

"First Love"

Keayva Mitchell

I stood at the arrival gate, my eyes trained for the golden brown hair of my daughter. Then, as if I'd conjured her up in my thoughts, there she was, darker from her summer vacation in California, her pink carry-on backpack slung over one shoulder only, her hand attached to a distinctly male one. Guess her love for him survived the summer then, I thought, pursing my lips.

"Mom!" she exclaimed as her eyes locked with mine, a grin stretching wide over her face. She let go of James's hand and ran over, throwing her arms around me. She smelled like sand and sunshine and airplane peanuts.

"Honey! Oh, I missed you!" I drew back to look at her. "Look at you, you look great."

"You do too, Mom. You cut your hair! I like it."

I'd cut my plain brown hair into a short bob at the beginning of the summer and it had grown a few inches since then. I fingered it self-consciously, just as James finally arrived.

"Thanks baby." Out of obligation to my daughter, I added a polite, "Hi, James," before suggesting we go get their luggage.

As we made our way down to baggage claim, Danielle laced her fingers into James's again, all smiles, not knowing that I still wanted to rip his hand from hers and tell him to go back to where he came from. It was their first summer together, her first summer away from home, from me. I wanted her to enjoy herself, but at the same time, there was a selfish part of me that wanted her to break her disillusionment with James. He was no good for her. She deserved better. And I'd told him that before they'd left.

I'd pulled him aside while Danielle finished some last minute packing and told him point-blank that I'd kill him if he hurt my daughter. He swore he wouldn't, but I knew better. He loved her, would never do anything to jeopardize their relationship, he'd told me. But I'd heard it all before and didn't believe a word that came out of his mouth. He told me to relax. How could I? Danielle had only known him for one rocky, tumultuous year and already they were going across the country on vacation together. He was already trying to take my daughter from me.

She's going to want to see more of him, I suddenly thought with barely concealed panic. Christmas, Thanksgiving, all major holidays, really. And what could I do? I couldn't say no. It would be the holidays and I couldn't separate a nine year old girl from her father on Christmas.