



**E**xactly one week before I stab Josh, I'm running hopelessly late for my weekly coffee date with Esmee. Self-loathing crawls beneath my skin and infects my mood as I furiously pull open dresser drawers, my eyes desperately scanning numerous outfit options.

None of them feel good enough today. My stomach is still painfully bloated after yesterday's fast-food binge, and every seam of my pants feels unforgiving.

August, my fluffy midsize dog, brushes past my legs in a soft caress, almost like he senses my emotions spiraling out of control. I look down at him fondly as he slips straight through the cracks of my thunderous mood.

"We need to hurry, buddy."

The golden-beige dog tilts his head to the side. I read his unspoken words in that simple gesture: *I've been ready for hours. What about you?*

I grab my favorite pair of high-waisted black skinny jeans and try to suck my stomach in, the waistband pressing uncomfortably into my skin.