

# Did I Mention I Love You?

*by Estelle Maskame*

I can almost see the road through the gaps in the fence by the side of the house, and I squint through. There's music playing. More like blaring. I can hear it over the crappy music that's already bouncing around the back yard, and as a sleek white car speeds up to the edge of the sidewalk and skids against the curb, I grimace in disgust. The music cuts off the second the engine is killed.

"What are you looking at?" Rachael asks, but I'm too busy staring to even attempt to answer.

The car door swings open roughly, and I'm surprised it doesn't fall straight off its hinges. It's difficult to see clearly through the fence, but a tall guy gets out and slams the door shut just as aggressively as he opened it. He hesitates for a moment, stares at the house, and then runs a hand through his hair. Whoever he is, he looks super depressed. Like he's just lost all his life savings or his dog just died. And then he heads straight for the gate.

"Who the hell is this jackass?" I mutter to Rachael as the figure nears us.

But before either of us can say anything more, Jackass decides to hit the gate open with a fist, drawing the attention of everyone around us. It's like he wants everyone to hate him. I figure he's probably that one neighbor that everyone despises, and he's only here in a fit of rage because he wasn't invited to the lamest barbecue get-together that's ever been hosted.

"Sorry I'm late," Jackass comments sarcastically. And loudly too, with a smirk on his lips. His eyes flash green as emeralds. "Did I miss anything besides the slaughtering of animals?" He throws up the infamous middle finger to, from what I can see, the barbecue. "I hope you guys enjoyed the cow you just ate." And then he laughs. He laughs as though everyone's expressions of disgust are the most entertaining thing he's seen all year.

"More beer?" I hear my dad call out to the silent crowd, and as they chuckle and return to their conversations, Jackass heads through the patio doors. He slams them shut so hard I can almost see the glass tremble.

I'm stunned. I have no idea what just happened or who that was or why he's just entered the house. When I realize I'm slightly slack-jawed, I close my mouth and turn to Rachael. She bites her lip and pushes her sunglasses down over her eyes. "I'm guessing you haven't met your step-brother yet."