



One Reckless Summer Preview

A fleeting look to the left revealed the old Brody cabin through the trees. Even more overgrown than when she'd last seen it, she could barely make it out through the vines climbing its walls. It sat dark and desolate, neglected and mysterious, almost disappearing in its surroundings, a part of the forest now – and yet at the same time it beckoned her in some strange way, making her want to explore it, peer in the windows, now that the Brodys were gone. Had they left anything behind? Any clues to what they were really about? She'd always heard there was a small cemetery behind the house, and now she wondered who exactly was buried there, and why.

And then – dear God, what had she just seen? A light? Had a small light just come on inside that old shack? Surely not. Surely she was seeing things.

Old leaves and new undergrowth crunched beneath her tennis shoes as she plodded on, her head still turned toward the little house, confused. She didn't see the light anymore – had only spotted it for a second – but it seemed to her a question of angles, of having exactly the right view through all the trees between here and there.

Still, maybe she truly *had* imagined it. Maybe it had been the setting sun reflecting off an old window pane as it glanced down through the heavy trees.

Trees too thick and billowy to actually *admit* any sunlight at the moment, she couldn't avoid noticing. And actually, hadn't the sun just *set*?

But don't think about that.

Her heart began to pound against her chest.

And it was in that precise moment that her body collided with ... another body.

No question about it – she knew even before she looked up that what she'd connected with wasn't a tree; it was far too warm, too broad and looming. Uh oh.

Her gaze darted upward as a sharp blade of panic sliced down through her, and she found male eyes on her. And a male body, still connecting with hers. She couldn't make out much more than that in the dim lighting, other than his white t-shirt. She took a quick step back and tried to breathe. Who in the world ...?

"This is private property," he said brusquely, "so I don't know who you are, but you need to get the hell outta here."

Good God. She sucked in her breath so hard that she thought for a second she'd faint. So much for trying to breathe. The man before her was at least 6'2" and smelled musky, like the woods, like the earth, and his deep voice had run through her like warm liquid, like ... an old memory.

She wanted to step farther back, put more distance between them, but she'd reached out to press her free hand against a tree trunk and needed it for balance at the moment. "I was just ... going to look at the stars," she explained, hefting her telescope bag a bit higher to show him. "Up on the rocks at the top of the hill." Now she freed her hand from the tree to point. Apparently talking had helped her breathe better.

"I don't care what you were doing – you're trespassing."

Wow, he still sounded just as mean. She'd sort of thought her explanation would calm the guy down. Not that she was sure, now that she thought about it, why someone would be so concerned about trespassers on this piece of useless, almost uninhabitable land. Except ... that maybe she really *had* seen a light in that cabin. Was this guy staying there? Who was he? Could he be ...?

"I don't mean any harm," she told him. "The rocks are just the best place around here to look through a telescope."

The man towering above her gave his head a derisive tilt and lowered his chin. As her eyes began to adjust to the dimness, she began to make out *his* eyes, along with the dark stubble on his cheeks. He had a full mouth, thick hair, a broad chest. "I don't think you're hearing me. You need to leave, go back to wherever you came from."

She swallowed but met his gaze, aware of the rise and fall of her chest as she continued focusing on her breathing. Then she pointed over her shoulder. "I just canoed across the lake. I won't hurt anything." Normally, on any other night of her life, she'd have turned around and left. But she just couldn't bring herself to do that right now. She wanted ... hell, maybe she just wanted something in life to be simple, to go the way she'd planned.

"Damn right you won't," the guy grouched, "because you're gonna get right back in that canoe and go."

"*Look,*" she snapped, pushed to a breaking point. "What's the big deal? What is it you think I'm going to do that's so terrible?" Maybe it was foolish – no, *certainly* it was foolish – but she was tired of doing what people told her, tired of feeling she had so little control over ... anything.

That's when she sensed his eyes narrowing on her – and began to think she was right, about who he was. About that voice. Oh my.

"Are you ... Mick Brody?" she ventured.

He looked stunned – so stunned she knew she was correct – but she wasn't sure why he was so surprised to be recognized, given that this was his family's old home. She'd assumed the land belonged to someone else now, but apparently it didn't.

Instead of answering, he said, "Who the hell are *you*?"

"We ... met once," she offered, again pointing over her shoulder in the direction of the lake. "At my family's dock. It was a long time ago." *You asked me if I wanted to take a ride. In your rowboat. But I'm pretty sure you really meant on you.*

His eyes narrowed further as he said, "You're not ... that Tolliver girl?"

She nodded. "Jenny. But I don't think you knew my name. You called me –" *Stop! Why on earth are you telling him this?*

“Pussycat,” he recalled aloud, his voice a bit softer now, more smoldering than fiery. Something in her womb flinched, contracted. That he would remember. That the word still sounded sexual to her, sensual, as much as it had then.

She stayed quiet, her breasts heaving slightly. Her astronomy equipment grew heavy, weighing down her right arm.

“Well, pussycat,” he said, sounding much more matter-of-fact now, “it’s time for you to go.”

She let out a breath – now she was the surprised one. She’d thought once he realized who she was that he’d finally say okay, let her go on her way. “Seriously?” she heard herself reply. “You seriously have a problem with me walking up the hill to those rocks and looking through a telescope?”

“Seriously,” he said, unsmiling, his expression as dark as the dusky air. “I know you always get your way, but not this time.”

Everything in Jenny tightened. He thought she always got her way? He didn’t know her at all; he didn’t know anything about her. All she’d wanted was a little distraction from her troubles, a little peace. Was it so much to ask? A lump of anger rose in her throat as she said, “I see you’re just as big an asshole now as you were then.” A *good-looking* asshole, she was beginning to realize, but an asshole just the same.

“Whatever, pussycat,” he said. “Now be the good little girl you are and go home.” Then he placed his large hands on the tops of her arms and physically began to turn her around, toward the lake.

And that was it! It was the straw that broke the camel’s back, the last bit of opposition Jenny could stand. She wouldn’t be man-handled. And she wouldn’t be bullied by one more person who thought being “good” meant being *weak*, willing to be bossed around. She was tired of being “good Jenny,” obedient Jenny, tired of letting men make her decisions for her – from Terrence insisting she be a teacher instead of an astronomer to her father insisting she come live in the lake house for the summer. And now she had *this* guy – Mick-freaking-Brody – insisting she couldn’t go where she wanted? Every bit of anger, fury, disgust, that had been gathering inside her over the past months boiled hotter inside her, finally overflowing.

So as Mick tried to turn her body one way, she turned it the other, silently refusing to go where he was directing her. She faced him again and spat, “Get your hands off me and get out of my way.” She couldn’t quite believe she’d said it, but she couldn’t stop herself, either. Then she started to push boldly past him, tired of this ridiculous game.

Only Mick Brody didn't let her pass – his arm shot out to block her path as she barreled forward, and before she knew it, his palm had closed firm over her hip, the length of his arm stretching down over her breasts and torso. His strength stopped her in her tracks even as his nearness, the solid connection of her flesh against his, made her pool with shocking moisture between her thighs. Dear God.

He bent down, his breath warm on her ear. “Listen, sweetheart,” he said, voice low and menacing, “you don't want to mess with me, okay? Now turn your pretty little ass around and get back to your side of the lake while you still can.”

She sucked in her breath, raised her gaze – frightened but bold. “Or what?” she whispered, her voice coming out far softer than planned. She remained in his grasp, their faces but an inch apart.

Their gazes locked, so close she could barely fathom how she'd ended up in this position. With Mick Brody, of all people on the planet. Mick Brody, who'd once frightened and aroused her all at once, at a time when she'd been far too young and sheltered to understand such conflicting emotions. And now she found herself in the very same situation – only their bodies were much nearer now, touching, and something inside her sizzled with strange, desperate need.

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