

DELETED SCENE - 2

19.2 Josh

I was getting impatient. I'd had a tetanus shot, been stitched and bandaged, x-rayed and brain-scanned... and abandoned in a cubicle wearing nothing but a backless hospital gown. Jon had been in earlier, but disappeared to look after Suki; she had a dislocated shoulder, he reported, but nothing appeared to be broken, thank God. But that had been ages ago. I stared some more at my watch. I'd been here almost two hours, why weren't they telling me anything? My gut cramped at the possibility of her being more seriously injured, of Jon trying to shield me from the news.

Oh to hell with this. I clambered down from the trolley and went in search of them. A passing nurse looked shocked to see me on my feet; she tried to take my arm and guide me back to the cubicle, but I shrugged her off and headed for the enquiries desk. Briefly alarmed at the cameras jostling at the end of the corridor, I pasted on my most charming smile and asked, still in a hoarse whisper, for Suki Bridgewater, eventually being directed to a small waiting room.

I stood in the doorway, just drinking in the sight of her. Jon sat next to her, tapping out a text message while Suki huddled next to him. She was pale, her face drawn and tired, a bright blue sling a stark flash of colour in the bland room. As if she recognised she was being watched, she lifted her head and our eyes met. "Josh. Oh God, they told me you couldn't be disturbed." Stepping towards me, I moved and we met in the middle, Suki nestling into my careful embrace, her head against my chest. I buried my nose in her hair, inhaling deeply. Finally, I could relax, everything was going to be fine.

Jon greeted me with a grin and a firm handshake. "Good to see you on your feet, we were waiting for you before Suki decides what to do."

Shaking my head, I tried to convey that I didn't understand. Suki meshed her hand with mine and drew me to the seat next to her. "I want everyone to know the truth about what happened in Paris, and since your friend Dev is tracking down the girl, Aimee, that's all in hand. But I don't know what to tell the police about tonight."

I gaped. Not having a voice sucked when there were things I needed to say. I mimed writing and Jon's face lit up as he understood. He scrabbled inside his pockets and produced a biro and an envelope to write on. They would have to do. I scribbled furiously, turning the pad to show them both. *He tried 2 murder u 2nite. How can u NOT tell the police?*

She coloured, stared at the floor for a moment. "It's not that easy, Josh. He's badly injured..."

What the fuck? I scribbled again. *U were nearly killed. Anita thinks he killed his ex. U can't let him get away with it!*

Her voice was wobbly. "His back is broken in three places and his spinal cord ruptured. It's highly likely he'll never walk again, let alone drive a racing car. And he has possible brain damage. Not only is he in a wheelchair for the rest of his life, he might also be a vegetable." She hesitated. "I think that's punishment enough. Nothing that we say will bring the other girl back. And what can we achieve by telling the world he planned to kill me? I can do without that level of attention. I just want to walk away and forget it all happened. The press are going to crucify me anyway for leaving him, especially while he's wrecked. He's a sporting legend. Rightly or wrongly he deserves his place in F1 history and I don't want to take that away from him."

I was stunned. But then again, Suki has more compassion than me. I drew in a shaky breath and wrote some more. *So what are u going to do?*

She blushed some more and looked at Jon. "Would you mind, umm, giving us a few minutes?"

When we had the room to ourselves, she took my hand again and gazed into my eyes. "I'm confused, Josh. I love you and I can never thank you enough for what you've done for me, but I don't know if I can just leap straight into a relationship with you. Things are complicated. I want to go back to work, but in my job, I need the support of the public. If I'm seen walking away from Gabe as he lies on his deathbed, especially if I take up with another man, well you can imagine what they'll say."

My eyes searched her face. Was she hiding something? I wrote roughly. *Are u saying it's over?*

I saw pain in her eyes and - thank you God - she shook her head, but it was a long time coming. "I can't do that, not after everything. I'm just saying I need... I don't know, some time I guess. A quiet divorce from Gabe and then I'll be free to start over again."

And until then?

"I don't know. I need some space." I was already shaking my head in disbelief. I couldn't sit here and listen to Suki's *Dear John* spiel.

Next thing she'd say –

"It's not you, Josh, it's me." Yep, there it was. I closed my eyes, waiting for the final axe to fall. It wasn't far behind. "I'd like us to stay friends though."

How freaking ironic was this? The one time I need, really need, my voice, it's gone AWOL. No way did I intend to state my case with pen and paper. Not only did I have to suffer the multiple humiliations of sitting in a backless gown with my arse on show AND having my heart ripped out at the same time, I couldn't even come back with a sharp one-liner. That too had been taken from me. My pride was all that remained.

I schooled my features to stay calm, stoic even and gazed silently at her. As if puzzled, she frowned. “Why can’t you speak, Josh? Did you hurt your throat in the accident?”

Oh to laugh out loud. For a moment I contemplated telling her just how my windpipe had been almost crushed and then I thought better of it. The last thing I wanted was Suki’s pity. No, I’d keep this to myself, Gabriel’s parting gift. Summoning the fragmented shards of my dignity, I stood up and pressed a lingering kiss on her cheek.

I couldn’t look at her, I shuffled blindly back towards my trolley to suffer some further indignities. Jon called me, caught me by the arm when I was half way down the corridor. “Josh – hey Josh, where are you going?”

Shaking my head, I realised I’d left the pen and envelope in the waiting room. Jon had his phone in his hand though. I plucked it from his fingers and tapped out a text message while he waited, bemused. *I think I’ve just been dumped.*

“Whaat? You’re joking.” I shook my head, my mouth tight. “Man, I don’t get it.”

I shrugged, tapped another text to him. *She’s scared. It’s too much for her. All I can do is wait.*

Judging by the disgusted look on Jon’s face, he didn’t agree. “I hate to be brutal, but man up here, Josh. If you want her, tell her straight. I nearly lost Anita by hanging on the sidelines.” He cocked his head slightly to one side. “You do love her, yeah?”

I punched out another text, struggling to hold myself together under Jon’s frank stare. *I need her more than the air in my lungs. This sucks hard.*

A flash of pity in his eyes made my stomach churn. I tried to smile as he clapped me on the shoulder. “Yeah, man, it sucks. Me and Anita, we’ll look after her until she comes to her senses.” There was nothing more to say. Even if I wanted to.

19.3 Suki

The next two days passed in a flurry of exhausting activity. By keeping myself ruthlessly busy, I didn't have time to think about Josh. Or Gabe. I'd resumed my ostrich-head-in-the-sand technique of ignoring everything. Jon was busy preparing for the race and Anita stuck close to me, coming with me to the hospital, the police and the various authorities. Gabe stayed resolutely unconscious which angered me. I feared that when I actually stopped running, took a little while to think about what I'd just done, I'd end up howling like a baby.

Linda caught up with me at the hospital, insisting on us having a coffee together. I gazed at her warily. We'd never shared confidences and I couldn't imagine us starting now.

"I don't blame you, Suki. If anything, I blame myself." I'd hardly slept for three days, my thought processes were sluggish at best. I stared at her, not understanding. "I should have seen the signs, seen how he was turning out just like his father." She fiddled with the froth on her coffee, drawing tails with her spoon, refusing to meet my eyes. "I'm hooked on sleeping pills. I've been taking them for years, since Gabe was small. Craig sometimes withholds them, if he feels angry with me. It's a brutal method of control that Gabe has grown up with. When I learned he'd persuaded you to take tranquilizers, you can understand why I was worried."

"Why was Gabe angry with me? What had I done to upset him?" I spoke slowly. I understood her words, but they didn't make any sense.

Linda shrugged, played some more with her coffee. "He was jealous of your success. Your career was on the up, his was stagnating. He resented your popularity, how your job was

becoming more important than his - more important than him. How you stopped going to the circuits with him.”

“Stop, please.” I felt sick. Was Linda really trying to say I’d brought all this on myself? “What about his ex?”

“She was a whore.” Linda finally met my eyes. “But she didn’t deserve that.” We finally agreed on something.

It was a day for difficult conversations. I bumped into Jon on the way back to the hotel; he asked politely about Gabe, I bit my lip to avoid asking about Josh. “You know, Suki, I’m astounded that he didn’t press charges. Josh, I mean.”

“Huh?” I’d been heading for my room in the hope of a few hours sleep.

“Suki.” His tone was faintly scathing. “You did see the state of his throat, didn’t you?”

I just shook my head. I had no idea what he was talking about.

“Jesus.” He shook his head in wonder. “Gabe tried to throttle him in the car. Josh was trying to get him out and Gabe flipped, had a go at strangling him. That’s why his throat was trashed – you really didn’t know, did you?” I shook my head again. “I saw it happen,” he spoke gently, he must have seen how shocked I was. “I couldn’t do anything to help, the car was about to go over the edge. Josh is bloody lucky to be alive.”

I sat on my bed for an age, thoughts swirling relentlessly in my head. How brave Josh had been – and honourable. He hadn’t told me what Gabe had so nearly done to him. He’d saved me, over and over again. How my dependence on my career had messed up my marriage. How the things that I always thought were important, were useless. What really mattered.

And how I'd pushed away the one man who really loved me.

19.4 Josh

It was with a profound sense of relief that I collapsed onto the bed in my hotel room; thankfully my room was still available, even though I'd checked out the evening before. Gods. It seemed like weeks ago, not just 24 hours. The room had been cleaned and tidied, no trace of Suki remained. I wished I could clean her out of my heart so easily.

The hospital had given me some painkillers for the bruises on my back and the lump on my head; indulging in a heavy drinking session was probably not the best idea so I tried to make myself comfortable while I waited for the pain to go away. I already knew that the worst pain could never be fixed by a bottle of pills, I would have to live with that.

Even my dreams failed to give me comfort. Fleeting images of Gabe looming over me, his hands around my throat. Suki's voice over the radio link, her fear when she was trapped in the cupboard. The bedroom in the grey mansion again - but now without Suki there; this time when I stared out of the window, I waited for Suki, who never came.

I felt worse in the morning. Every muscle ached, even my bones hurt. There was little chance of me flying home for a couple of days, I could hardly walk. And the damned thermostat in the room was on the blink, it was unbearably warm. I tossed and turned, sweating like a pig and longing for the quiet solitude of my own apartment. I pondered my recurring dream, how it was now different. I'd always hoped it was a premonition, a peep into the future to see the woman that would love me for who I am. Wrong again.

I knew now that like chasing a rainbow, there was no pot of gold at the end for me.

After another night of self-pitying restlessness, I was sick of feeling this way. Jon had told me to man up, maybe he had a point. I'd have one last shot at winning Suki's heart and after that... I'd walk away. I showered, dressed slowly and pulled on my lucky cowboy boots. Even though the water had been cold enough to make my teeth chatter, I was still red cheeked and sweating. What the hell was wrong with me? I gulped down some more painkillers and staggered out into the corridor. Or at least, I tried to. I'm not sure how far I actually got before my knees buckled and I face planted into the carpet.

19.5 Suki

When I rang Anita, she told me Josh was back in his hotel and as far as she knew, he hadn't gone home yet. So that's where I went. My tiredness forgotten, I was driven by one simple goal. Tell Josh how much I loved him.

The taxi took forever to get to the Alexander. The lift took an age, full of visitors for the race. There were a few sideways glances at me, a furtive whispered conversation - my face had been plastered over the newspapers with Gabe's, it was only to be expected - and finally I escaped on Josh's floor. I hurried down the corridor, rounding the corner as he left his room. "Josh," I called, puzzled when he didn't hear me.

Puzzlement turned to anxiety, and then fear as he swayed gently, his head bowed and then he slumped to the floor.

Fear didn't even come close. My hands trembled as I felt his skin, he was burning up with a fever, deathly pale with pink splotches on his cheeks and violet shadows under his eyes. With the utmost gentleness, I sat on the floor and slid his head into my lap, then

fumbled for my phone. The bloody sling got in the way, I slipped out of it so that I could cradle him to me. "Please Josh, *please* be okay." The tears I'd been holding back threatened to escape as I tried to phone Anita. I had no idea how to contact an ambulance; to my eternal gratitude, she emerged from her room further down the corridor. "Hold on, Cowboy," I crooned to him, "help is on its way."

How would I manage without friends like Anita and Jon? Jon came running to help while Anita fetched a damp cloth to drape across his forehead. Together we waited for the ambulance. In practice it was probably around five minutes. It felt like hours. I murmured to him, dropped little kisses across his forehead and held his hand, our fingers laced together. I haltingly explained to the others why I'd come back, that I'd been such a complete idiot and how guilty I felt at not being here with him.

Jon glanced at Anita, Mindy clutched in her arms, then back at me. Handing me his phone, he scrolled through to a text that Josh had written. "It was easier for him to text me than try to speak. I asked him if he loved you, this is what he said." My eyes filled up as I read it.

I need her more than the air in my lungs. This sucks hard.

How could I have been so stupid? I wept over him, uncaring who saw me. "You are going to be okay, Cowboy, d'you hear me? I'm not letting you go again. And the minute you wake up, I'm going to tell you just how much I love you."