

Today was the day of the choosing ceremony. One day every seventy-nine years all of the boys and girls age fifteen to twenty lines up by The Rock. Pair by pair each boy and each girl put their hands on The Rock from youngest to oldest. When The Rock glows, it means that they are picked to be the leaders of the world and are given the title, the Chosen Ones.

I stood in the line with all the other girls. I was pretty close to the end because I was sixteen. I couldn't see the boys' line. They were on the other side of The Rock. Slowly the line moved up. I could see the girls walking back with disappointment on their faces. Eventually it was my turn. I put my hands on The Rock and waited for a boy from the other line to do the same. I tried to keep my head down, but I couldn't help peeking to see if I knew the boy.

Unfortunately, I did. It was Tom Faller, my closest friend. I could feel time slow down as he put his hands on The Rock next to mine. The Rock shone a blinding light, brighter than ever before.

This couldn't be right. I knew that in the past the Chosen Ones always got married. I didn't want to marry Tom. He was my friend. I had known him since I was an infant. Our moms were friends. When we were little, they used to take us out every week to play while they chatted over cups of coffee. Tom was my only friend. And I was Tom's only friend. In elementary school, we found out that apparently boys and girls have a contagious disease called cooties, which means that a girl can't play tag with the boys and a boy can't play truth or dare with the girls. We were outcasts from all the other children, but we were used to it.

Everything seemed blurry as I took my hands off The Rock. My head was spinning. I noticed my breathing getting heavier and faster. I passed out.

When I woke up I saw Ricky Warren, the most annoying, snobby, impulsive, stupid boy that I had ever met. He had a crush on me since we were about ten. The only way I could get him to leave me alone was to let him think that we were dating.

"You'll be okay, JJ," he said. JJ was the stupid name he called me. My name was Jamie and that was what I wanted to be called. "I'll still love you."

He kissed me. The disgusting being actually dared to kiss me. I bit his lip to get him away from me. All he did was examine my face, while blood dripped from his lip. He was jealous. He had hoped that he would have gone up with me. He wanted to be a Chosen One with me. I sat up and punched him in the face hard enough to leave a bruise, but not hard enough to mess up his head any more than it already was.

"Can you believe him," I said to Tom as I stood up

"He won't bother you anymore," Tom said quietly. "Now we can put a restraining order on him."

I covered my mouth with my hand to keep myself from laughing. The old Chosen Ones, Victoria and Wendell Harper, approached us and handed down their crowns. They told us that they were always open to go to for advice and support. They reminded me of those nice, old people who always had candy to give and a story to tell. Limousines pulled up into the square. Victoria and Wendell boarded one and Tom and I boarded the other. We were taken to an enormous, medieval style castle where the Harpers gave us a tour of all of the fancy rooms' heirlooms of past Chosen Ones.

Victoria and Wendell told us that they would live in the castle until they die, but they wouldn't interfere with anything going on. They left us to go to their small wing of the castle, leaving Tom and me in the garden. I began to cry.

"We'll be okay," said Tom. "On the bright side, we know that the world won't be run by idiots like Ricky."

"I know," I said between sobs. "It's just that this is too overwhelming for me."

"Calm down," he told me. "It is a lot to take in. How about you go to your room and wind down? I'm glad that I'm here with you and not some other girl that I don't know. I could have been stuck with anybody, but I'm with you."

"Okay," I said as I headed for the door. I went through the halls and up a few flights of stairs to my room. I was about to plop down on the bed when I saw something by the pillow. It was a note with my name on it. Next to it was a single rose. I hate flowers. They make me sneeze.

I decided to open the note. All of the writing was written very carefully in red ink. I began to read it: 'How can you let this happen? What happened to our love? Why didn't you take me with you? Tom Faller will never love you like I do. I need to talk to you. I will wait for you. Meet me by The Rock tonight after curfew. Love, Ricky.'

I took the note, tore it into many pieces, and threw it out the window. I collapsed on my bed and fell asleep as soon as my face hit the pillow. I woke up to the curfew alarm that had been a requirement in every household for years. I saw the rose that Ricky sent and remembered that I was supposed to meet him by The Rock. I got up, pulled on some clothes, and carefully slipped

through the halls. I walked along the road for about an hour until I came to The Rock. Ricky was right there, leaning on The Rock. Shadows from trees kept the moonlight from illuminating the clearing.

"Hi, JJ," he said. "I want to show something to you."

"What," I asked with caution.

"Put your hand on The Rock."

"Why?"

"Just do it."

When I put my hand on The Rock, it glowed, but not nearly as brightly as it did with Tom...

"See? We're supposed to be together."

"Ricky, I have to fulfill my duties as Chosen One..."

"There are loopholes in the law," he interrupted. "We can find a way to get Faller kicked out. You would get to redo the whole process and we would be able to rule the world together. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"Fun is an odd way of putting it."

"That's what I love about you; you always make me laugh," he said. How badly I wanted to wipe that smile off his face.

"I don't think we should see each other anymore."

"What? That's ridiculous! We are meant to be together!"

"I know," I said "But if somebody finds out, we will be separated and never able to see each other again." The more I talked the better I sounded to myself; Ricky being as far away from me as possible sounded pretty good to me.

"We can run away. Right now," he said. "My car is right around the corner."

"I can't, Ricky. If I disappear, search parties are going to come looking for me. We'll be found out and probably put to death." I tried to fake cry, but I wasn't very good, so I hid my horrible acting with a hug.

"You're okay, JJ," he whispered. "I will find a way to see you. I promise."

"I need to get back before somebody notices that I'm gone," I said as I broke away from him.

I slipped through the darkness, leaving Ricky in the shadows of The Rock. I got back to my room unnoticed and went back to bed.

I had a weird dream that night. Ricky came and talked to me in it. He rode a horse to my window and climbed the wall to get to me. He kissed me and told me to leave with him. I refused and told him that we couldn't be together. He got angry and threw things around. Then, he pulled out a rope and a gag and tied me up.

He lowered me out the window and climbed down after me. He made sure that I didn't hit the ground hard though. He threw me over his horse and jumped on. Bringing the horse to a steady gallop, he took me to The Rock and forced my hand onto it. It glowed dimly when he put his and next to mine, just like it did in real life. He yelled at me and told me that we were meant to be together. After that, he carried me to his little luxury sports car, which was parked not very far away, pushed me into the passenger seat, and jumped in the driver's seat. I heard the rev on the engine and didn't remember any more of the dream after that.

When I woke up, I laid in bed, staring at the ceiling for a long time before I sat up. I wasn't in my room at the castle. I was in something that resembled a prison cell, but it was homey. There was a nice bed, a rug, some chairs, a table, and a bathroom with a door.

"Good morning, JJ," said Ricky as he entered my field of vision on the other side of the bars. It was then that I realized I didn't dream last night. It was real.

"What," I said crossly.

"I brought you some breakfast," he said. His voice was too happy sounding.

He came up to a place where there was a small door, unlocked it, and held out a tray of food for me to take. The door was just big enough that, I could grab his shirt collar and make him bang his head against the bars. I dropped the tray and went right for his collar. He didn't seem to think that I was a threat and kissed me again. I spit on him.

"What was that for, JJ," he asked me. I felt like he was talking to me like I was a dog.

"Ricky, can I tell you something," I said. I didn't wait for his response. "I don't love you. I never did. I never will. You disgust me. I think you are a terrible person. I'm sick of seeing you. You annoy me. You think you are all that, but you're not. Your daddy is rich and you think that anything you want is yours, but it's not. You don't even know me! I don't like being called JJ! I'm allergic to flowers! I think that it's disgusting when you kiss me! I have gotten to the point where your mere presence annoys me!"

He stared at me for a few awkward minutes and left. I was alone. He left me. This was a first. He never just left me. I was always the one to leave him.

I sat on the ground and salvaged what I could from the bacon and pancakes that were scattered all over the floor. My orange juice spilt, so I took the cup and filled it up with water at the bathroom sink. I sat at the table and ate in silence. When I was done, I went back to bed because there was nothing better to do.

After I got to a point where I couldn't force myself to sleep anymore, I looked around at everything more carefully. I traced the pattern on the rug with my finger and played with the water temperature at the sink. I tried to get a good look at what was outside my cell. I could easily see a table and a chair, but that was about it, except for the wall. I tried changing my position to see if I could see what was on the wall next to me. I caught a glimpse of another cell. I spent an hour trying to talk to the imaginary person that I put in the cell. I found the door in the cell that would let me out and sat next to it. I don't know why though. I was bored.

Finally, I heard a noise that wasn't caused by me. Ricky was coming back. I heard his footsteps creak down what I took to be stairs. He unlocked the small door and passed me a new tray of food. I gave him the old tray when I took the new one.

"Ricky," I said. "I'm sorry." I actually was. "Can we talk?" I didn't really mean to hurt his feelings. "Please?" I just wanted him to stop being so annoying. "I didn't mean anything that I said earlier." **That was my only lie.**

"Why," he said, breaking his silence. "Why did you do this to me?"

"I-I-I just..." I just wanted to get you away. "I was trying to be nice. Nobody tells you, but you are a little bit annoying." More like very annoying.

"That's it?" He sounded surprised. "There's no secret relationship between you and Faller?"

"No," I reacted quickly. "He's my friend! I've known him since I was like one!"

"I don't believe you," he said under his breath as he left.

I ate quietly and slowly to make it last longer. After I ate, I ran back and forth across my cell to use up all of my energy. Ricky never gave me dinner. I cleaned up at the sink because there was no shower and went to bed, even though Ricky never turned the lights out. I heard a noise in the middle of the night and woke up, eager for anything that might be the slightest bit interesting. I saw Ricky struggle with something, but I couldn't tell what. He came over to the

person door in my cell and told me not to talk. I heard the sound of a metal door slamming shut, then Ricky left and the lights went out.

"Tom," I said.

"What is wrong with him," Tom said. I could tell from his voice that he was enraged with hatred towards Ricky.

"Don't fight it. It won't get us out of here."

"What happened?" He was crying now.

"You know how Ricky thought that I was his girlfriend? Well, the whole Chosen One thing made him mad. I told him that I couldn't see him anymore and that made him angrier. He literally took me from my room and brought me here. I said some things, the truth and he wouldn't talk to me much since. I think he's crazy."

"I think that he loves you. You hurt him and now he doesn't know what to do."

"I've been terrible to him for as long as I can remember. Why would he want to follow me around like this?"

"He loves you."

"You agree that whole thing with him kissing me was sick, right?"

"Yes," he said. "That was."

"What should we do?"

"Find a way out of here."

"But how?"

"We can trick him. He isn't that smart."

"Remember, we are the geniuses who got trapped by him."

"I know, but I think we just have to beat him at his own game."

"It's impossible," I retorted.

"Go to sleep. I'll have a plan by morning."

"Goodnight," I said as I cuddled with a blanket and fell asleep.

"Jamie? Jamie," Tom whispered yelled to me.

"Yeah," I said groggily.

"I have a plan."

"Really?"

"Yep, okay, so Ricky thinks you want to break up with him because you like me, right?"

"Yeah."

"Well, all he needs is confirmation that you absolutely hate me. When he comes back down, we should stage a verbal fight. Act frustrated and ask Ricky if you can come in here to beat me up. He is stronger than you, but not me. When he opens the door to my cell, I'll knock him out. Then, we can get back to the castle and all will be taken care of."

"I like that idea," I said. "Do you know what time it is?"

"Yeah, it's six o'clock. I guess Ricky didn't get his beauty sleep yet."

"Just wait. He'll be down before you know it."

Three hours later, Ricky still wasn't down and I was getting extremely hungry. Tom fell asleep and was snoring. I eventually heard creaking coming from where Ricky always came from.

"What's your problem, Tom? You always treat me like a child all the time! I'm sick of it," I yelled to get a fight started. Tom woke up and jumped right on my prompt.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean!"

"I wouldn't have to do it if you didn't act like a child!"

"I wouldn't act like a child if you actually paid attention to me occasionally!"

"Maybe I'd pay attention to you if you were just a little bit interesting. You always go off on some random topic that nobody cares about!"

"I think that I'm interesting."

"Yeah, but nobody else does! I can't stand hearing about your fish that died a year ago or about the time that you fell off your bike ten years ago and stuff like that. Nobody cares about you!" Tom's voice actually sounded like he was really mad at me.

"Shut your mouth," Ricky's voice came from a place outside my cell.

"No," Tom responded. "She needs to hear the truth."

"Ricky," I whined. "Make him stop."

He came over to where I was standing up against the bars and played with my hair.

"Don't worry. I will."

"Wait," I said, grabbing for his wrist through the bars. "Let me shut him up."

"I can't let you do that. You'll run away from me."

"How? You are far faster and stronger than me. I really want to give Tom a black eye right now."

"Fine," he said, pulling a set of keys out of his back pocket.

He unlocked my door and let me out. I clung to him as he walked with me to the door to Tom's cell. I could see that Tom's cell was much worse than mine. He had no furniture; just a dirty looking rug lying on the ground. Tom had his back up against the wall closest to the cell door. Ricky unlocked the door and opened it wide enough for me to get in. Tom sprang at the open door. I fell inside to let Tom get at Ricky quicker. The door closed and locked behind me as Tom tackled Ricky. With a single punch, Ricky was knocked unconscious. Tom grabbed the keys from his limp hand and opened the door for me. I held the door open while Tom lugged Ricky into the cell. I put the trays of food that Ricky would have given us had we not been a distraction and let the door close.

Ricky and I stumbled outside where we found the nearest person to give us directions back to the castle. When we got back, we told a guard what happened and sent him to go put Ricky in a very strict prison. We met up with the Harpers, who gave us hugs and lectured me about trusting the curfew law. When they left, Tom and I were alone again.

"Jamie, can I tell you something," he asked me.

"As long as you don't say something like what I said to Ricky when I asked him that very same question."

"I'm serious."

"I am too. Do you want to hear what I said to him?"

"Jamie, I have known you for as long as I can remember..."

"You aren't proposing to me, are you?"

"No! I just wanted to tell you that... I... I love you. I love you more than Ricky did."

I didn't have anything to say. I stared at him pensively. It took me a moment to realize that I loved him all my life. I shut out the rest of the world to be with him.

"I love you too," I whispered as I hugged him.

Eight years later, we were very happily married, with a two-year-old child. As for Ricky, he was out of jail, but had a restraining order. He found himself a girlfriend who was almost as crazy as he was and moved to Australia with her. If I have learned anything as Chosen One, it would be that there is absolutely nothing stronger than love.