

SYDNEY'S JOURNEY: BOOK THREE

A QUIET STORM

PathFinders



Kim Sigafus

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 Shopping Trip Gone Wrong

CHAPTER 2 The Encounter

CHAPTER 3 Finn's Dad

CHAPTER 4 Pizza and Pride

CHAPTER 5 Almost Friends

CHAPTER 6 The Other Man

CHAPTER 7 Changes

CHAPTER 8 Many Truths

CHAPTER 9 Moving On

CHAPTER 10 Alone and Lonely

CHAPTER 11 Beginning to Heal

CHAPTER 12 Pain Is Universal

CHAPTER 13 One Day at a Time

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CHAPTER

1

Shopping Trip Gone Wrong

Sydney pushed back dress after dress in her closet. None of them seemed right for a formal school dance.

She was surprised her mother decided to let her go. There had been some discussion on whether or not Sydney was old enough to date, but Sydney had won out in the end, telling her they were being driven by Jeremy's mother and the dance was chaperoned. Besides, Finn was also going with them.

Sighing, she sat down on the bed. It had been six months since she and Jeremy started seeing each other. At first, her best friend, Finn, wasn't happy about the situation. He didn't trust Jeremy and tried to hover about whenever they were together at school. Sydney knew he was only trying to protect her, but she eventually had a conversation with him about backing off some. He was reluctant but did as he was asked.

Finn had been a little afraid that she wouldn't want to spend time with him anymore now that she had Jeremy, but that had not been the case. If anything, Jeremy ended up tagging along with *them* most of the time. He still hung out with his football buddies but had stopped harassing Finn, and his friends had eventually followed suit.

She wished the other bullies—like Amelia and her friends—would stop too. They had been messing with her and Finn for months, and she wondered if she would have to give a final push back to get a conclusion, good or bad, to the situation. It was obvious Finn was just trying to stay out of the way, and Jeremy didn't seem inclined to handle the issue for her.

When Finn and Jeremy weren't with Sydney, they never spent any time together. They were cautiously cordial with each other, but the friendship they had when they were younger no longer existed. They both wanted to be in Sydney's life and understood how they had to treat each other in order to be able to do so.

Sydney was aware of the uncomfortable situation but knew to stay out of it. They would either work it out or not. It was not up to her to fix it.

Since her parents' divorce and her final confrontation with her father about the way he'd treated her all her life, he had not contacted her or her mother again. While her mother was relieved, she was not. To be dumped by her father was not something she'd ever expected to happen.

"Sydney? Are you ready to go?"

Sydney frowned and slid off the bed. Her mother, Dakotah, had opened the door and was standing there with her purse.

"Go where?"

"Shopping. You need a dress, right?"

"You didn't tell me we were going shopping." Sydney smiled as she grabbed her tennis shoes and slipped them on.

"I must have forgotten. Come on, let's go."

Sydney followed her mother out to the car and buckled herself in.
"Where are we going?"

"Only the biggest mall in the state," Dakotah replied with a grin. "If you can't find something there, then I give up."

"Thanks, Mom!"

They pulled out of the driveway and headed down the road. Neither spoke for a few minutes as Dakotah navigated traffic and entered the freeway.

"So, Sydney . . ."

Sydney turned to glance at her mother, but she didn't go on.

Sydney frowned. "What?"

"This is your first formal dance."

"This is my first dance, period, Mom."

“I just wondered if you had any questions about . . . well, anything.” Dakotah started to blush, so she turned to glance out her driver’s-side window as she moved into the left lane.

“No. I know how to dance.”

“I’m not talking about dancing, Sydney. I’m talking about you and Jeremy being alone.” Dakotah did not want to have this conversation, but she had no idea what her daughter knew about intimacy.

“There are other people coming to this dance, you know.”

“Oh, for . . .” Dakotah cleared her throat and then let the words rush out. “I’m talking about sex, Sydney. Do you have any questions about sex?”

“What? No.” Sydney blushed and looked away. “Geez, Mom . . . really?”

“Well, I don’t know where you’re at with these things.”

“That’s because we never talk about it.”

“I know. That’s why I thought I would bring it up now. Before the dance, you know.”

“Why would you think we’re going to have . . . no, Mom. Not happening. There are people there. We can’t . . . I’m not going to . . .” Sydney cleared her throat. “No. I don’t have any questions.”

“So, you’re not thinking about leaving the dance and—”

“No!”

“Okay, I just wanted to be sure.”

“Okay, fine.”

Dakotah sighed. “I like Jeremy.”

“I know.”

“I just don’t want him to do anything to make me change my mind about him.”

“I get it. Can we change the subject now?”

“Yes.”

They pulled into the mall’s large parking garage and parked. Dakotah led her daughter up the escalator and to a store that carried the kind of dresses they were looking for. She sat in a chair and watched her daughter try on dress after dress, trying to find the right one.

After about twenty minutes, Sydney pushed back the dressing room curtain and stepped out in a floor-length spaghetti-strapped satin dress.

It was red.

Dakotah frowned, but Sydney didn't catch that. She walked over to the full-length mirror and looked at herself. Dakotah cleared her throat and opened her mouth to speak, but Sydney shook her head and started to tear up.

"I . . . I look so pretty . . .," she whispered. "I . . . I didn't know I could ever . . ." She swallowed hard and glanced over at her mother. "I look good, don't I?" she asked as she turned her gaze back to the mirror, amazed at her own image.

"Honey, you're pretty no matter what you wear, but—"

"But not like this," Sydney whispered. "Never like this."

Dakotah didn't know what to say. She thought the dress was too revealing but didn't want to burst Sydney's bubble of happiness.

"How much is it?" she asked, and her daughter frowned and fumbled for the tag. She found it and then sighed.

"Never mind," Sydney mumbled as her eyes dropped to the floor. "It's . . . it's a lot. I'll go find something else that will do."

She started for the dressing room again, and her mother sighed. Dakotah knew she was about to give in despite her better judgment.

"It might get chilly," she said, getting up and walking over to her daughter. "You might need a wrap or shawl."

She pushed Sydney back to the mirror, and they stood looking into it, each feeling different things.

"I have that shawl Nokomis gave me," replied Sydney. "The embroidered one."

Dakotah nodded. "That would look beautiful on you. Your grandmother would be honored for you to wear it at your first dance."

"But, Mom, the dress costs too much."

Dakotah looked into her daughter's soft eyes and looked down at the dress again. It was way too grown-up for Sydney, she thought. And she wasn't ready for "grown-up" Sydney.

She sighed. But Sydney was ready for “grownup” Sydney. As much as she hated to admit it, her daughter was becoming a woman. The sooner she dealt with that, the better for both of them.

“What are you going to do with your hair?” she asked, and Sydney frowned.

“Mom, the price . . .”

“Let me see the big picture, and then I’ll decide.”

Sydney turned back to the mirror. “Well,” she said thoughtfully, “I thought maybe I would wear it up. It’s grown out a little now.”

“Yes, with cascading curls, and—”

Sydney laughed. “Do I look like a ‘curls’ kind of girl to you?”

“Indulge me and I’ll buy the dress.”

“Really?” Sydney caught her breath and hugged her mother. “Yes! I will let you curl my hair. I’m so excited.”

Dakotah watched her twirl around in her dress and turn from side to side to look at herself. The dress slid around her body and fit like a glove. She shone as the light hit the material, but it was the light in her eyes that caught Dakotah’s attention. She wondered what Jeremy would think when he saw her.

“Okay, Sydney, go take off the dress so we can pay for it and go get some lunch.”

Sydney smiled and did what she was told. Ten minutes later, Sydney and her mother walked out of the store with the dress over Sydney’s arm.

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