gotted together."

“Oh baby,” said Jade, pulling her daughter into her arms. “Just because Mommy isn’t here doesn’t mean that you have to stop wearing the stuff you two bought together or stop playing with certain toys because they were ones you guys liked or she got you.”

“Really? It won’t upset you?”

“Really, it is perfectly okay.”

“Mama, is Mommy really watching over us like she said she would be?”

“I believe she is, and I bet she will smile when she sees you wearing that outfit. Now, get changed and come downstairs. Angie is here, and Jake and Kristel will be here soon.” Jade kissed the top of her daughter’s head.

“Okay.” Jade stepped out into the hall and composed herself enough to make it downstairs and she hoped she could maintain the strong façade until she was out of the house.

“I’m failing her and you,” Jade whispered, looking up toward the sky.



“Jade, are you okay?” Kristel asked as they drove away from the house.

“No,” said Jade as a tear rolled down her face.

“What happened?”

“Bri asked me if it would be okay for her to wear some stuff that Amy bought her. She’s been afraid to wear things and play with certain toys because Amy isn’t here anymore.”

“Jade, it’ll be okay. You talked with her, right?”

“Yeah, I explained that it was okay. She then asked if I really thought that Amy was watching over us. She misses her so much.”

“I’m guessing she isn’t the only one,” said Kristel, taking her friend’s hand and squeezing it.

“I still wake up at night feeling her holding me. She’s been gone almost six months, and I can’t even start to let go yet.”

“Jade, you two were so in love and worked so well together. It will take time. How about we get the coffee to go, and we find someplace to sit outside and enjoy the sun and no people?”

“I’d love that.” Jade offered her friend a small smile.

Kristel went in and got their coffee, then they headed to an out of the way park that Kristel knew of and found a picnic table to sit at.

“So, what type of party are you thinking for Bri?” asked Kristel.

“She is really into that movie, *Frozen*. I was thinking something dealing with that.”

“Jade, we are not renting a snow machine for your daughter’s fifth birthday.”

“I wasn’t talking about renting a snow machine. I was just thinking the decorations.” Jade rolled her eyes.

“Then, I think that would be great.”

“Kristel, can you take Bri next Friday for the night?”

“Of course. Why?”

“It would have been our eighth wedding anniversary. I-I need a night alone,” Jade said, staring down at the table.

“Oh Jade, I can’t believe I forgot. Do you want me to take Bri for the weekend? Jakey and I were just going to be hanging around the house.”

“No, she is going to be a big enough wreck just leaving me overnight. I just need to process things and come to grips with the fact that Amy is gone.”

“Jade, have you thought about going to any of those group therapy things? I’m not saying you need to, but I hear they do help.”

“I have looked into them, but I’m too scared to go,” admitted Jade.

“Would it help if I went with? We can find one, and in a couple weeks, go together.”

“I-I think that would help. I can’t believe it has been almost six months that she has been gone.”

“I know, and I know that you are still hurting, but given time, it will ease up.”

“I hope so. Right now I’m still at the crawling-in-a-hole-and-waiting-out-life stage.”

Kristel hugged Jade and they sat together in silence, just watching everyone at the park.



“Bri, get your stuff packed. Kristel is going to be here soon,” said Jade.

“I don’t understand why I have to go over there. I don’t like being away, Mama.”

Jade knelt down and looked her daughter in the eyes and told her, “Today was Mommy’s and my anniversary, and I need to work through things.”

“But I can help you. Please don’t send me away,” Brianna said, starting to cry. They had only spent a couple of nights apart since Amy’s death. Brianna had spent those nights with Amy’s parents.

Jade pulled her daughter into her arms and held her close. “I’m not sending you away, Baby Girl. I just need some time to work it out in my head that Mommy isn’t here anymore.”

“I miss her, too, Mama,” Brianna said into her mother’s hair.

“I know you do. I love you so much,” Jade said, hugging her daughter tighter.

“I love you, too, Mama!”

“All right, now I need you to get ready.”

“All right,” Brianna said, sniffing and grabbing her backpack, and starting to put her clothes into it.

Jade reached the bottom of the stairs just as Kristel knocked on the front door. Jade answered the door and motioned for her friend to come in.

“How are you doing?” asked Kristel as Jade closed the door behind her.

“I’m a wreck, but holding it together for Bri’s sake.”

“You mean until we leave,” Kristel said, raising an eyebrow to her friend.

“Exactly.”

Brianna came down the stairs and went over to her mom and motioned for Jade to bend down.

“What is it, sweetie?”

“Mr. Butters helps me when I get scared and miss Mommy. I want you to have Mr. Butters tonight to help you not be too sad.” Brianna handed her yellow bunny to Jade.

“Thank you, sweetie,” said Jade, hugging her daughter close and seeing Kristel wipe away a tear. “I will make sure to keep Mr. Butters with me tonight.”

Jade said good-bye to her daughter and Kristel and after they left, she grabbed four photo albums and went into the living room and sat down on the couch. She propped Mr. Butters up next to her and opened the first album.

“Happy anniversary, my love,” Jade said, running her fingers over the first picture of her and Amy ever taken. “I can feel you watching me. I can see you shaking your head at me for still holding on so tight to you. Deal with it. Bri misses you, and I miss you. I have no idea how I’m supposed to move on when my heart feels so empty with you gone. Kristel is taking me to some group therapy session next week. She’s been our rock, just like you predicted.”

Jade continued paging through the pictures. When she got to the wedding photos, she stopped and stared. “You were so beautiful that day. I still can’t believe you wore a tux with tails just because you knew I loved the look. I have three happiest days. The first was the day you first kissed me, the second was the day we got married, and the third is the day Bri was born. How is it that you have been gone almost six months, my love? I feel like my heart stopped beating when you died...you were always the best part of me. Bri is growing up so fast. We’re having a *Frozen* birthday party for her next weekend. I can’t believe she is going to be five.” Jade flipped through the pictures of Brianna’s birth and them holding her while lying in the “family” room at the hospital. “She left Mr. Butters with me to help me get through tonight. Damn bunny reminds me of you and does make me feel closer to you. You couldn’t have chosen a cuter stuffed animal?” Jade laughed, wiping more tears from her eyes.

Jade set the albums on the floor and grabbed the yellow bunny. She hugged it close as she lay down on the couch and cried herself to sleep.

Morning came and Jade looked around the house, hearing the rain outside hitting the windows. She sighed. After taking some time to clear her head, she got up and put the albums away and went to shower before Kristel brought Brianna back.



“Hey, Angie! Thanks again for babysitting Bri and Jake tonight,” Jade said as the teen arrived.

“No problem. They are such great kids.”

“I don’t think that we will be too late, but if it gets to be later than, say, nine o’clock, I will give you a call.”

“It’s okay. I don’t have school tomorrow, so please, stay out as late as you want.”

“I appreciate the offer,” said Jade, smiling.

Brianna and Jake entered the room and, each grabbing one of Angie’s hands, led the teen into the living room where they had constructed a fort the size of the room.

Kristel and Jade headed out for the group Kristel had found.



“I don’t know that I can do this,” Jade said as they pulled up outside the community center.

“I know it’s scary, Jade, but you have to give it a try,” said Kristel, pulling her friend from the car.

They walked inside and Kristel checked them in while Jade absently scanned the bulletin board.

“You know those flyers you are reading are at least ten years old,” said the woman now standing next to her.

“Huh?” Jade said.

“Sorry. Those flyers you are pretending to read, they’re at least ten years old.”

“Oh, I was wondering about the pictures.”

“Are you in the group?”

“Um, y-yeah.”

“Well, I’m Rachel Cassidy and I lead the group. Welcome!”

“I’m Jade, and thank you.”

Rachel took her coffee and headed into the room.

“Who was that?” Kristel asked.

“She said her name was Rachel. I guess she runs the group,” said Jade.

“Oh that is her. I read her bio when I was doing research for the groups. She’s had some tragedy in her life. Her wife was killed by a wolf while they were out hiking.”

“Wow, that’s horrible.”

“We should probably get inside and get seats.”

They entered the room and saw that there were about twelve people sitting in chairs set in a circle. Jade and Kristel chose two seats in the middle of an empty section, each hoping that nobody would sit next to them. As they looked around the room, they saw the same lost look in the eyes of the others who were there. Jade watched as Rachel closed the door to give them privacy in the room.

“All right, let’s go over the group rules. First and foremost, be respectful of others. Everyone here has lost someone they loved and is trying to find a way to move on with life. Second, see rule one. Third, you don’t have to speak unless there is something that you want to say. I do ask that you at least participate in the introductions. Lastly, please clean up after yourself before you leave. Are there any questions?” asked Rachel, looking around at everyone. “Great. I guess I’ll start the introductions. I’m Rachel and I lost my wife and unborn daughter three years ago.”

“I’m Doug, and I lost my husband three years ago,” said the man to her left.

“I’m Sharon, and I lost my husband twenty-two months ago tomorrow. We have two kids together.”

“I’m Carmen, and I lost my girlfriend nine months ago.”

They continued around the room until they got to Jade.

“I’m Jade, and I lost my wife six months ago. We have a daughter who turns five on Saturday.”

“I’m Kristel, and I’m here to support Jade. I lost one of my best friends when her wife died.”

“Great, thank you everyone for sharing. I know how hard it is for some of you to come here. I think it is fantastic that you care enough, Kristel, to come and support Jade. Shall we get started? Does anyone want to share how your week has gone?”

“I was able to look at a picture of Diane for the first time without completely falling apart,” said Carmen.

“That’s great, Carmen,” Rachel said, offering the woman a genuine smile.

“I saw my parents this week, and when they asked how I was doing, I was able to answer them without breaking into tears,” said Sharon. “My kids even told me that they were proud of me.”

“That’s fantastic. I know that it was a huge step for you and your children.”

Jade raised her hand unsure what was compelling her to do so.

“Jade?”

“Friday would have been mine and Amy’s eighth wedding anniversary. We were together almost ten years. I spent the night alone looking through our photo albums, talking to my wife, and holding a stuffed bunny my daughter gave me to help me not feel alone. It was the first time since she died that I let myself admit that she wasn’t coming back.”

Kristel put her arm around her friend, and two people passed her a tissue as she started to cry.

“We all have done that. I admit, I still find myself talking to my wife,” said Rachel. “The important thing to remember is that you are always going to have that person as a part of your life and a part of you. Jade, you said that you have a daughter? Your daughter is always going to be a piece of you and your wife and as long as you hold on to that you will never be alone. I’m not saying pine for the loved one, but hold them in your heart and remember that you loved them and they loved you and it is okay to love others or love again.”

“Have you moved on, Rachel?” asked the dark-haired man near Jade.

“I am not dating anyone, but I’m not opposed to the idea either.”

The group continued to talk about their loved ones while Kristel and Jade listened. After two hours Rachel announced that they had to end the group for tonight, but she hoped everyone would be back next week.

“You ready to go?” Kristel asked Jade as soon as the group ended.

“Yeah,” nodded Jade.

“Um, Kristel? Jade?” called Rachel, walking over to them. “Thank you again for coming to group and sharing. I know that things are hard and feel impossible right now, but they will get easier. I wanted to give you each my card and number. I’m always available if things get too rough or if you need someone to talk to. I know that is cliché, but I also have been where you are and have some perspective on it.”

“Thank you, Rachel,” Jade said, offering a little smile.

“Thank you again for allowing me to sit in with Jade at the meeting,” said Kristel.

“My pleasure, and you’re both always welcome. I hope the meeting helped, and we see you next week,” said Rachel, nodding to the women and heading over to some of the members who were waiting to speak with her.

“She’s nice.”

“Yeah, she is.”

“Do you think you want to come back next week?”

“Yeah, I think I do, but will you come with me?”

“Of course. We’ll have to make sure that Angie can babysit.”

Preview Copy

About the Author

BL Clark lives in Southern Wisconsin with her partner, their very opinionated cat, and occasionally, their now college bound daughter. When not being distracted by her day job, she can be found working on various story ideas, or playing with some form of technology, be it her computer, phone, tablet, or any other piece of technology she can get her hands on.

You can follow BL Clark at:

Twitter: [bl_clarks](#)

Facebook: [blclark.author](#)

Website: [blc.bkclark.net](#)

Preview Copy