



chapter *twenty-nine*

I heard him come home. I think the whole house must have—except for Jeremiah, who could sleep through a tidal wave. Conrad made his way up the stairs, tripping and cursing, and then he shut his door and turned on his stereo, loud. It was three in the morning.

I lay in bed for about three seconds before I leapt up and ran down the hallway to his room. I knocked, twice, but the music was so loud I doubted he could hear anything. I opened the door. He was sitting on the edge of his bed, taking his shoes off. He looked up and saw me standing there. “Didn’t your mom teach you to knock?” he asked, getting up and turning down the stereo.

“I did, but your music was so loud you couldn’t hear me. You probably woke up the whole house, Conrad.” I

I narrowed my eyes at him. “Gnomes don’t dance. I was a ballerina, for your information.”

He smirked. “So why’d you quit, then?”

It had been around the time my parents got divorced. My mom couldn’t pick me up and drop me off twice a week all on her own. She had a job. It just didn’t seem worth it anymore. I was bored of it by then anyway, and Taylor wasn’t doing it anymore either. Also, I hated the way I looked in my leotard. I got boobs before the whole rest of the class, and in our class picture I looked like I could be the teacher. It was embarrassing.

I didn’t answer his question. Instead I said, “I was really good! I could have been dancing in a company by now!” I couldn’t have. I wasn’t that good, not by any stretch of the imagination.

“Right,” he said mockingly. He looked so smug sitting there on the bed.

“At least I can dance.”

“Hey, I can dance,” he protested.

I crossed my arms. “Prove it.”

“I don’t have to prove it. I taught you some moves, remember? How quickly we forget.” Conrad jumped up off the bed and grabbed my hand and twirled me around. “See? We’re dancing.”

His arm was slung around my waist, and he laughed before he let me go. “I’m a better dancer than you, Belly,” he said, collapsing onto his bed.

I stared at him. I didn't get him at all. One minute he was broody and withdrawn, and the next he was laughing and twirling me around the room. "I don't consider that dancing," I said. I backed out of the room. "And can you keep your music down? You already woke up the whole house."

He smiled. Conrad had a way of looking at me, at you, at anybody, that made everything unravel and want to fall at his feet. He said, "Sure. Good night, Bells." Bells, my nickname from a thousand years ago.

He made it so hard not to love him. When he was sweet like this, I remembered why I did. Used to love him, I mean.

I remembered everything.