




I got lucky...

Rocked
by **LOVE**



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ROCKED BY LOVE

ELLA GOODE

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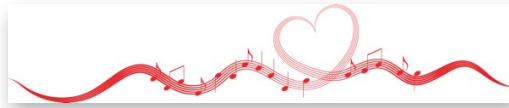
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Every night I get on stage and fifty thousand fans dance to my tunes, sing my lyrics, and scream my name. If I go to a restaurant or a club or even store, someone knows me. And it's that level of fame that drove me out into the desert after a sold out stadium show in Las Vegas. In the middle of nowhere I found a true oasis in Clover. She's not used to a fast life with bright lights but I can't go back to that world without her.

A man with no name, no job, no car isn't on top of my list of eligibles. I have a bar to run and friends to feed. I don't have time for this hot stranger who looks like he wants to eat me alive. He's got too many secrets and I'm a girl who likes open books. Unfortunately, I can't stop my heart from yearning for him. My steady foundation here feels like it's been rocked by love but I don't know if that's enough.



CHAPTER 1

DYLAN

“THANK YOU, LAS VEGAS! I LOVE YOU!” I PULL OUT MY earpiece and let the sounds of the crowd fill my head. The cheers are loud enough to raise the roof. The best part of every concert is this moment when I’ve sung every note, played every chord, and have left it all on the stage, and in return the stadium attendees scream out their love. It’s mutual, though. Fucking fans are the best. I could stay here for hours, but my body won’t take it. Blood pumping, mind buzzing, I let the lift carry me down under the stage. At the bottom, I collapse into a waiting chair. The cheers kept me upright for two hours, and now that the concert is over, I’m drained.

My assistant, Cloudy, shoves a mug into my hand. “It’s honey water.”

“Thanks,” I croak. My vocal chords are on fumes. I stretch my legs out, lean my head back and listen to the dying chants. When the crowd doesn’t want to leave, I always have the urge to go up and do one more encore. But my voice is shot, so I remain seated.

A couple hands start patting small towels against my face and neck. I close my eyes and let the styling team dry off my sweat, brush the tangles out of my hair, and remove the heavy silver rings and necklaces. Someone unbuttons my shirt, and someone else directs a fan toward me. Feeling somewhat human, I push to my feet.

“Ready?” The intrusive voice of my manager arrives.

“No.”

“It’s only a few photographs, and the person is doing the article for *GQ*.”

I swallow a sigh. The best part of being a rock star is performing. The worst part is all the other shit. “I don’t feel like it.”

“But you’ll do it.” Chris is confident, and to be honest, in the five years he’s managed my career, I’ve never given him much reason not to be. I do my interviews, show up for my performances, refrain from drugs, and earn him a shit ton of money. In exchange, he makes sure that the day-to-day bull is kept to a very bare minimum.

But there are moments where I miss playing gigs in small college towns in seedy bars that didn’t hold more than a busload of people. The floors were sticky and the acoustics were crap, and the crowd was often drunk, but there was no pressure and no expectations and no rich people angling for a photo op or interviewers trying to dig up the skeletons in your past. You played your music, and if they liked you, you got invited back. I was invited back a lot.

Another set of hands appear to wash off my chest.

“I’ll talk to the reporter, but not do the photos.”

“It’s for the promoter’s sister. He promised her. It’s her birthday.”

As if I haven’t heard that before. “When?”

“When what?”

“When’s her birthday? Today? Or seven weeks from now?” Everyone claims it’s a special occasion.

Chris pauses because he never asked.

“Falling down on the job?”

The hand that wipes down my chest is almost a little too friendly, lingering a little too long over the ridges of my abs. I glance down to see an unfamiliar face. “Enjoying yourself a little?” I ask, irritated.

The woman flushes and is immediately pulled away. Cloudy hurries over. “Sorry about that. Daniel got sick in the middle of the concert, and we pulled someone up from the costume pool. It won’t happen again.”

“I’m sure that it won’t.” I don’t need to have random girls groping me backstage.

Cloudy gives me a terse, apologetic nod and then hands me a fresh T-shirt, which I shrug on.

“Lead the way,” I tell Chris. “This is the third time the reporter has been here. Any reason why?” Usually reporters only get one, maybe two hours, at a restaurant, and sometimes they don’t even rate a restaurant.

“She said she just had some follow-up questions, and it’s Grammy season.”

“Email doesn’t exist?”

“I told her five minutes, and she did fly all the way here from New York.”

“I hate Grammy season.”

“We all do.” He claps me on the shoulder.

The promoter’s sister turns out to be the promoter’s sister, the sister’s family, her best friend, the best friend’s family, and some random neighbor. In total, there are about fourteen people in my green room. The moment I step inside, shit is shoved in my face. Everybody wants an autograph. I clench my teeth and start signing. “How much does this go for on eBay these days?” I ask one of the kids, who clearly is not a fan of mine.

He laughs uncomfortably. “No idea.”

“I wish you would’ve sung ‘No One’s Business.’ That’s my favorite,” someone chirps from the corner.

“Trying to do some of my new music,” I reply.

“When’s your next album coming out?” someone else asks.

“The current one is only three months old.” Do they think churning out music is the same as a fashion line refresh at Shein?

I spot the reporter hovering in the background. I need to get this dog and pony show over. “Ask your questions,” I order.

I guess she doesn’t like the tone of my voice because the question that zips out silences the whole room. “There’s a rumor that you have a throat problem that is exacerbated by your smoking. Are you trying to ruin your voice, or is it a cover for a deeper addiction?”

Chris moves toward her, but I motion for him to stop. “You shouldn’t believe everything you hear.”

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m here.”

“Throat sounded good for two hours out there. You be the judge.”

She asks a few other questions, which I dodge. The photographs that were only supposed to take a second last fifteen minutes. I give up smiling after the third one. There’s gonna be some rumor about me being an asshole to fans, but at this point, I don’t even care.

Chris sees my patience fray and shoves everyone out at the point that I’m about to snap. When he returns, I pin a pair of angry eyes on his craggy face. “I’m not doing any more of the shit for the rest of the tour. I see one VIP back here again, and you’re going to have to sell my autographed merch online to make money.”

“Fine. Fine. Do you want a car to take you back to the hotel, or do you want me to have the chef make you some dinner? Traffic is bad out there, and there’s a ton of fans waiting for you outside the tunnel.”

“You know what I want? I want a normal night. I want to go to a pub, have a drink, listen to some live music. I don’t want anyone asking me for an autograph, criticizing my songs, ask whether I’m drinking too much or smoking too much, or

when my next album is out. I want none of that.” I slash my hand down.

“Do you want me to get the makeup artist in here and have them do a disguise, like old man makeup and a wig?”

“No. Those itch like hell.”

“This is a bad idea.”

“I don’t give a shit. I am tired of being cooped up in my hotel room. I haven’t seen real people for weeks. I need to get out of here before I lose my mind.”

“The fifty thousand fans you had at the concert aren’t even all out of the stadium at this point. There’s no place around here where you could go where there aren’t fans.”

“I won’t go anywhere near here.”

We stare at each other until Chris gives in. “Let me make some phone calls, and I’ll arrange something.”

I can only imagine Chris’ plan. It’s going to be some ritzy place where they serve whiskey that costs \$2000 a bottle. All the men will be old cigar smokers, and the women will all be expensive side pieces, but I also know that there’s no arguing with Chris. “I’ll meet you outside.”

He smiles brightly and gives me the thumbs-up before dialing someone.

“I’m going to the john.” About twenty feet from my door, I spot a sanitation worker with a vest striped with reflective tape, gloves, and a hat. When I reach him, I pull out my wallet. “A hundred bucks for your gear.”

The man gives me a long once-over, and I can see in his eyes, recognition. I thumb out a few more bills.

He doesn’t take it. “You trying to escape, son?”

“Trying is the operative word. Can you at least give me a head start?”

He pulls off his vest. “Gotta keep the gloves, but you can have this and the hat. Keep your money.”

“Absolutely not. What you’re giving me is priceless. Use this to get your woman a nice purse or dinner or buy your daughter something she’s always dreamed of.” I pull out an even bigger wad of cash and shove it in his back pocket.

I hear my name yelled.

“Better skedaddle,” the worker instructs.

I don the vest and cap and start walking. A couple security guards rush past me, but the vest makes me invisible to them. I adjust my cap and head out into the night. My fatigue fades away, and my steps are lighter. I’m gonna have some freedom tonight. I’m going to find a place where no one knows me. I’m going to drink cheap beer, listen to real people talk, and forget, for even just a couple hours, that I’m Dylan Sign, the biggest rock star in the world.



CHAPTER 2

CLOVER

I SCREAM AS BEER SPRAYS EVERYWHERE IN THE KEG ROOM. “James!” I shout, shoving him out of the way. Okay, maybe it’s not so much of a shove. He moves on his own accord when I shoulder him out of the way. I’m only a few inches over five foot, so it’s not like I’m pushing anyone around.

Besides, no one can shove James. He’s built like a damn tank, and that’s part of the problem. When one of my taps ran out, he said he’d go change the keg out for me. I was in the middle of making a round of drinks and shots. I guess he missed me shaking my head no. I had planned on changing the tank myself once I finished up that round of drinks. But when I went in the back, I found James trying to do it himself.

The man really has no idea how strong he is. It’s why I can’t ever let him behind the bar. He breaks glasses and bottles so easily. Either with his hands or by slamming them down too hard. He’s the bouncer or security. It’s what I hired him to do eight months ago after I lost my father suddenly. This was originally my dad’s bar. Once he passed, I inherited it. I grew up in this place, but I knew I needed some muscle because it can get rough at times. It’s a dive bar. My dad was good at keeping people in line. Me, not so much. It’s hard to get in someone’s face when you’re my size.

I fix the keg, stopping the spray. “Sorry.” James drops his head. He’s a giant-ass teddy bear of a man I can’t stay mad at. He doesn’t mean any harm. He just underestimates his size and strength sometimes.

“It’s fine.” I’m going to have to run the line to clear out all the heads, but it is what it is. If I’ve learned anything since

losing my dad, it's that life happens. You can't control everything. You can either cry about it or you can roll with it. No matter what, life goes on. What's done is done.

"I'll clean this up. You should ah, change." James looks anywhere but at me. I glance down to see my white T-shirt with the bar's green logo Get Lucky is soaked.

"Shit." I pull my shirt away from my body so my nipples aren't on full display. I have a bra on but a thin one. "I'll be back." I rush out the back to go find a change of clothes.

I have to cut back through the bar to get to the other side where there is a small office and kitchen that makes a handful of food items. It's nothing fancy, but my apartment with fresh clothes is above the bar. We aren't packed tonight, so I make a straight cut toward the back door. Suddenly the bathroom door swings open, and a man steps out. I'm not fast enough to stop myself from colliding with him.

"Sorry!" I squeak when I run into him. I brace myself, knowing I'm going to fall backwards because whoever I just ran into is like a freaking wall. I would have guessed it to be James, but he's still in the keg room.

"Fuck," the man grunts. He grabs my shoulders, pulling me back into him, stopping me from falling backwards.

"Sorry, sorry," I repeat. My dad named me Clover because he said I was lucky. I'm starting to think he took all my luck with him.

"How about you just watch where you're going?" the deep voice says. I have to drop my head all the way back to stare up into brown honey-colored eyes. I've never seen anything like them in my life. Our eyes stay locked for a long moment. It's not only his eyes that are stunning but the man himself is gorgeous. I don't think I've ever seen anyone more handsome. He probably thinks I ran into him on purpose.

"I said I was sorry. Your first drink is on me. Or did you already have one? If so, I'll cover the next." I try to step back, but he doesn't let me go.

“You’re wet.” Heat rushes my face. My mind goes where it shouldn’t because that is so not what he means. “Did I miss the wet T-shirt contest or something?” I scrunch my nose.

“We don’t do that here. The bar might be called Get Lucky, but if you really want to *get lucky* you should check out Shady Lady. It’s three miles that way.” I point my thumb behind me in the direction of the strip club.

“It was a joke.” Now he’s the one who seems flustered. “I came here for a beer.”

“The hell!” I hear James shout from behind me.

“Let go.” I wiggle backwards. The man actually does as I ask. “James, I’m fine. I ran into him.” I glance over my shoulder at James, who is glaring at the man. The word *Security* written in bold white letters on his black shirt makes it clear who he is.

“I don’t push myself on women.” The handsome man holds his hands up.

No, I don’t think he’d have to. His eyes drop, and I suddenly remember where I was going and why.

“I’ll be back. I’m changing. He gets a free beer,” I tell James before I make my way around the gorgeous man. He grabs my hand before I can make my escape.

“What’s your name?” His voice comes out rougher now. I don’t know if it’s that or his touch, but my whole body comes alive with a strange tingle across my skin.

“Clover. I own the place.” I give him a smile. I’ve somehow kept this place going, and I’m kind of proud of that. I wasn’t sure I’d be able to do it, but I have so far.

“Clover.” He repeats my name in a husky tone.

“And yours?” His brows lift at my question.

“My name?” he asks as though no one has ever asked him that before.

“Well, yeah.” I laugh.

“Dylan.”

“Well, Dylan, welcome to Get Lucky.”

“How do you know I’ve never been here before?” he asks, still holding on to my hand.

“Cause I know everyone here.” And I would so remember him if I’d seen him before. A lot of people are regulars or old timers. We get some new faces here and there.

“Do you now?” A smile plays on his lips. Am I missing something?

“Yeah, I do.” I pull my hand from his. “I’ll be back.”

“Promise?”

“Like I said, I own the place. I’m not going anywhere,” I tell him before I turn to head toward the back. Is he flirting with me? It takes everything inside of me not to glance over my shoulder to see if he’s watching me walk away.

I don’t date customers or do one-night stands.

I never get lucky around here. Or anywhere, for that matter.



CHAPTER 3

DYLAN

SHE DOESN'T RECOGNIZE ME. THERE WASN'T A FLICKER OF recognition in her beautiful blue eyes. I practically skip to the bar. The security guard follows me and ducks under an open part of the bar.

“What're you having?”

“Whatever's on tap.” I haven't drunk beer in a long time. A case of dark malts are in my rider, but that's for Chris. I usually drink whiskey and sometimes this moonshine that my bodyguard and I discovered during the Asia leg of my last tour. It's 58 proof and knocks you on your ass.

“Light or regular? You look like a light guy.” His hand is on a tap, ready to pour me the wateriest beer possible.

“Even if I was a light guy, I'd have to say regular because obviously my manhood is on the line here.”

Mr. Security doesn't crack a smile, but he does move his hand one spigot over and fills a frosty mug with a dark liquid. He has a challenging glint in his eye when he places the mug in front of me. I feel compelled to drink half of it in one go. Like I said, my manhood is being challenged.

He grunts when I set the mug down, but I can't decipher if it's approval or disgust. I finish it and motion for him to hit me with another. As he's refilling my mug, I allow my gaze to wander over to where Clover disappeared. She said she'd be back, but the minutes are ticking by. To occupy myself, I inspect the interior. It's actually a lot bigger inside than the drab exterior suggests. Had I known how big it was, I might not have stopped in, but there was something about the four-

leaf clover logo and the words *Get Lucky* that felt like a sign. I'd been lucky to escape the stadium, lucky to find a taxi driver who was willing to take me anywhere—literally—for the right price, lucky to find a bar where no one knew me, lucky to run into a smoking hot babe like Clover. *Get Lucky* is my new motto.

There's no stage here like my old college bars. Instead, a couple pool tables line the back wall. A vintage jukebox in the corner plays some old '80s rock, and a handful of people sit around tables, some eating, one group playing cards, and a couple looking like they are on an awkward first date. None of the patrons seem to require someone with the word *Security* emblazoned on their shirt.

"See a lot of fights in here?" I turn back to the bartender.

"No."

"Maybe they haven't drunk enough," I muse. Early on in my career, I went on a few benders, and that was about the only time I needed security.

"You're awfully nosy." He wipes down a non-existent spill.

"How so? I haven't asked you a question about your finances, your smoking habits, who you're sleeping with. I don't think I've even begun to be nosy."

He folds his burly arms across his chest. "You trying to start a fight with me?"

I think my bodyguard would have a hard time taking this guy down.

"You always work security? Do any personal protection services?" I wonder.

His mouth thins into a tight line. He stomps over to the corner of the bar and pulls a phone from behind a bottle on the counter. His loud, deep voice barks into the receiver. "You better get down here because I'm gonna beat the pretty boy up."

I think he meant for me to hear that.

I finish off my second beer and wave him back. “I’ll have another one.”

“You gonna start a tab or what? Only the first one was free.”

I open my wallet and consider my limited options. I have several hundred-dollar bills and a black card. Neither form of payment seems right for the setting. The credit card has my name on it, and the hundred-dollar bill is way too big for this place. I lay the bill on the counter. “For everyone here since I’m a stranger.”

Security fingers the bill and then holds it up to the light for a long moment. When he finally decides it’s authentic, he shoves it into the drawer. “No offense.”

“None taken.” I grin. I haven’t had so much fun since the after-party of my first Grammys when I lost to some industry plant whose father owns the largest recording studio in the world. All the other losers and I went out and got lit. So many wild rumors started because of that night. I might be still dating one of those strippers or the male popstar who was caught sitting on my lap for a hot second. He’d fallen, but the photo made it look like we were extra cozy that night. I leave it up for the tabloids to fight over my social life—which due to my nonstop touring has been non-existent. When you’re on tour, you’re lucky to see anything outside of the venue, the hotel, and your staff. It’s playing one night, maybe two in one city and then moving on to another city the next night. It’s how you build your fanbase, how you pay your bills, but it also is how you lose all contact with the real world.

The door opens, and I feel a shift in the air. Instinctively, I know Clover is back. A spire of electricity spikes in my veins. Her T-shirt is exactly the same with the green four-leaf clover situated on a white background. This one isn’t wet, unfortunately.

“Are you giving my bartender a hard time?” she asks when she joins Security behind the bar.

“No ma’am.”

“What even brings you to Loveland? If you were looking for Vegas, you missed it about an hour West.”

“Loveland? Is that the name of this town?” Get Lucky is real.

“Yeah,” she says slowly, considering my answer.

“I came from Vegas. It was too noisy.” I jerk my thumb toward the back of the bar. “How come you don’t have a stage for a live band?”

She stiffens. “Not really into that.”

That explains why she doesn’t recognize me.

“Not into music or not into live music?” How can anyone not be into music?

“Music,” she says.

“You have a jukebox over here.”

“It came with the place,” she snaps.

Music appears to be a touchy subject. How can I be hard over someone who doesn’t like music? I frown at my lap and silently tell my dick I’m disappointed in him. He doesn’t care.

A bell rings, and Security disappears behind a door I hadn’t noticed before. When he returns, he has a tray of burgers, nachos, and sizzling fajitas. My stomach growls.

“I’ll have to take one of those.”

“There are three things on this tray.”

“I’ll have one of all of them.” I never eat before a concert, and I’d forgotten about that until just this moment. Usually, I eat after I’m done performing and then pass out full of carbs and red meat.

Security dips his head toward the kitchen. “Hey, Clov—”

“I’m on it,” she replies and ducks into the back kitchen.

The short exchange makes me testy. They’ve known each other so long that they’re finishing each other’s sentences. I can’t say why that bothers me, but it does. Like I know it’s irrational as hell to get angry over the fact that she’s more

friendly with Security than me, but in the back of my head, it should be me finishing her sentences, and it should be my mind she's reading. We should be in bed together, naked and fucking.

"You keep looking at her ass like that, I'm gonna take your eyes out," Security growls in my ear as he passes.

When he returns from delivering the food, I ask him straight-out, "You two a thing?"

I hadn't intended to fight this brick house, but I mean, if I gotta do it, I gotta do it. He'll have a weakness somewhere. Everyone does.

He scowls. "No, she's my boss."

"No workplace romances allowed in the bar?"

"The problem with your type is that your mind is on only one thing."

"My mind is on food," I lie, but he's right. My mind is totally in my pants.

"Bullshit." Security can see right through me.

Thankfully, Clover appears with the nachos. "The rest will be up in a sec." Sensing the tension in the air, she bounces suspiciously back and forth between Security and me. "What's going on?"

"Nothing." Security turns and heads over to the door.

"I think he's feeling territorial," I say before popping a chip into my mouth.

"Over what?"

"I think he might have a thing for you."

"Doubtful. James is in a committed relationship with Brian, who owns the hardware store."

"So no one's gonna jack me up if I ask for your number."

"No one will object, but you're not getting it either."

"Why not?"

“For at least a hundred reasons, the first of which is I don’t know you. You could be a serial killer.”

“Your radar might be a little broken. The vibe I’m giving off is not that I wanna kill you but that I wanna kiss you.”



CHAPTER 4

CLOVER

HIS WORDS TAKE ME A BIT BY SURPRISE. HE COULD BE ON THE cover of a magazine with how handsome he is, where I'm more the sporty small-town girl. Then again, if he wants to get laid, he doesn't have a ton of options in the bar at the moment, and he might think I'm an easy bet. It's a good thing he left Vegas because he's going to bust and not in the way that he's wanting.

"You're not my type." His brows lift. I get a small kick out of the fact that I've surprised him with my response. I'm sure girls fall all over themselves to get his attention or for so much as a mere kiss. "I don't do one-night stands." I get right to the point.

"Thank fuck." He lets out a breath, his body relaxing back into his seat.

"You're not looking to get laid?" Now I'm the surprised one. Is he turning me down now? I'm so confused and oddly a smidge disappointed. Which is crazy because I don't even know this man.

"I wasn't, but I wouldn't turn you down to save my life. But you scared me for a second. I thought you weren't into men."

"Oh." I laugh, getting how he got there from my response. "I think you're handsome enough to have any girl second-guess what she's into." As soon as the words slip past my lips, I want to grab them back. I can see the sparkle of hope in his eyes, and I know he's going to latch on to the fact that I said he's handsome.

“So you think I’m handsome.” He gives me a charming smile that has my toes curling. This man is dangerous. Thankfully, James appears with the rest of Dylan’s food so I don’t have to answer that question.

“Let me grab you some napkins,” I say, trying to think of any excuse to get away from him. I need a minute to think and get my bearings. There is something about this man that has me off-kilter. Something I’m not used to. When I’d gone to change my shirt, I’d made sure my hair was in place and put on lip gloss and mascara.

“These are fine.” He grabs a few of the bar napkins.

“You need ketchup.” I make another attempt at escaping him and his charm.

“Are you trying to get away from me?” He ignores his food, all his attention focused directly on me. I’ve never wanted attention from a man while not wanting it at the same time.

“I’m doing my job.”

“Aren’t bartenders part-time therapists?” I snort a laugh.

“Sometimes.” I shrug. At times, I enjoy listening to people tell me their stories. Other times not so much. “What’s your story, Dylan? What brought you to Loveland?”

“How about we go question for question? I answer yours but you gotta answer mine in return.”

“What makes you think I really want to hear your answer and I’m not just doing my job?”

“Ouch.” He puts his hand on his chest, pretending to be wounded, but I catch something in his eyes. My words did hit, and I’d only meant to tease. I didn’t think he’d have an ego that could be bruised with the way he looks.

“All right. Answer mine and then I’ll give you one.” I finally relent because I do want to know why this man is here. It’s more common for people to flee to Vegas than to here.

“Needed to get out. Was starting to feel like I couldn’t breathe anymore.”

“You’re running?”

“Ah-ah. It’s my turn.”

“Right,” I huff. What can he really ask me that would bother me to answer?

“Music. Why do you hate it?” Holy shit. Out of all the things he could have asked, that is actually one I don’t much care to talk about.

“Some people are the opposite, Dylan. Vegas calls to them. I was only a small girl when my mother took off to make it big. She really had the voice of an angel,” I admit, not wanting to lie about my mother. Even though she abandoned my dad and me to pursue her own dreams.

“Had?” His face softens, and he puts down his burger he was about to take a bite out of.

“Ah-ah. It’s my turn.” I tease, reminding him of his own rules.

“That’s a hell of a cliffhanger.”

“She’s not dead. At least not that I’m aware of. The last time and only time I looked her up, she wasn’t singing, but she is working in the industry.” I try to keep any emotion out of my voice.

I know she got some notoriety because one time I heard her songs playing over the speakers at the grocery store. I knew her voice. She used to sing to me every night before I went to bed. I’d turned and walked out of the grocery store leaving my half-filled cart behind. The barrage of emotions I’d felt had been too much for me to handle.

When Dad passed, I don’t know why I did it, but I thought maybe I should tell her. After a quick search on the internet, I knew she didn’t give a shit about us. She has a whole new life.

“She left you. That’s fucked up. I don’t see how anyone can walk away from you.”

“You’re really good with your pickup lines.” I grab a fresh cup to get him another beer.

“It’s not a line.”

“Well—” I set his drink back down. “It wasn’t only me she left. It was this place and my dad. She never looked back. Not even when my dad passed.” My voice cracks. This time I can’t hide my emotions. I almost could forgive her for leaving me, but I will never be able to forgive her for hurting my dad.

“I’m sorry.” He reaches out and grabs my hand resting on the bar. “How long ago?”

“Almost nine months.” He gives my hand a squeeze. That same flash of heat from when he’d grabbed my hand earlier flows through me. “I miss him.”

When he first passed, it was all people wanted to talk to me about. I’d often end up in tears, so now the regulars never bring him up to me. It’s bittersweet. Some days I want to remember everything about him, and others I want to lock it away in the back of my mind.

“Your turn.” He doesn’t let go of my hand.

“You’re not running away from a wife or girlfriend, are you?”

“Never had one, but things change.” Before I can ask him what that means, someone comes up to the bar to order a round.

“I’ll be back.” I pull my hand from his to go make their drinks.

“I’m not going anywhere,” I hear him say.

Liar. Everyone leaves. It’s the way of the world. Even if they don’t want to.



CHAPTER 5

DYLAN

THE VOICE OF AN ANGEL COMMENT TICKLES SOME MEMORY receptor in the back of my head, but I can't quite bring it forward. There are a few singers that have the "angel" adjective used to describe their voices—Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, maybe Ariana Grande for everyone born after 2000. There's someone else, but the name is escaping me.

I think about what I want to ask next. What is her type since she ruled me out? Or maybe what type of guy does she think I am? Other than someone who is into one-night stands. I wonder how I give that vibe off. Is it something I'm wearing?

She swings back into range.

"My turn," I remind her.

She grabs a mug and flips one of the taps down. "Shoot."

"Favorite memory."

Her eyebrows shoot up. "Thought for sure you would go with a sex question."

"Gotta keep you on your toes." Inwardly I'm sighing with relief that I changed up the topic at the last minute.

She sets aside the mug and grabs another. "Favorite memory?" Her fingers dance along the top of the keg pull as if she's sifting through, and discarding, memory cards in her brain.

"Halloween. Age ten. I dressed up as a Red Ranger, the OG power ranger, and my dad went as Magna Defender since he's one of the canonically oldest power rangers. As we were out trick-or-treating, we ran into another dude dressed as the

evil Green Ranger. Dad pretended to engage him in battle. As the two were fighting, the evil Green Ranger tripped on a rock or something and fell into some bushes. When he got up, his costume ripped, and his bare ass was hanging out.

“Dad tore his plastic pumpkin bucket in half, and then using his belt and some fabric from his own costume, somehow fixed the pumpkin halves over the guy’s ass. The other dude looked so funny with his butt covered in the plastic pumpkin that I nearly peed my pants laughing.” She arranges three full mugs on a tray and hoists it on top of her shoulder. “I’m going to deliver these, and when I come back, it’ll be my turn.”

I can’t wait. Her next question requires some nimbleness. She slides into the stool next to me and lays her tray on the bar. “What do you do for a living?”

Not music. “I’m in crowd engagement.”

She wrinkles her nose. “Is that like corporate speak for ‘social media influencer’?”

I contemplate my sixty million followers on Instagram. “Yeah, something like that. Does that make me more or less like a guy who wants to have a one-night stand?”

Her mouth opens, but before she can answer, I raise my hand. “Forget it. I don’t want to waste my question on that.”

A quick grin spreads across her face. “You’re lucky because I was about to answer.”

Between the curve of her lips and the scrunch of her nose, she’s so fucking beautiful I could eat my fist. I want her badly, and I have to be in Los Angeles in two days for a four-night gig at SoFi Stadium. How am I going to swing this? Because I don’t want her to be in my bed for a single night. I don’t want to stop trading questions with her. This is the most fun I’ve had since forever—as in, I legitimately can’t recall the last time I enjoyed myself so much.

Sure, being on stage is a high that can’t be matched by anything, but that’s a momentary rush of endorphins and it fades quickly. Usually by the time the lift hits the ground floor,

I'm dead, and only tendrils of the stage's intense emotional glory remains. Bantering with Clover is something I could see doing every day and not tiring of it, and I can only imagine how good she'd feel in bed. Better than the stage, I'd bet.

"If you were to have a super power, what would it be?"

She bursts out laughing. "You always surprise me. I didn't know exactly what question you were going to ask, but it wasn't this one, that's for sure. I guess flying? That seems super cool although I get motion sickness and haven't flown in years but superheroes don't get air sickness, right?"

"If you're wishing, I think it comes in a package. The ability to fly plus no motion sickness."

"Okay, I'll take that one. How about you?"

"Is that your question?"

"Yeah, if it's good for you, it's good for me." She gives me a challenging look.

I don't hesitate. "Invisibility." The ability to go anywhere and do anything without having a camera in my face or some paparazzi staked out in a tree with a zoom lens that could probably take photos of aliens on the moon is a fantasy that will never come true. The closest I get to being unknown is when the makeup team puts a wig on me and does some kind of old person makeup. I strap on a fake stomach and pull a too-tight T-shirt over it. For the most part, it's worked, but the wig is hot as hell, and after a couple of hours, my makeup will start melting off.

Being here in Loveland with Clover is as close to being invisible as I've ever been, and yet she sees me as clearly as anyone in my inner circle. I want to wrap this moment up and hang on to it for as long as possible.

"No follow-up question?"

"Trying to think of the best question to ask but rather than beat around the bush, let me be straightforward. I can only spend a few days here in Loveland. I want to spend them with you. They can be in bed, they can be in this bar, they can be on top of a sand dune. I don't really care so long as the hours are

with you. Will you be with me?" I lay my hand on the bar, palm up, and wait.



CHAPTER 6

CLOVER

ONCE AGAIN, HIS QUESTION SURPRISES ME. IT'S ON THE TIP OF my tongue to say yes, but my brain screams no.

“Anyone is welcome to come to the bar.” I sidestep his question, my mind reeling over it.

“If that’s all I can get, then I’ll take it.” He gives me that devastating smile that makes me happy that I’m sitting down so my knees can’t go weak. What is it with this man and me? There’s something between us that I don’t understand.

“You know there is only one hotel in town, and it’s sold out.” I plug in that tidbit of information.

“How do you know it’s sold out? You own that too?” he teases.

“It’s the Barkers’ annual family reunion. The hotel only has seven rooms. Three of them are always out of service because beyond the Barker family reunion, which happens once a year, it’s never sold out.”

“Who are these Barkers?”

“They’re a”—I hold up my fingers and do air quotes—“motorcycle gang.”

“Motorcycle gang?” I shrug.

“I don’t know what else to call them. They were all in the Army together. Now they have their motorcycle gang. It’s a nice one. Not scary at all. Unless they’re provoked. They might be in their sixties, but they handle themselves.” Dylan laughs. It comes out husky. How can someone’s laugh be sexy? Is that really a thing? I suppose so because I’m

witnessing it firsthand. But I find myself thinking that when it comes to a lot of things that have to do with this man.

“I’ll figure it out.”

“Are you really going to hang around Loveland for a few days?”

“Told you. I want to spend more time with you.”

“Then what?” That’s my hang-up. Dylan is too charming. I’m already ready to give and say to hell with it. Every girl should get a one-night stand in their life, right? It’s not as though there is anyone from this town I’m interested in. When you grow up in small towns like these, everyone knows each other. Which means that most people have dated at some point or at least hooked up.

“Then I head back to work for a bit and maybe you’ll invite me back.”

“We might end up hating each other after a few days. How do you know I’m not one of those people who chews with their mouth open or picks their nose? I could be annoying as hell.”

“I’m not worried about you being annoying. I can promise you that.” He picks up his beer and chugs half of it back. I’m not sure what made him run away from Vegas, but he needs a break. I can see it in his eyes. As charming as he’s being, he’s tired. Some days I wish I could run away for a few days.

“Give me your ID.” Dylan hesitates but pulls out his wallet. I don’t miss the mound of cash inside. His job must pay well.

I’ve never done the whole social media thing. It never appealed to me. There’s really no need for it in this small town. We all know what each other is doing without having to post online. I mean, technically Get Lucky could be considered the hub of our social media. This is where people come to see what’s happening in everyone’s lives.

He hands it over, and I pull out my phone and take a picture of it before texting it to James. “What are you doing?” I hand him his ID back.

“I’m not going to steal your identity.” I laugh. “I texted it to James so now if you murder me in my sleep, he’ll have your information.”

“So that he and the Barkers motorcycle gang can track me down and get revenge?”

“Something like that.” I laugh even harder. “But really, the hotel is booked up but the answer is yes. You can spend a few days with me. My place”—I point over my head—“isn’t giant, but I’ve got a sofa you can crash on.” I know I’m acting impulsively, but it feels good to do something that makes me happy. What’s the worst that could happen?

“I’m not going to argue with that offer.” That smile lights up his face once again, making me second-guess my decision for a moment. Knowing there is no way I’m ever going to be the same after this.

We spend the rest of the night going back and forth with random questions. Before I know it, I’m calling last round and locking up for the night.

“You sure about this?” James asks me as he puts his coat on. He’s glaring over my shoulder at Dylan, who is cleaning. Yes, cleaning. I hadn’t asked him to help. He got up on his own and started to straighten up.

“Yeah, I am.” I smile up at him. James finally softens.

“All right. You’re an adult.”

“Also your boss,” I point out.

“Right.” He chuckles.

“Why is that funny?”

“Break her heart and I’ll break your face,” James shouts across the empty bar, ignoring my question.

“And if she breaks mine?” Dylan tosses back, making James smirk.

“Clover breaks every single straight man’s heart in Loveland.”

“Whatever.” I roll my eyes and start to push James out the door. He goes, and I lock it behind him before setting the alarm.

“Anything else we need to do before we head up?” Dylan asks as I make my way back across the bar.

“I think that’s it. We can, ah, head up.” I suddenly feel shy. We’d fallen into fun banter when we’d been going question for question, but now this is getting real.

“I’m not going to ask you for anything, Irish. In fact, you’ll have to kiss me first.”

“Irish?” I asked, coming to stand in front of him.

“Clover, Get Lucky,” He wraps a piece of my hair around his finger. “The red hair. So yeah, Irish.” He gave me a nickname? Why do I love that?

“All right.” I grab the front of his shirt and pull him down as I lift up on my tiptoes and do the one thing that I told myself I wouldn’t do. I kiss him.

What can one kiss really hurt?



CHAPTER 7

DYLAN

THE KISS TAKES ME BY SURPRISE, BUT I DON'T HESITATE. When opportunity knocks at your door, you throw it the fuck open and welcome that bastard inside.

I sweep my hand under her hair and tug her head back so I can deepen the kiss. Our tongues tangle around each other. Our teeth clash. The taste of her mouth makes me hungry for more. I move my mouth from her lips to her jaw, down the column of her neck. My hands find her tits. I cup those juicy melons and mold the flesh to fit my palms.

“Gonna suck on your tits now,” I tell her before reaching down to grab the hem of her T-shirt. She doesn't resist when I sweep it up over her head. When the sight of her lace-covered breasts come into view, I momentarily lose track of my thoughts. She's a vision. Ripe, bouncy globes barely restrained by some elastic and lace. Her hands come up to cover herself, rousing me out of my stunned daze. “No, Irish, never hide from me. You're too beautiful for that. Like I've written shit before about beautiful things, but I didn't know what beauty was. I'm a fool.”

I pull down one cup until the nipple pokes out. It wobbles in the air, like an invitation to come and suck. I take that invitation and draw the nub into my mouth. Her hands land on my shoulders and then find their way into my hair. She inhales a shaky breath and clutches me to her chest.

“I shouldn't be letting you do this. I'm not sleeping with you tonight.”

She sounds unsure.

“Who said anything about sleeping?” I growl. I move to her other tit and tease that nipple into a hard nub. “I just want to taste you. Your mouth wasn’t enough. I want to know how your tits feel in my mouth. I want to kiss your inner thighs and the backs of your legs. I want to slide my tongue right here.” I cup her sex through her jeans. “None of that has shit to do with sleeping.”

“You know what I meant.”

I pause in my trek down her stomach and peer up at her. “You tell me to stop and I won’t touch you again.”

She hesitates, and that’s enough answer for me. I pop the button on her jeans and slide them down. Her hands tremble on my shoulders as she uses me for balance to step out of one leg and then the other.

I boost her up on the bar and then spread her legs apart. The material covering her sex is darker, damp. My mouth waters.

“You look like a goddess up here on the bar. Like you own the place.”

She licks her lips nervously. “I do own the place.”

“So you do.” I don’t even feel stupid about my remark. My head’s filled with lust and need, and it’s shocking that I can even form a sentence. I smooth my hands along her inner thighs. The skin there is soft. Around her mouth and neck, I see signs of my beard. I drag a hand across my chin.

“Should’ve shaved but didn’t think I’d need to.”

Her hand comes to cover mine. “That actually makes me feel better. Like this wasn’t planned.”

“Irish, you have no idea how unplanned this is. I got in a taxi and told them to drive, and then I made them stop because the sign said Get Lucky, and that’s exactly what I want. A little luck. Just a taste.” I wink at her before leaning forward to press a kiss just shy of the crease of her leg. I take a deep breath and fill my lungs with the smell of her arousal. “You’re driving me crazy.” I push her knees apart and pepper kisses along her thighs. Her skin pebbles with goosebumps, and I can

see her sex clenching against the thin covering of her lace panties.

I take my time, paying attention to her legs, the backs of her knees, the tender skin of her ankle. I kiss my way across the top of her feet even though she tries to tug them away. “I was on them all day,” she claims.

“A woman who works. I like it.” Her scent is honest and lovely.

I work my way back up, squeezing the muscles of her calves, loving the press of her thighs against my mouth. My nose nudges softly against her core.

“God, you’re sexy.” I laugh at myself. “This is now my favorite place in the world. You’re going to need to bolt this stool to the floor and put a plaque on it that says *Here sat Dylan. He saw heaven and died on the spot.*”

“You’re silly.” She brushes my hair away from my temple. “I’m going to have to bleach this spot. No one’s going to want to sit here after I’ve rubbed my ass all over the bar.”

“You’re wrong. You could probably charge extra, but since I’d have to kill anyone who even so much as got a whiff of how you smell, maybe bleach is for the best.” I run a finger up one edge of her panties. She shivers and tries to close her legs, but my big body is between them. There’s no escape from me.

I toy with her more, watching in fascination as the wet patch on her panties grows darker and larger. Her desire is spreading. I tug the cloth away, my finger brushing against her sensitive skin.

Above me, she gasps. I slide one finger along the wet lips of her sex. “You ever look at yourself here?”

“No.”

“You should. It’s the sexiest sight in the world. I could probably come just staring at you, but I’m done looking. It’s time to feast.”



CHAPTER 8

CLOVER

I DIG MY FINGERS INTO DYLAN'S HAIR. THE MAN WAS NOT kidding. He wants to touch and taste every part of me. If not for the pleasure I'm lost in, I might cry. You never know how much you long for something until it's there at your fingertips.

"Oh God." I moan as Dylan's tongue circles my clit. His fingers dig into my thighs to spread them open wider, giving him all the room he needs.

"I love you calling me God, Irish, but I want my name on your lips."

"Dylan." I tug on his hair. "Less talk."

"You don't want to hear my voice?" He smirks.

"No! I want to feel your mouth." I don't have to ask him again. He buries his face back between my thighs. His tongue slips lower this time. He stiffens it and thrusts it in and out of me. My hips start to rock, wanting more of what he's giving me. But as much as I love this new sensation, I want more. I need more. Something bigger, thicker.

He pulls his tongue out, replacing it with a finger. That hadn't been what I was thinking, but I'll take it. Right now, I'll take anything.

"You're tight." He pushes his finger in and out slowly. He suddenly stops.

"Dylan! You've wanted in my pants all night, why are you teasing me?" I'd murder him, but I'm already addicted to him and his mouth.

“You’re a virgin.” My heart sinks. If I wasn’t already flushed before, I sure am now. My face warms all over. Does that change something? I try to close my thighs, which is pointless because he’s between them. “Has anyone ever licked you, Irish?” He licks his glistening lips that are coated with me. I’m soaked. I didn’t even know a girl could get this wet. I shake my head no. He closes his eyes and sucks in a deep breath.

“Dylan?” I ask, unsure of what his reaction means.

“Yeah?” He starts to thrust his finger in and out of me again.

“Nothing.” I drop my head back, not wanting to say anything that may cause him to stop again. I’ve never experienced anything like this in my life, and I don’t want it to end.

“Not nothing. It’s everything,” I hear him say before his mouth is back on my clit. This time, he doesn’t tease me. He gives me exactly what I need. I cry out his name as the orgasm hits me hard with only a few flicks of his tongue. He doesn’t stop. Dylan drinks it down and keeps going. One orgasm turns into another. It’s too much.

“Dylan, I can’t.” I shake my head no while tightening my hold on his hair, not really wanting him to stop.

“I want one more. I know you can give it to me. Please,” he begs as he hooks his fingers, hitting a spot deep inside of me. I’m not sure what he did, but the pleasure is so intense, my vision blurs as I scream out his name. This orgasm is different from the others. It comes from somewhere deep inside of me. It explodes out.

My whole body goes limp. I don’t know how, but the next thing I know, I’m in Dylan’s arms and he’s carrying me up to my place above the bar.

“You don’t have a lock on this door?” My eyes flutter open.

“Why would I need one?” The bar is locked.

“You ever up here while the bar is open?” He carries me over to my small sofa and sets me down on it. I glance from my couch to him. He’ll never be able to sleep on this thing, but I think in the back of my mind I knew that.

“Sometimes.” Dylan shakes his head, not caring for my answer as he goes back over to close the door behind us.

“Someone could come up here.”

“With a bar full of people?”

“Yeah, they could come up here while you’re working too. They could wait for everyone to leave and for you to be all alone.” The look on his face grows more concerned.

“Oh.” I’d never thought about that. Before my father passed, we hadn’t used the small apartment above it for anything more than an office. I swallow a lump that has formed in my throat. Dylan’s words are the same as my dad would have said to me if he were here.

I moved up here right after I lost him. I couldn’t bear to stay in my childhood home. It no longer felt like a home at all without him there. I grabbed what I thought I might need from it and haven’t gone back. James lives across the street from it, so someone is watching it to a degree.

“I’ll put a lock on it tomorrow.”

“Okay,” I agree. I watch him as he glances over my tiny place. There isn’t really a kitchen. Only a small fridge and sink. If I need to cook something, I do it downstairs. I have a table with one chair. The table is my office. I never eat at it.

“Bathroom.” I point to one door. Then another. “Bedroom.”

“It’s cute,” he says, causing me to snort a laugh.

“Cute?” I take a real look for myself. I had given it a fresh paint job when I moved in. It hadn’t really needed one, but I find I need to keep busy.

“Smells like you.”

“What do I smell like?” I take a deep breath and don’t smell anything.

“Lavender.”

“That’s my soap.” I point toward the bathroom. “If you shower, you’ll smell like it too.”

“That’s a good idea. I think I’ll enjoy smelling like you.” He walks over to the bathroom, pushing the door open and flicking the light on. “Good.”

“Good?”

“It will fit both of us.” He pulls his shirt off. I stare at his broad, muscular chest.

“What did you say you did for a living again? Are you sure you’re not a model? Oh! I got it!” I snap my fingers. “Personal trainer.”

“No.” He laughs, running his fingers through his hair. I swear his cheeks redden a tinge. It’s adorable. Damn it. I might already be done for when it comes to Dylan.



CHAPTER 9

DYLAN

I STARE AT THE INGREDIENTS I'VE ACCUMULATED ON THE counter. Eggs. Cheese. Tomatoes. Some green things with small white bulbs that look somewhat familiar but I'm not sure the name. A pan. A pot. A spoon. Not one of the small ones you eat soup with but a large spoon for stirring. I glance at my phone. If I could turn it on, I could do a search and find instructions on how to cook some breakfast for my woman. But turning my phone on means that I'm going to get a flood of notifications about how I abandoned my crew, that my whole tour is in danger, that if I don't get my ass to Las Vegas or Los Angeles—wherever Chris is at the moment—within the hour, the entirety of my career will crash down around my ears. I plan to return. I still have one more day before the concert day in LA. I know my set by heart and can do a short soundcheck sometime tomorrow afternoon. It'll work.

I've never made breakfast before. Before I got famous, I was a cereal guy. I never learned to cook and subsisted on takeout, sandwiches, and cereal. There are literally hundreds of different kinds, and I swear I've tried them all. Cereal is a broke indie musician food, not the kind you serve to a woman who you plan to bed. I don't think scrambled eggs are the ideal morning-after food either but something hot comes off as more caring than milk and crackers.

I pick up an egg and hover it over the pan—the smaller, flatter one. Do I throw it in? Nah, I think I crack it against the edge. I tap the shell and nothing happens. I strike the edge harder, and the entire thing breaks in my hand.

“Shit.” I shake my hand over the sink and try again. The third time I get it right; only fragments of the shell fall into the pan along with the yolk and whites. Fishing those fuckers out with a fork or even my fingers doesn’t work.

“You should use the shell.”

I jerk upright. “Huh?”

Miss Irish herself, looking tousled and delectable, strolls toward me wearing a Get Lucky T-shirt that is big enough for the both of us. Struck dumb, I let her push me away from the counter. She grabs one of the shells and scoops out the fragments. “What were you making?”

“Eggs.” I peer into the pan. “How’d you do that?”

“Use the shell. I don’t know why, but it cuts through the membrane and allows you to capture the floaties. My mom—” She cuts herself off. “What kind of eggs?” she asks me in a quick change of subject.

I go along with it because it’s morning and she looks delicious, and I have to leave tomorrow or maybe even be on the red-eye tonight.

“How many different types of eggs are there?”

She scrunches her brows together. “Are you an alien?”

“No?”

“You’re not sure?”

“Did I feel like an alien last night?” I waggle my eyebrows.

She blushes adorably. “No sex talk during the daylight hours.” She turns away to toss the empty egg shell in the trash.

“Who made that rule up?”

“It’s a universal rule, or do you have different ones for your morning after?” There’s an edge to her tone that warns me to walk carefully. Good thing I have nothing to worry about.

“Would not know. I have never had a morning after for sex.” Although does fingering count as a sexual encounter? “This is my first.”

“Because you always sneak out the night before?”

Now it’s my turn to be irritable. “You speaking from experience?” I was sure she was a virgin. Not that it matters in the end.

“No. It was obvious it was my first time.” She pokes her self-righteous chin in the air.

“I don’t know about obvious.” She’d felt tight and hot and wet and fuck, I can feel my half morning wood rise to full mast. “Since I’ve never fingered anyone before, I wouldn’t know whether you’re different or the same as another woman.”

She casts a suspicious gaze over my frame. “You look like you do, and you’ve never had sex with another woman? I don’t believe it.”

I run my tongue over my teeth and seek some patience. “You look like you do,” I repeat her own words, “and you’ve never had sex with another man? I don’t believe it.”

Her eyes widen as she realizes the assumption she made. Her cheeks redden slightly. “I’m sorry then. I just figured...I mean, most guys have done it before getting out of high school. Like I’m pretty sure all my classmates thought that sex was a class that they had to finish before they were allowed their high school diploma.”

“I was—actually, scratch that—I am too busy for sex or women.”

“Because of your crowd management career?” She’s trying hard to figure out what that is, and to be honest, so am I. It sounds like what it is—a made-up job—and if she asks for details, I’m not sure what I’m going to tell her. I haven’t spent enough time with her—or in her—to give away the info that I’m a rock star. I don’t want that to jeopardize what we’ve got going on here because people are different when they figure out I’m famous, and not for the better. I’m not sure how things

will change between us. Maybe she puts her small foot in my ass and shoves me all the way to the East Coast. Maybe she decides dealing with the stalkers and groupies is too much to handle. Or maybe she turns into someone who wants to bleed me dry. I don't know if I care much about the last one, though. As long as she's with me, my wallet is hers. The key is to make sure she sticks with me, and I haven't figured out how I'm going to pull that off. I'm a singer, not a magician.



CHAPTER 10

CLOVER

“IRISH.” I LOVE THE WAY HE GROANS MY NAME. THERE IS something about the deep gruffness of his voice that rolls through my body.

After breakfast, we ended up on the sofa watching TV. I had my head resting on his thigh, and one thing led to another and now I’m giving him a blowjob.

When we took a shower together last night, I’d jacked him off with the help of him. He came all over my stomach before he ended up washing every inch of me.

I don’t know how we made it to my bed, but we had at some point. He’d gone down on me again, and that had been the last thing I remembered. When I woke up, I was naked and alone in my small bed. My stomach had dropped. He was nowhere to be found in my apartment, but his shirt was on the floor, so I didn’t think he’d gotten far. It had been damn sexy and adorable to see him downstairs in the kitchen trying to make us breakfast.

Dylan grips my hair in a tight hold as I suck his cock deeper into my mouth. I’ve never done this before, but based on his reaction, I must be doing something right. His thigh flexes, making me think he might be close to coming.

“Fuck,” he groans, which only spurs me on more. I am so turned on by giving him this pleasure that I’m dripping wet between my thighs. The ache that has formed there is almost unbearable, but I want him to feel the same way I did when his mouth was between my legs. “Irish, fuck. Babe, I’m going to come.”

I suck him harder, hollowing out my cheeks and taking as much of him inside as I can. My name roars from his lips. His release hits the back of my throat. I don't stop though; I keep sucking, swallowing every drop of him down. It's not until he lifts me off him that his cock leaves my mouth. I want to protest, but he's kissing me. I moan into his mouth.

"My turn." He buries his face between my thighs. "Someone enjoyed sucking my cock." He licks up all the desire that coats my thighs and then my sex. He doesn't stop until I've come twice. My body melts into the sofa. I don't think I ever want to move again. My eyes feel heavy. "Stay with me." Dylan brushes his mouth against mine.

"I'm here." He pulls me to sit up. I don't want to fall asleep. It would be a waste of whatever time we have left.

"I want to put a lock on your door before..." He trails off.

"Before you leave," I finish for him. I can't help the sudden feeling of disappointment that fills me even though I know it's ridiculous.

"I'll be back." I nod. I want to believe him, but it's hard. When my mom left, she'd said the same thing. That she'd be back. I haven't seen her since.

"The hardware store isn't far." I stand. "I'll get dressed," I say, needing a moment alone to get myself together.

I head to my bedroom and find a pair of jean shorts and shirt to slip into. I pull my hair into a messy bun on the top of my head before I wash my face. I wipe it with a towel, catching sight of Dylan standing behind me in the bathroom mirror. He towers over me.

"You're beautiful." He wraps his arm around me from behind. I tilt my head to the side when he leans down, knowing he wants to kiss my neck. I'm already reading him so easily. Normally I'm good at reading people, but he throws me for a loop here and there. I might be naive but I believed him when he told me he'd never been with anyone. But I do know there is something he's keeping from me. It has to connect to whatever reason he's never been with a woman.

“You’re not too bad-looking yourself.” I turn in his arms. I drop my head back and close my eyes. He gives me the silent kiss I’m asking for before we head out.

“You mind?” Dylan snags one of the Get Lucky merch hats we have. There are only a few different items: two shirts, a sweater, and some hats.

“Nope.” He puts the hat on, pulling it low. I unlock and relock the door to the bar. His hand takes mine as we stroll down the sidewalk toward the hardware store. A few people stop and stare our way. I squeeze Dylan’s hand. “Ignore them. They’re only wondering whose hand I might be holding. Small-town stuff.”

I’m sure they’ll all be whispering about it. I wouldn’t even be shocked if someone sneaks a picture and posts it in the Facebook group for our town. That place is gossip central from my understanding. It’s why I stay off social media. My bar is enough gossip for me. James has told me a few juicy fights that have happened in that group though.

“Clover!” Brian calls my name as we enter the hardware store. “Oh.” His eyes drift up and down Dylan, checking him out. I’m sure James mentioned that I’d let a man stay after closing down last night. Brian cocks his head to the side as he continues studying him. Dylan beats me to introductions.

“You must be Brian. James’ partner.” Dylan holds his hand out to him. Brian takes it. I guess Dylan does listen to everything I say. “I need to get Irish here a lock for the door to her apartment.”

“You don’t have a lock on it?” Brian’s attention swings back to me.

“There is a lock on the bar.” I defend myself because I can already see where this is going.

“What if someone snuck up there while you were working and was waiting for you?”

“That’s exactly what I said,” Dylan says. At least he isn’t smug about it. I elbow him in the side. He pretends I hurt his abs by grunting.

“I think you’re okay.” I pat his side. My fingers linger for a moment. Soon he won’t be here for me to touch when I want. “Get me a lock. I’m going to see how good Dylan is with his hands.” I wiggle my brows.

“And the blows keep coming.” He teases me back.

“I’ve got one in mind. Let me grab it.” Brian heads off toward the back of the store.

“Amy.” I nod when she enters the hardware store.

“Hi, Clover.” She tries to eye up Dylan, but he shifts to give her his side as he wraps his arm around me to pull me into him. I melt into him.

I peek up at Dylan through my eyelashes, wondering how long it will take to install a lock on my door. My time with him is ticking away. I don’t want to have any regrets. I want to get as much of him as I can before he’s gone.



CHAPTER 11

DYLAN

THE NEW GIRL EYES ME UP. A FLICKER OF RECOGNITION appears in her eyes, sending a spiral of unease down my spine. I tug the hat down farther and turn toward the back where Brian disappeared. Hopefully he'll be back soon with the lock, and we can get out of here.

"I didn't know you were seeing anyone, Clover." The other woman won't stop staring at me. The back of my neck starts to itch.

"It's new," Irish admits. "We met recently."

"Anyone ever tell you that you look like—"

"Marco Asensio? Occasionally, but once they see me trying to play soccer, the comparison dies a quick ugly death," I joke.

"I have no idea who that is," Amy replies. "Actually, I was thinking of a singer, but I'm blanking on his name. It's on the tip of my tongue."

If I threw Irish over my shoulder and ran out of the hardware store, would anyone notice?

"Here's the lock. It's an easy install. You should be able to do it if you follow the instructions." Brian appears like a big, burly savior.

"No worries." I take the lock.

"You're handy around the house?" Irish raises her eyebrows. "But can't cook?"

“Those are two different skill sets.” In my early days, I built and broke down my own sets. I might not know how to scramble eggs, but I’m good with a power drill.

“Hey, Brian, who’s the act having the big concert at Allegiant in Las Vegas this weekend?” Amy queries.

I nudge Irish toward the door. Hopefully we can exit before my name comes out of someone’s mouth.

“Coldplay.”

“No, the guy who sings—” Amy hums a few notes of my most popular single.

“Dylan Sign.” Brian replies with my stage name. Never have I been more grateful that when Clover asked for my ID, that I showed her the one with my real name. I wanted her to know the real me.

“Right.” She snaps her fingers and then points toward me. “You both have the same first name.”

“Who?”

Brian casts me a speculative gaze. “Rock guy. Has had multiple big hits. Was supposed to win a Grammy a couple years ago but lost to some new girl who was the daughter of a big industry dude.”

“Exactly. He’s so hot.” Amy can’t stop looking at me. I hug Irish closer.

“What’s hot about him?” Brian demands. “Just because he’s a singer and has some money doesn’t make him a decent guy.”

“Who cares if he’s decent? I just want a chance with him.” Amy runs her tongue across her teeth.

“He’d cheat on you, break your heart, and make you miserable, Amy dear.” Brian has nothing nice to say about me. “And you’re just attracted to him because he’s a star. The Beatles had one decent set of teeth between the four of them and still made good girls lose their minds.” This time, he shifts his glare toward Irish.

Irish laughs and pats her chest. “Y’all worried about me? You know I’m the last person to get involved with a musician.”

“That’s true.” Amy gives a slow nod. But even as she’s paying for her purchases, I can tell her attention is fixed on me.

Meanwhile, Brian is hell-bent on dragging every bad rumor about me to the table.

“Heard he does drugs, is dating three women at one time, and treats his staff like shit.”

The last one hurt. I treat my staff well. I only hire union workers, pay well, give good benefits, and try to be punctual. The last one is a rarity in the music industry. Most concerts never start on time because the talent doesn’t show up until hours later, and when they do, they’re often stoned or drunk or both. That makes it hard on the staff, but if I speak up in my own defense, it’s only going to create a target I don’t want.

“Who knows how many kids he’s left behind?”

“Kids?” I burst out.

Irish tilts her head up and looks at me in confusion. “You sound surprised. People abandon their kids all the time, especially musicians.”

“Sure. Sure.” Belatedly, I realize this is a sore point for Irish. Her mom, a singer with an angelic voice, left her to be raised by her dad. Irish probably thinks most singers sacrifice goats to Satan in their dressing rooms before concerts. I’m going to have to do some reprogramming of her belief system.

I wave my hand with the lock in it. “Thanks for the goods, Brian. I’ll take good care of Irish. We don’t want her to get hurt.”

“That’s for damned sure,” he replies ominously.

Outside I say to Irish, “I don’t think that this rock star is that bad of a guy.”

“Why are you sticking up for him?”

“Because he can’t defend himself.”

“People like that don’t need you and me. They are surrounded by legions of staff that kiss their feet and affirm everything they do is perfect. It’s weird how you have the same name and were both in Vegas.”

Is she fishing for a particular answer? I search her face but see nothing but innocence.

“Yeah, it is weird, but Vegas is a big place. There’s bound to be more than one Dylan around. There’s a Dylan North who plays football for the Vegas team. I wouldn’t mind being him for a half a day.”

“Which half? The one devoted to watching the cheerleaders?”

“Hell no. Did you know they get to the stadium at dawn to practice their routine? I only get up at dawn to fool around with you.”

She’s still pink when we make it back to the bar.

I was going to make love to her before I left. That was an imperative. Tonight, after the lock went on, after we made—well, she made dinner. After her bar closed, I’d take her upstairs, rub down her back and legs, shower her, and then make deep, unforgettable passionate love.

But now I’m thinking that to do that intimate act while pretending to be someone else might cause irrevocable harm. She hates music and musicians. I need more time. She needs to come on tour with me. She can see for her own eyes that I don’t have time for groupies, nor do I want any. That I surround myself with people who challenge me. That I run a clean operation.

“You ever been on a vacation?”

“Don’t you need a passport to leave the country?” I watch Dylan install the lock. The man really is good with his hands. I’m not sure why we’re on the topic of vacations. I’ve been on a handful over the years, but they were all in the States, and only once did we have to take a plane.

“Yeah, you don’t have one?”

“I do.” I suddenly remember. Both Dad and I had gotten them.

“Irish, you okay?” Dylan stops messing with the lock to look over at me.

“Sorry.” I shake my head. The tears threaten to break free from my eyes at the memory. “I forgot. My dad and I were making plans to go to Ireland. It’s probably at home.” We never got to make that trip. How had I forgotten about that? To be honest, I probably blocked it out.

“Damn.” Dylan leans over and brushes his mouth against mine. I’m sitting on the floor with my legs crossed. “I’ll take you.”

“You’re leaving,” I remind him and myself.

“But I’ll be back.” He grips my chin so I have to stare into his eyes. “I’ll be back,” he promises.

“That’s a big trip. Maybe one day.” I shrug off the conversation of Ireland. I don’t want to get my hopes up.

“You said the passport is at home? I thought you lived here.”

“I do live here. It’s back at the house I grew up in. I don’t stay there.”

“I’m sorry.” He kisses me again. I slide my hands up his chest and around his neck. He pulls me into his lap. I get lost in his kiss. Dylan’s hands grip my ass as I rock against his cock, wishing we were both naked.

So far all we’ve done is oral, but I want more even if this is coming to an end. I’m not sure I’ll ever get a chance like this again. I’ve never had this kind of attraction to another person before, and I don’t think the odds are good that I will again anytime soon. I’m not going to stay a virgin for the rest of my life. Besides, if Dylan is telling the truth about him being one too, I want to be his first. To have this experience with him.

“Dylan.” I moan against his mouth. He stands, keeping a tight hold on me. I wrap myself around him, and he kicks the

door closed.

“Bed?” The one word comes out choked.

“Yes.” All I want right now is to forget about everything else and get lost in him for a while. The rest of the world can wait. I’m taking something for myself.

“Fuck,” Dylan grunts as he takes me down to the bed.

“Yes,” I agree. That’s what I want. I start pulling at his clothes. He grabs my hands, stopping me.

“Eyes on me,” he orders.

“Why are you stopping?” I try to pull my hands free, but he doesn’t let them go. I want his clothes off.

“You with me? You want this?”

“Yes! I’m trying to take your clothes off, for heaven’s sake. I couldn’t want this any more.” What is he talking about?

“No, are you really with me?” Something flashes in his eyes. I’m normally so good at reading people, but I’m not with Dylan. He’s always throwing me for a loop. I really don’t know much about him. I’ve told him so much about my life, but he’s been pretty vague about his past. I might be crazy, but I still feel this deep connection with him. He feels so right even if it is only temporary.

“I’m with you, Dylan. I want you. I want this.”

“Good, because I don’t fuck you, Clover. Never.” He kisses me, finally releasing my hands. Slowly we strip each other of our clothes. Dylan kisses his way down my body. I want to protest, wanting him inside of me, but the words die on my lips when his tongue circles my clit. “Have to get you ready, Irish.” He thrusts a finger inside of me. “So tight.” He groans as he works a second into me.

It’s not long before I’m crying out his name, but he doesn’t stop there. Dylan keeps licking and sucking me. His mouth is relentless as he manages to work another finger into me. My hips rock as the second orgasm starts to push down on me. Then his mouth is gone, leaving me teetering on the edge. I’m so close. Only a little more and I’ll be there.

“No!” I cry out.

“I’ve got you. The next time you come, it will be on my cock.” His body comes down over mine, and he claims my mouth in a deep kiss. The head of his cock presses inside of me. I gasp.

Dylan slides his hand between us, his fingers going to my clit. With only a few strokes, he sends me over the edge. The pleasure flows through my body as Dylan thrusts fully inside of me. A mixture of pain and pleasure courses through me.

His whole body stills over mine, not moving. Only his mouth. He keeps on kissing me. The pain starts to fade until all I can feel is him, his body connected deep with mine. An overwhelming emotion that I can’t describe starts to take hold.

“I feel it too,” he whispers against my mouth. Love? Is that what this is? It can’t be. We barely know each other. “Stay with me.”

“I’m with you.” I wrap my arms around him, gripping his back. He pulls out and thrusts back in.

“Irish.” He groans.

“Don’t stop,” I plead, needing him to move.

“Never,” he grits out as he starts to move faster. I lift my hips, meeting each of his thrusts. “You’re so tight. Not going to last.”

“Come.” I want to feel it.

“Not without you.” He shifts his knees, digging deeper into the mattress. His cock hits the perfect spot inside of me. “Come with me.”

“Yes!” I cry out. This orgasm is different. It explodes outward. Dylan groans my name, thrusting as deep into me as he can and comes. His warm release spills inside of me.

I’ve never felt more connected to someone in my whole life. I don’t ever want to let go, but I know I’ll have no choice come tomorrow. Still, I wrap my legs around him, keeping him as close as I can for now.



CHAPTER 12

CLOVER

CHRIS IS NOT HAPPY.

“The only reason I’m not yelling at you right now is because I’m saving my vocal cords for when we are in person. I want you to get the full volume of my fury face to face,” he seethes over the phone.

“I’m sorry.”

The flight attendant gives me a ten-minute sign. I settle back into the plush captain’s chair and stretch out my legs. This is why I waited until I’d boarded the private plane to turn my phone on. There’s a forced time limit for Chris.

“When I signed up to be your manager, we agreed that you weren’t gonna be one of those types. You know I left the business because I was tired of all these asshole superstars not meeting their commitments, leaving me holding the bag, requiring me to make up ridiculous excuses.”

“I know.”

In these circumstances, I always think it’s best to let someone vent. It doesn’t do any good to try to explain yourself or justify your actions. It’s not like I have any justification. I disappeared in the middle of a tour and didn’t turn my phone on for over forty-eight hours. It was beyond irresponsible, but of course, I’d do it all over again.

“I’m on my way.”

“Where are you?”

“At Henderson Airport waiting for the control tower to say we can take off.”

“Finally.”

“Do I have any obligations tomorrow?” Or today since it’s two in the morning.

“I canceled all of them. You’re welcome,” he grumbles bitterly.

“Thank you. What’s on my agenda?”

“After the concert, you have some meet and greets, and a reporter from the *LA Times* wants five minutes for the post-concert review. Can you please keep it together for another four days? Once you’re done here, you have a week off before we open in Seattle.”

“Yes, of course. I’ll be an angel. In the meantime, I need you to book me a hotel—actually, no. Rent out an Airbnb. A small one that’s sort of like a family house or a house that would belong to a—” I try to think where someone who is into “crowd management” would live—“to an ordinary office worker, but make sure it has a pool and a hot tub.”

“Do you know what an ordinary office worker can afford?”

“Probably not.”

“What are you up to? Is it a woman? Actually, don’t tell me. I want plausible deniability. Do you need a chef or do you want me to have food sent every day?”

“I can order in.”

“Can you? Do you have Uber Eats or Dine In apps on your phone?”

I have no idea what those are, but I lie. “Of course.”

Chris lets his silence speak for him.

“I can figure it out,” I say.

“Is she legal?”

“Yes.”

“Fine. God. I aged about ten years.”

“Sorry.” I am regretful I caused Chris anxiety. “I will call next time.”

“Please don’t say there’s a next time,” he cries.

This time, I’m the silent one.

“Fuck. Fine. The plane should be taking off soon. Audrey Carter wants to know if you’re interested in doing a remix of her Christmas song. Think about it.”

“She’s remixing ‘Christmas Fools’?”

“Yeah, wants to do a twenty-year anniversary reboot and reached out to us. I think you should do it. The fans would like it, and it would give you something special to play during your holiday concerts. They’ll need an answer right away.”

“Seems fun, and I don’t have any reason to say no.”

“That’s what I figured. If you agree, I’ll forgive you for running off.”

“You’ll forgive me anyway.” I hang up and give a nod to the flight attendant that I’m ready to go.

An hour later, we touch down in LA. Chris has a car waiting for me that takes me straight to the Wilshire. I contemplate calling Irish, but I figure I’ll catch her when she wakes up.

At the hotel, I collapse on the bed and don’t regain consciousness until Chris bursts in about noon.

“Rise and shine. Time to get your ass to the stadium,” he bellows from the living area of the suite.

I pull a pillow over my head and try to shut him out.

“Nope. You have to go and rehearse. You can nap after you do soundcheck.”

I reach out and fumble for my phone. The text message screen is pathetically blank. I type out a message.

Irish, my feelings are going to get hurt if you don’t fill up my inbox.

No response arrives. I toss my phone away and wonder if I have time to fly into Loveland. There has to be an airport close by.

“Whatever you are cooking up, remember that fifty thousand people shelled out two hundred bucks to see you.”

“Right.” I do have obligations. I can text her after the concert. It’ll be perfect because about the time I’m done, Get Lucky will be closing. It’s like our schedules are in sync. I eat and pull on a pair of jeans and a hoodie. Soundcheck is smooth. I do some press and then take a nap in my soundproof green room. Chris wakes me up an hour before the start of the concert. The opening act’s latest hit single blasts through the sound system as hair and makeup get me ready for the stage. Three hours later, they’re wiping me down. I’m juiced up and missing Irish.

“You never sounded better,” Chris admits grudgingly. “Not that I encourage you to run off again, but it didn’t harm your energy.”

“It’s going to get better.” I’m going to send a plane for Irish. Or maybe a plane ticket. I’ll tell her I work nights. She’ll understand. We’ll live in that little house, and then when I have to travel, I’ll take her with me. There’s got to be some excuse I can give her like a traveling salesman or some shit like that. “I need a job,” I tell Chris.

“You have one.”

“A fake one. One that has nothing to do with music, requires travel, and has something to do with crowds.”

Chris’ mouth drops open. I slap him on the back. “I believe in you, man.”

Whistling, I pop open my phone and call my girl.



CHAPTER 13

DYLAN

“YOU DOING ALL RIGHT?” JAMES ASKS. WE’VE BEEN SLOW tonight. I just did last call. I’m not sure if I’m thankful for that or not. When I’m busy, I don’t have time to think about Dylan, but it’s nice not to be running around.

I’m worn out. Dylan has been gone a day, and I can still feel him on me. I’m not as tender as I had been between my thighs, but there is still a small ache there. Though I could be mixing it up with an ache to be filled by him again. The man has ruined me. I can’t stop thinking about him.

“I’m fine,” I lie. My emotions are all over the place. At first, I told myself I wasn’t going to text Dylan. I hadn’t. Then he was texting me, and I couldn’t help myself. I know I’m being a brat. He has a job, but if I don’t text him, maybe he’ll miss me and come back sooner.

“You don’t seem fine. And I know better than to believe there is nothing wrong when a woman says she’s *fine*.” James leans up against the bar. “When did your lover boy say he’d be back?”

“A few days.”

“Hmm” is James’ only response.

“What does that mean?” I tense.

“What?”

“The hmm?” It’s not often that James doesn’t have an opinion on something or someone, so I know that one little *hmm* means he’s holding back.

“Only thinking.” He gives me a smile, but it’s forced.

“Well, think out loud,” I order him. James lets out a long sigh as though telling me exactly how he feels about the Dylan situation is the last thing he wants to do.

“I don’t want to burst your bubble, but I also don’t want you pining away for someone that might not be coming back.”

“He’s coming back,” I rush to say way too defensively. James’ brows lift. “He’s been texting me. If he didn’t have plans to come back, why not just ghost me?” Hell, he could have given me a fake number, but he didn’t.

I have to admit that it burned a little when he left. I knew he had to go, but the time had gone by way too fast. He had helped me close the bar the night before, and we went upstairs and made love. Then he slipped from my bed saying he had to go. I had to fight the urge to beg him to stay. I don’t know how I managed it. It would come off clingy and probably freak him out. I never thought I’d be that girl, but here I am.

I know it’s because of my abandonment issues. First my mom and then my dad. Not that my father wanted to leave me, but I still felt left behind. I should be used to it. All it did was open up wounds I’ve been trying to keep closed because I’ve never let them actually heal.

“I just find it odd that he left in the middle of the night to catch a plane. You know those don’t take off in the middle of the night. What exactly is it that he said he does for a living?”

“Crowd management.”

“A security guard?” James gives me a perplexed expression.

“He said it’s corporate speak for social media influencer.”

“So he’s an Instagram model?”

“No. He’s in crowd management for a company.”

“What company?”

“What are you, the police?” I get defensive again. James holds his hands up.

“It’s sketchy, and to be downright honest with you, he almost sounds married.” My heart sinks.

“No.” I adamantly shake my head. He can’t be.

“Clover, I love you. You’re like a little sister to me, but you can’t just believe whatever he tells you. He might still be texting to string you along in case he does get a chance to swing back this way.” I keep shaking my head no, but his words rattle me.

“I’m naïve.”

“You’re a sweet girl who trusts people.” I hate the look of sympathy he’s currently wearing.

As if Dylan knows I’m talking about him, my phone goes off with a text.

Dylan: I miss you. Come out here. I’ll get you a plane ticket.

“Look!” I shove my phone at James so he can see how wrong he is. If Dylan were married, he wouldn’t be offering to bring me out there.

“He wants to fly you out. Big deal. Does he expect you to drop your life here and rush over to a man who doesn’t tell you shit about himself?”

“Okay,” I sigh. “Keep your thoughts inside your head again.” That’s enough reality for me for today.

“This is one of those times you need to hear it.”

“You’re still thinking out loud,” I grumble.

“I know, but someone has to be honest with you.” James drops a kiss on top of my head. He’s saying what my dad would say. I text him back.

Me: I have a bar to run. I can’t just up and leave.

I’m sure I can have staff run things for a few days if I really wanted to. The same people have worked here for years. I even have random servers I can call to pick up shifts if need be. Perks of living in a small town.

My phone rings a moment later, Dylan's name lighting up my screen. "Answer it. I'm going to lock up," James says. "I'll leave you alone about it. I said my piece. You're a grown woman."

"Thanks," I say before answering the call.

"Irish." Dylan says my name before I can speak.

"Hey," I respond, feeling suddenly shy. When he was here, I hadn't been, but now doubt is starting to seep in.

"I just miss you. I know you have the bar. I'm stuck in LA for the next few days, and it's driving me crazy not seeing you."

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

"Whoever said that was full of shit." I snort a laugh.

"I miss you too," I admit. "You're not married, are you?" I blurt out.

"What? No. I told you—"

"I know. I know." I cut him off. "It's just, I don't know some things." The line is quiet for a long moment.

"I'm not married. You're my girl. The only girl." I could melt into a puddle, but it's all words.

"What are you doing now?" I ask, changing the subject. I don't want to come off as some jealous clinger.

"I'm about to leave work."

"How did managing the crowd go?" I try to tease, but there is an edge in my tone.

"Good actually. Still would rather be there with you."

"I wish you were here too." Maybe I could fly out to LA. It's not a long flight. "You know—"

"Dylan!!" I stop speaking when I hear a girl scream his name and then another.

"What's going on?"

“Shit. Let me call you back.” He doesn’t say bye; the line just cuts off. I stare down at my phone, all my emotions starting to bubble over. I power my phone off, needing a second. My mind is so fogged by Dylan I’m not thinking straight.

I had sex with a man I hardly know. Without protection, mind you. I hadn’t thought about that until after he’d left. When I’m with him, I feel closer to him than anyone else in the world, but maybe lust does that to you. If this is lust, I don’t want to know what love is.



CHAPTER 14

CLOVER

I SHOVE THE PHONE IN MY POCKET IN FRUSTRATION. “CAN YOU clear those fans out?” I bark at Security. “No fans down here.”

“Sorry, Mr. Sign. They slipped in. Won’t happen again.” The hired security guard motions for someone to take the girls away.

“Check their phones. They were filming something.” I shake my head and make my way toward the artist staging area where the catering is set up. I want to grab something to eat before going back to the hotel. “Chris,” I yell when I get there.

His head pops up from the black leather sofa that we cart to every concert. “What’s up?”

“There were stalkers down in the tunnel. I was on a call with my girl, and she heard them yell my name.”

Concern floods his face. “Your girl? The woman you met three days ago is now ‘your’ girl?”

I roll my eyes. “You’re supposed to be upset about random people breaking through security and bullshitting their way into our private spaces, not that I’m attached to someone.” I pick up a plate and gesture for the chef to cut me off a slice of the prime rib shank he’s got on the board. I add some mashed potatoes and greens and throw myself into the chair at a makeshift table.

“I can multitask.” He hauls himself off the sofa and pulls out his phone to text someone.

“I already took care of it.”

“Sorry,” he says and joins me at the table. “Groupies are part of touring and being a star. They exist. Your girl”—he emphasizes the possessive—”will have to understand that.”

“Why?”

“Why does she have to understand that groupies exist? Because they do. Because no matter how married you are, how many kids you have, someone out there is going to imagine themselves in love with you, and that all it will take is one look out in the crowd and you’ll be smitten.”

“That’s not going to happen.” I’ve toured in front of a million people in the last few years, and I can’t remember one face in the crowd, not even the fans who I’ve taken photos with or whose hand I touched as I sang. Fans are one large body for me, not individual faces.

“I know that, and you know that, but the single fan doesn’t.”

“Regardless, I don’t know what that has to do with Irish. I pay enough money to get good security and if I have to, I’ll shell out more so that this space”—I gesture around the artist room where the band mills about with a half dozen other stylists, dressers, press people—”is private and safe.”

“You thinking about bringing her on tour with you? That’s a big commitment for a girl you just met.”

“I might.” Although, how I would do that without revealing that I’m a musician, I haven’t worked out in my head. “For now, though, I want to be able to have a call with her without her hearing random women shouting my name.”

“Just invite her backstage, and she’ll understand how chaotic things can get.”

“I’ll do that.” Just not right now.

Three days later, I’m landing in a practically deserted airfield about twenty minutes from Loveland. A car and driver are waiting for me.

“Don’t really get many jets landing here,” the driver says when I belt in. “Prop planes and twin turbos, but no real jets.”

“It was the only plane that was available to me,” I reply.

“It looks nice. Expensive, too. How’s it ride?”

“Okay for short trips, but for the longer ones, it’s like flying in a tin can. You’re better off flying commercial for anything over about seven hours.”

“Good to know. Never gone anywhere but Mexico myself.”

“Mexico’s nice.” I close my eyes and lean my head against the backrest. I’m exhausted. Four shows in a row, press obligations, meetings with my label, and a couple of producers who wanted to sell some tracks for my upcoming album that I haven’t given much thought to. I want to find Irish, kiss her senseless, and then sleep for about ten hours.

“You sure you want me to drop you off at the bar? You look beat.”

“Yeah, I’m sure.”

“Sad about that Clover girl.”

I shoot upright. “What about her? Did something happen?”

The man looks at me with confused eyes. He wasn’t expecting my sharp response. “Her daddy died, and now she’s got that bar to take care of all on her own.”

“Is the bar in financial trouble?” Maybe I should buy it. Or maybe she should sell it and just live with me. She can travel on tours with me, and then when I’m making music, she can live in my Malibu home.

“Not that I know of.”

“Then what’s sad?”

The driver scowls. “Her old man passed. That’s tough.” He grumbles something under his breath about city folk and then turns up the music.

I didn’t text Irish today because I wanted my arrival to be a surprise, but I’m itching to shoot her a message to see if she’s okay. I force myself to wait because I want to see her face when she lays eyes on me. The ride ends up speeding by. My

latest single is playing on the radio when the driver pulls in front of the bar.

“Good song, isn’t it?” he asks.

I freeze in the middle of getting a twenty out for a tip. “Why would you say that?”

The driver shakes his head. “You’re a strange one, aren’t you? Can’t a man say he likes a song without any reason? It’s a good song. Makes you feel something.” He thumps his chest.

A glow of pride fills me up. I hand him two twenties. “I agree. It’s a good song.”

I’m still wearing the smile when I open the door to Get Lucky. Not even the scowl on James’ face when he spots me dims my spirit.

“Why are you back?” he growls.

“Why else? To be with Irish.” I slide onto the bar stool and scan the place. “Where is she?”

“Busy.”

“In the back or upstairs?” I start to get off the seat, but a hard hand on my shoulder pushes me back into place.

“She’ll be out soon enough, and it’ll be her decision to talk to you.” He says it ominously like she’s pissed off.

Fuck. Maybe I shouldn’t have left this as a surprise.

My eyes glance down at my phone for the millionth time. After the phone call from Dylan a few days ago, we exchanged some texts. I continue to give him short responses, but he keeps on texting regardless.

I still can’t stop thinking about hearing the girls scream his name, but for all I know it could have been someone trying to get his attention at work. Whatever his job might be. I’m not stupid. I can tell he doesn’t want me to know details. I’ve been trying to give him the benefit of the doubt.

It’s possible that he works with celebrities and he’s not allowed to talk about it. Isn’t that a thing? Maybe he has one of those NDAs or something. I don’t know, but either way, he

hasn't texted me for a while. I'm making him chase, and I know it. I've gone from worrying about being clingy to avoiding him the best I can.

I close my laptop, done with placing orders to our vendors. I'd snuck upstairs while we were having a few slow hours to get some paperwork done. I put my phone into my back pocket before I head out and down the stairs into the kitchen.

"Are you hungry?" Oliver asks as she drops a batch of onion rings into the deep fryer.

"No. I'm good."

She cocks her head to the side. "Are you on a diet?"

"No." I glance down at myself. "Are you saying I should be?"

Oliver rolls her eyes at me. "I'm saying it's weird that you don't want any food and you look like you've lost a few pounds. You just got the weight back on from when we lost your old man." I can see the emotion in her eyes when she talks about my dad. Sometimes I forget that I'm not the only one that lost him.

"I'm good. Just a few weird days is all," I tell her, not wanting her to worry.

Oliver has worked in this kitchen for as long as I can remember. It had hit her hard too when my dad passed. They always acted like they were siblings. They could fight and make up as if nothing ever happened. In part, Oliver has been a bit of a mother-type for me when I needed it.

I'll never forget when I started my period, and my father was a bit flustered. He tried to pretend he wasn't, but Oliver stepped in and helped both Dad and me out on that one. I'd been so embarrassed, but now thinking back to that day it makes me smile. He was a good man. I've been so numb since I lost him. I think I'd grown used to the feeling until Dylan showed up here. He pulled so many emotions from deep inside of me to the surface, and he'd done it easily.

"Is it about that boy? The pretty one?" she asks.

“Boy? Really?” Dylan is no boy.

“They’re all boys,” she says dryly.

“Let me ask you something. Do you believe that you can meet someone and just know?”

“Are you talking about love at first sight?” I nod. I suppose I am.

“I believe in souls and energy. That you should trust what you feel, but those pretty boys can be smooth operators, so you have to be careful.”

“He’s not pretty. He’s handsome and a bit gruff.” I don’t know how else to explain him. Dylan is in a category all his own. I think that’s the problem. I’ve dealt with a wide variety of men and boys working at the bar over the years. I know their games and smooth-talking ways. Dylan slipped right past all the defenses I’ve built.

I thought with a few days apart, some of the lust would fade, but the longer he’s gone I somehow get pulled deeper. Into what, I’m not sure, but it’s scaring the hell out of me. How can I miss someone so much I barely know?

“You’re really into this kid.” Oliver pulls the onion rings back out of the fryer, dropping them into the bin. I know I might as well tell her the truth because she can read me like no one else.

“He wanted to buy me a plane ticket to come see him. That means something right? James thinks it was for a booty call.”

“I saw him. I don’t think he needs to fly a girl out to get laid. He wanted to fly you out. So yeah, I think it means something.” I worry my bottom lip between my teeth. We don’t have a label on whatever it is we are, but I’d hope he isn’t doing random booty calls. From the way he speaks and what he’s told me so far, that’s not him.

“Pretty boy’s back,” James says, pushing into the kitchen, the door closing behind him.

“Really?” My heart gives a flutter. He kept his word and came back. That has to mean something.

“Asking for you. He looks like shit.” Did something happen to him? Is that why he hasn’t texted me? It doesn’t matter. He’s here, so he can’t be that bad.

“You just called him pretty.”

“Worn out. He looks worn out,” James explains.

“Okay.” I run my fingers through my hair. I’m suddenly nervous for some reason.

“You look fine, honey,” Oliver reassures me.

“Thanks,” I tell her before I head out of the kitchen into the bar. It takes everything inside of me to play it cool. I’m mad at him. Right? To be honest, I don’t know what I am anymore. This man has my emotions all over the place.

Dylan’s eyes are on me the second I step out of the kitchen. My breath hitches. I told myself I’d made him out to be more handsome in my head than he really was. But that’s not the case at all. The man is fine. His whole face lights up with a smile. He heads straight for me.

“I’m sorry. I know you might be mad at me, but I need you. Just a taste.” I don’t get a chance to respond before his mouth drops to mine. I melt into him instantly, kissing him back.

Damn I missed him. I knew I did, but seeing him here now has only confirmed it. When his mouth is on mine, I’m weak. He has me in the palm of his hand.

A few catcalls ring out in the bar. Dylan lifts his mouth from mine.

“Ignore them.”

“Already was.” He smiles down at me.

“Dylan—” I lick my lips.

“I know you’re upset with me.”

“I just—I don’t know.” I take a breath. “Don’t break my heart. Please. If this can’t happen between us, I need you to walk away. I’m not strong enough to take another heartbreak right now.” Dylan cups my cheek with his hand.

“The last thing I’d ever want to do is break your heart, Irish. I’m trying to make you fall in love with me so that you can’t leave me.”

I’m pretty sure I’m already there, but I don’t tell him that. I grab the front of his shirt and pull him down for another kiss.



CHAPTER 15

DYLAN

I MANAGE TO STAY AWAKE AND HELP CLOSE DOWN THE BAR. My efforts are repaid with smiles from Irish and fewer frowns from James. Manual labor appears to be the key to both their hearts.

“You look tired,” Irish says as we climb the stairs to her apartment.

“Not too tired for you.” I’d have to be dead not to be hard around her. Even though my energy bar is seriously depleted, the sight of her ass is keeping me upright—in many ways.

“Maybe we should just sleep. I’ve had a long night, too.” She sticks her key in the new lock I installed last week.

“Nah, I have to reward you for your good behavior.” I tap the lock. “Look at you, using your safety equipment.”

“I think of you every time I have to fish the key out of my pocket,” she replies pertly, telling me with her tone, if not her words, that she finds it annoying.

“I hope you’re thinking of me more often than that. What about the bedroom? Do you have certain thoughts there?”

“Yes. I wish my shades were darker because sometimes the light wakes me up.”

I swat her ass. “Sounds like someone is issuing a challenge. If you don’t want to be able to walk tomorrow, say that.”

“You don’t look like you have the energy to kill a fly let alone make love to me even once tonight,” she teases.

Suddenly, my tiredness disappears. I sweep her up in my arms, kick off my shoes, and stride to her bedroom. She shrieks in my ear.

“Let me down. I need to shower! I stink of beer and grease and people.”

“I’m too weak for shower sex, Irish. Let’s do missionary on the bed.”

I toss her onto the mattress and then strip out of my clothes. Naked, I lie down on my back and pat my lips. “Bring your sweet pussy up here.”

Irish heaves a huge put-upon sigh. “I can’t believe I, the woman, have to do all the work.”

“It’s the twenty-first century. This is what you fought for. Equality and all that.”

She tosses her shirt to one side and then shimmies out of her jeans and panties. “I never fought for that. I was happy being a bored housewife.”

“Could’ve fooled me.”

She crawls on top of me, brushing my hard cock with one of her legs as she brackets me between her thighs. I let out a groan.

“Did I hurt you?” she asks with worry, looking over her shoulder at my erection.

“Yes. Every day I’m not inside of you, I’m in extreme pain.”

“I’m not the one who left,” she points out.

“Fair, but I did ask you to come and join me.”

“I’ve got the bar to watch over.”

“I thought you wanted to be a pampered housewife.”

“We are not married.”

I palm her ass and pull her forward. “That can be changed.”

She might've said something else, but my mouth on her pussy had her swallowing her tongue. She tastes tart and sweet at the same time, like some exotic spiced honey that is only produced by one queen hidden in the ancient ruins on an island no one has ever heard of and is impossible to reach. I clamp a hard hand around each hip. I've got her now, and I don't plan on letting go.

I kiss her delicious cunt until she's shaking like a leaf at the very end of autumn. I pull my mouth away and lift her down on top of my cock.

"Hold on, Irish." I slam into her.

"Oh my God," she screams.

I'm balls deep. Sweat's dripping off my forehead. I lift her off and then drop her down again.

"Wait. I can't—"

"You can take it, Irish. You've got this."

I keep up the manic rhythm, spearing her deep again and again.

She rides me hard. Her nails dig into my chest. Her lube spreads across my thighs. I catch her when she comes apart, her orgasm seizing her and throwing her off the cliff. I follow her right over the edge, flinging myself into a vortex of sensation.

When we both surface, we're exhausted. She collapses on my body, my cock still wedged deep inside her.

"I should get up and shower."

"You should sleep." I fumble for a blanket and drag the comforter by a single corner until her body and mine are covered.

"Where were you?" she mumbles into my chest. "What's crowd management? Are you going to break my heart?"

"No, Irish, I'm not breaking your heart. I want to hold it with me at all times. Come with me, and I'll show you my

world. It might not be what you expected, but it's not terrible, and if we're together, it'll be perfect."

She's quiet for so long I wonder if she's fallen asleep, but right as I'm about to give in to my fatigue she whispers, "Okay."

I wrap my arms around her tight and give her a long kiss. "You won't regret it."

The next day, I text Chris to let him know that I'm bringing Irish. Meanwhile, she's busy arranging with James to cover the bar.

"Just a week for now, James." She casts a worried glance in my direction. "I don't want to be gone longer than that."

Make sure there's a private space for her. I want furniture, a television, everything. Hire a stylist for her too.

Do you still want that Airbnb?

Negative. She'll stay with me in the presidential suite. I want a car available for her. Not sure about food yet. I'll text you that. Also roses in the bathtub. Lots of candles and flower arrangements. Let's have a big one in every room.

Chris doesn't question any of my requests. On the ride to the airport, I keep a hold of Irish's sweaty hand. She's nervous, and I'm worried she's having second or maybe even twenty-second thoughts about agreeing to come with me.

"Are you sure that your boss is okay with this? What kind of job allows you to bring another person along for a whole week?"

"Yes. I'm sure it's okay with the boss, and you'll see when we get there."

"That's so ominous." She peers out the window. "Where are we?"

"Private airfield."

She tears her gaze away from the window and frowns. "Private what?"

"We're taking a private jet to Seattle."

“What about LA?”

“I’m done there. The next stop is Seattle. You’ll like it there. It’s very green. Rains a bit too much, but other than that, it’s great. There’s a huge food variety there, too, which reminds me, any food allergies? Or better yet, any food requests?”

“You’re not a bouncer or in social media, are you?”

“No.”

“Do you work with celebrities? Are we going to be part of a celebrity, um, thing?” She waves her free hand.

“Something like that.” I bring her fingers to my mouth.
“Trust me.”



CHAPTER 16

CLOVER

“YOU’RE GOING TO RUIN ME.” I BURY MY FACE IN DYLAN’S neck.

“Good, then you can’t leave me.” He runs his fingers down my spine.

When we first got on the private plane, I was in awe. It was short-lived once I realized I was about to go up in the air in it. Sure, I’ve flown before. In one of those normal big planes—not that this one is tiny but aren’t these the kind that end up crashing?

He swore it was fine. Saying it was one of the best and fastest planes. A Gulfstream something with some numbers on the end of it. It was all gibberish to me, but I did as he asked and trusted him. It helped that he distracted me after he shoed away the flight attendant.

“I don’t want to leave you. That’s why I’m here.” I run my fingers up his bare chest. James had been iffy about me taking off with Dylan for a week. Oliver was all for it. Told me to get out and live a little. She insisted that they could hold the place down. I have no doubt they can.

It wasn’t really that hard for me to agree to go with Dylan. I’d missed him so much that I didn’t want to be without him again. I don’t understand this overwhelming need to be close to him, but I have it. I’m ignoring a bunch of red flags, and I know it. The truth is I think I’m already ruined, and whatever secrets Dylan might have will come to light at some point, but for now I’ve decided to let myself enjoy him.

I'm already in too far, and the fallout will be the same whether it's now or later. The man already holds my heart in his hands. He doesn't know it, but I think he's healed some of the broken pieces that were left behind when my father passed away. My days are no longer spent in mourning the past. Now he's there filling up the empty space and reminding me that there is a world out there I'm avoiding.

"We've started our descent." The pilot's voice comes over the speakers.

"That her way of telling us to put on our clothes?" I laugh.

"I suppose so." He sits up with me in his arms. I feel his cum spill out from inside of me. It's a reminder that neither of us have addressed the whole issue of protection. I'm not sure this is the time either.

Dylan helps me find my panties before we both get our clothes on. "I'm in the mile high club." It dawns on me.

"I guess we are." Dylan smirks.

"It wasn't on my bucket list, but it's pretty cool. I'm gonna add it and then scratch it off. You can do that, right?"

"I don't have one, but now I want to see yours."

"Sir," a man's voice calls.

"You can come in," Dylan says. The flight attendant reappears.

"We're about to land. Can I get you anything else?"

"Do you need anything, babe?" Dylan asks me.

"No, thank you."

"All right." He nods, his eyes bouncing between us for a brief moment before turning to leave once again. I'm noticing that happens a lot. The pilot had been surprised to see me with Dylan too.

"That's his way of asking us to sit down for landing."

"Oh." I quickly find a seat and put my seatbelt on. Dylan drops down beside me a minute later with a hat in his hand and

sunglasses.

“Do you know the pilot and flight staff?” I ask. He seems almost familiar with them.

“I do. I like to keep my circle tight.”

“My circle is tight; it’s just got a lot of people in it.”

“Loveland is quite protective of you.”

“It’s nice. I mean, it was only my dad and me, so they’re like family too.” Dylan slides his fingers into mine as the plane touches down. The door opens a few moments later. Dylan puts his hat and glasses on before guiding me off the plane and down the stairs. Two black SUVs sit waiting for us.

“I take it this is Irish?” says a man in a suit walking toward us.

“You call her Clover. Irish, this is Chris. Chris, this is my girl Clover.” I can’t help but love that he introduced me as his girl.

“It’s nice to meet you.” I give him a smile.

“It’s really nice to meet you too.” He smiles back at me, but I can tell he’s assessing me. He’s unsure of me.

“Shall we?” Dylan motions toward the waiting SUVs.

“Yeah, everything is ready.” He hands Dylan a folder. “The contract we talked about. There is an NDA in there too.”

“She’s not signing an NDA.” Dylan’s hand holding mine tightens.

“It’s fine. I can sign whatever you need me to.”

“I’ll look over the contract and give it back to you tonight.” Dylan doesn’t say bye to Chris. He leads me toward one of the SUVs.

“He’s not going to like me,” I say when we’re alone in the SUV. Well, kind of alone. There is a driver.

“Chris will be fine. He’s only being a stickler. Don’t worry about him. In fact, if I’m not around and you need something,

you can always ask him, and he'll handle it." Yeah, I won't be doing that. It would be awkward.

I glance out the window as we drive into the city. Dylan points out a few places to me as we pass by them. I take it all in. It feels good to experience something new with Dylan at my side.

"Will we get to sightsee or anything?" I ask when we pull into a parking garage that goes underground.

"Maybe." He pulls his hat off to give me a kiss before he puts it back on and opens the door for us to get out. A few people who look like security stand nearby. Dylan puts his hand on my back, guiding me toward a side door.

Once inside, we go straight to an elevator and directly up to our room. "We don't have to check in?" I'm not sure what the heck Dylan does for a living, but I know not just anyone gets this sort of treatment.

"Nah, it's been handled." I step into the suite, my mouth falling open as my eyes take all of it in.

"This is a hotel room?" I almost don't believe it. It looks like one of those super fancy big city penthouses that you see in magazines.

"Yep." Dylan tosses his hat and sunglasses onto a table along with the folder Chris gave him. "You hungry?"

"A little bit."

"I had them bring up a bunch of stuff." He leads me farther into the suite. It has a freaking dining room. He starts lifting lids to reveal the food. "I say we eat and make use of the massive tub before I have to do some work."

"Okay."

"Irish." He pulls me down into his lap. "It's just a hotel. Doesn't mean shit. All that matters is that you came with me. Those four days without you almost killed me."

"Me too," I admit. He brings a piece of steak to my mouth. I open it, letting him feed me. I don't think there's much I wouldn't let Dylan do to me at this point.



CHAPTER 17

DYLAN

I SLIP OUT OF BED AND GRAB MY PHONE. IT'S ABOUT TIME TO get to the stadium. I debate what I'm going to tell Irish. If I reveal that I'm a singer now, will she take off? If I get her to the venue, she won't have an easy way to leave. No one there will actually tell her what I do. Like I told her earlier, my circle is tight. The staff isn't going to say anything. It's not like anyone goes around saying, "Hey, singer Dylan." If she stays in the room set up for her, she won't see any costume changes or the makeup artists. But realistically, how long am I going to keep her in the dark? It's starting to feel ridiculous.

I decide to tell her when we get to the venue. I take a quick shower and let Chris know that I'll be ready to go in an hour.

Irish is still snug under the white comforter, looking innocent and sweet and not at all like the hellcat that dug scratches into my back and shoulders. I sweep the hair away from her cheek. "Irish, you hungry?"

She scrunches her nose and slides deeper under the covers.

"Tired still?" I rub her back. Maybe I will leave her here. Sitting at the venue in some strange room might be weird for her. I can't really spend time with her. My breaks are timed tightly.

"A little," she mumbles.

"I've got to go to work. Want to just hang out here at the hotel?"

Her head pops out from under the covers. "The crowd management thing?"

She sounds skeptical. I rub the back of my neck. “I might have not been as specific as I could have been when I told you what I did for a living.”

Fully awake, Irish sits up with the sheets held against her chest. “You think? James suspects you have a wife.”

“A wife?”

“Yeah, you were vague about your life, which means you’re hiding something, and the number one thing men hide is that they’re already attached to another woman.”

“I am attached to one woman only, and that’s you.”

“I buy that, but I don’t believe that someone in ‘crowd management’”—she makes quote marks with her fingers—“has the money for private planes and stuff.”

“I’m surprised you came with me even though you had so many suspicions.”

She shrugs, and the sheet slips down to bare the tops of her boobs. I tell myself to focus and jerk my eyes upward.

“Because I trust you.” Her face is open and welcoming, and it makes me hesitate.

If I tell her what I do, that expression is going to change, but we can’t go on like this. I reach for her hand. “I would’ve told you the first night.” I pause. “Actually, that’s not true. I enjoyed my anonymity. I liked that you didn’t know who I was, but it was only possible because you hate music.”

As I expected, the softness of her features starts to harden. “Music?” She says the M-word like it’s a curse.

“I sing. And play the guitar. I can play other instruments but just for fun. I’m not proficient in anything but the guitar, really. If a gun’s held to my head, I could bang some melodies out on the piano. I do use it to compose, but the guitar is my first weapon of choice.”

She’s not impressed. Her mouth has thinned out, and her eyes are narrowed. The fingers in my hand have gone limp and cold. “I see.”

“I know you’ve had a bad experience before, but—”

“I need a minute,” she interrupts.

“I’m not your mom.”

“You lie like her.” She struggles to get out of the bed, sheet still wrapped around her, but the more she moves, the more tangled up she gets. “Shit. Can you just—” She waves a hand toward the door.

I don’t want to leave. Alone, she’ll be able to make up scenarios in her head about how the only musician she knew abandoned her. Worse, I have to leave for the stadium soon too, which means I’m either going to have to imprison her in the hotel room or kidnap her. Either choice sucks and is going to piss her off. This is my own damned fault for not coming clean sooner.

“Come to the stadium with me. You can see the concert, meet my team. Anything you want to know about me, I’ll answer, or someone on my staff will answer.”

Her face grows green. “Stadium?” She chokes out. “You’re that popular?”

“It’s not what it seems.”

“Not what it seems? You’re singing in a place where they play football, and it’s not what it seems? Do I even know your real name?”

“Yes. I’ve never lied to you about my name. I just left out my stage name, Dylan Sign.” I see the recognition in her eyes. Singing in a stadium is no different than a bar other than it’s bigger. That’s all. It’s scale, but really all that is happening is the same. I’m singing with a band, and people are vibing to the music.”

“Crowd management,” she says suddenly. “As in when you say stand up, everyone stands up. When you tell them to shout, they shout. My mom loved that. She loved it so much that she couldn’t stay at home with us. We dragged her down. We kept her from realizing her dream.”

“My dream is already happening. You being here adds to it. You’re the final piece in my dream.”

She doesn’t look convinced. My phone rings, and I know without answering it’s Chris. It’s time to go. I move quickly, pulling her up out of the bed, sweeping the sheet over her exposed parts and flinging her over my shoulder.

“What the hell?” she yells. “Put me down.” Her fists pound against my back.

“No can do. If I leave you here, you’ll run back to Loveland, and since the whole town has your back, they probably won’t let me in. I’m taking you to the stadium, and we’ll hash it out there.”

“I’m not going anywhere with you.” She wriggles like a worm on a hook, but since I’m at least a hundred pounds heavier and a helluva lot stronger, she’s not getting away.

I carry her onto the elevator and down to the private parking garage. Outside, the SUV is waiting. My bodyguard raises his eyebrows but doesn’t hesitate to open the door.

“Help me,” she cries. “This man is kidnapping me!”

“Stadium, sir?” the guard asks.

“Yup. Can you get the door for me?” I say as I climb inside. He nods and shuts the door behind us.

I settle Irish on my lap and hold her tightly until the SUV starts moving. Once we’re on our way, I let her go. Irish lunges for the doors, but there are no indoor handles for her. She comes up empty. “What in the hell?” she cries.

“It’s a safety feature.” I stretch out my legs. “I don’t know how to say this in a way that’s not totally threatening, but Irish, I’m not letting you go.”



CHAPTER 18

CLOVER

“HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?!” I HISS AT DYLAN. “I’M IN A freaking sheet!”

“Shit, you’re right.” He pulls out his phone and clicks away on the screen. I glare at him. “Clothes coming up.” He pockets his phone. I continue to glare at him so he understands that none of this is okay. “You never told me if you’re hungry. They normally have a spread laid out at the venue.” Is he serious right now?

I wrap the sheet around myself tighter and drop back in my seat. I’m clearly not going anywhere. Even if I wanted to. I can’t run out into the middle of the street in only a sheet. I might as well get comfortable at least until the clothes arrive.

“Not only are you a musician, you’re a psycho.” I turn my head to glare out the window now. He’s too handsome to stare at. I have no resolve when it comes to him.

“I’m your psycho.” He places his hand down in my lap over the sheet.

“It’s not funny.”

“Not joking.”

“So, you know you’re a psycho who kidnaps people.”

“I don’t kidnap people. Just you.” I snort a laugh. Dammit. Mad at myself for laughing, I turn and smack his chest.

“Stop joking,” I grit out, my attention going back to him. It always does. Of course, he’s someone famous. I should have known. There is something about Dylan that is alluring. From

the second I saw him, I was sucked in. I'm sure that's how it is with all his fans.

"I'm not joking." This time he says it softer.

"I don't know what to do." I fold my arms over my chest. That's the honest truth. "My dad always knew what to do."

"Irish. Fuck, you're going to kill me." He grabs me, pulling me into his lap. I want to fight him, but I can't. My emotions are all over the place. I want to call him a liar and tell him to get lost. Then I have another fear that he'll do just that. "I love you." My breath hitches.

"Words are easy," I say, wanting to remind myself of that too. My mom told me she loved me too. Then she left and never looked back.

"That's why I want to show you. I'm in this with you. I just need you to give me the chance to show you." I close my eyes and rest my head on his shoulder.

"I don't know if I can do this," I admit.

"You can try and run, but I'll chase. Is that what you need? For me to prove I'm not going to run out? If you haven't noticed, I keep running right back to you." He strokes my hair.

"Because it's new and exciting. Once that wears off, then what will happen?"

"I'm not going to lie, Irish. I do get a rush of excitement when I see you, but I've never had that before with anyone." I lift my head to stare into his eyes, wanting to believe all the things he's told me, but it's so hard to wrap my mind around it all.

"How have you never been in a relationship before?" I can't wrap my head around it.

"Honestly, I thought it was because I was focused on my career. Once I hit, I took off and I told myself I wouldn't let myself fall into the same hole other musicians have, so I've stayed focused. Too focused. It's why I took off that night and landed my ass in your bar, and there you were."

"The one girl that didn't fawn all over you." I lift a brow.

“Lies. You were into me, or I got you there.” I roll my eyes at him, but he’s not wrong. I had this pull to him from the very beginning.

“I just—” I stop speaking when I hear screaming.

“Ignore it,” he tells me.

How can I? The SUV pulls through the parking lot of the massive stadium. The guardrails keep people at bay, but they still scream and cheer while holding up posters. It’s all a blur of so many faces.

The SUV drives down and around toward the back before it rolls to a stop. I can no longer see the crowd, but I hear them. Now only a few people who I’m guessing work here linger outside of two giant doors that are open. There are a bunch of men in all black standing at attention.

I watch as a random woman approaches the vehicle with a bag in her hand. She opens the passenger door. “Clothes,” she says before shutting it. The driver grabs them and turns to hand them to me. Dylan takes them for me as the driver slips out, leaving us alone. I kind of forgot he’d been there at all.

“I’ll hold the sheet while you get dressed.”

“Maybe I won’t get dressed,” I bluff. Then he’ll have to leave me behind in the SUV.

“Irish, I’ll wrap you in that blanket. Might actually be better. Then someone might not sneak a picture.”

“Sneak a picture of me?” I hadn’t even thought about that. What it would mean if I was dating someone famous. How it would not only affect my life but all the people that are in it.

“They’re always looking for their next story. You don’t need to be one.”

“Oh, now you’re hiding me.” I know I’m being ridiculous and I’m all over the place, but I can’t help it. I snatch the bag from his hand and start to get dressed.

“Not hiding. I’m not sure I’m ready to share.” His eyes eat me up as I quickly get dressed. The clothes fit me perfectly.

Does he snap his fingers and things happen? I'm guessing the answer is yes. "But I suppose it's only a matter of time."

"Do you want me here or not?"

"I always want you, Irish. Always. If I had my way, I'd never be away from you." He sinks his fingers into my hair, pulling me in for a deep kiss. "I'm sorry I've pulled you into this, but I can't let you go." His eyes are almost pleading.

"We've got to go," Chris shouts, knocking on the window. Dylan ignores him.

"Let's go." I give. My heart is already in this. Even if I walked away right now it would hurt like hell. We can talk about all this after the show. I don't want to make anyone pick me over their passion even if on some small level I do. Or I suppose I more want to know I'd come first. But I should know better than anyone what always comes first.



CHAPTER 19

DYLAN

THE CONCERT IS...NOT THE USUAL SMOOTH SET. I'M distracted, and even though I know that for many, this might be the only event of mine they attend, I can't drag my mind off of Irish. The crowd doesn't seem to notice. The cheers are louder than ever. I admit there was an edge of pain in my vocals that I think everyone responded to.

At the bottom of the lift, Chris beams at me. "Good call on doing the 'Crazy Lovin' You' set. We'll have to put it on your live album. The crowd was loving it."

"Guess I was inspired." My eyes flick toward the long makeshift tunnel under the stage that leads toward the artist lounges. "Any problems?"

"None. I've checked on her multiple times. Had some things thrown at my head, but she's still there."

My assistant Cloudy hands me a fresh shirt and a towel. "Figured we should get rid of the girls who pat you dry. Someone may not like that."

"Good call." I strip off my soaked stage shirt and wipe myself down as much as possible. I'll have to shower when I get to the artists' lounge. I slip on the clean white shirt and climb onto the golf cart. When I arrive at Irish's space, I can feel my heart rate kick up.

"Go away," she yells at my knock.

Relieved to hear her voice, my body relaxes. Despite Chris' reassurances, I half-believed she had run off. I give Chris the thumbs up and shoo him away.

“It’s me,” I say. “I’m alone.”

There’s silence, and then I hear metal clanging against metal and the scrape of something heavy against the floor. Her face is flushed from exertion when she opens the door. My eyes fall to the side, where I spot a metal chair.

“There’s no lock on the door,” she says, a little defensively.

“Smart,” I reply, and gently move forward into her space. She backs up and then retreats to the sofa. On the coffee table are the remains of a fruit and cheese plate, a half-drunk flute of champagne, and some chocolate-covered strawberries.

“You’re done?” she asks.

I drag my eyes upward to the television that carried the live stream of the concert. It’s off, and the fact that she’s asking me if I’m finished means she didn’t watch. I try not to let that bother me.

“Yeah.” I notice that her red hair is smoothed and styled with bouncy curls at the bottom. Her beautiful features are highlighted by light makeup around the eyes and cheeks. My styling team must’ve come here. I wonder how they were able to convince her to undergo this small transformation.

She tugs at one of the curls. “What are you doing now?”

“After concerts, I usually do some small meet and greets for VIPs, like the owner of the football team or the execs of the company that has the naming rights to the stadium. A few of the athletes or wives might show up. I’ll take photos, sign autographs, eat, and then pass out. That’s my routine.”

“And sometimes you go to bars and pick up women?” Her hands fall to her shirt. She pulls at the end, which makes her tits stand out. I flick my eyes upward to her face so I’m not distracted. I don’t think she’d appreciate me drooling over her boobs while she’s trying to have a serious conversation.

“Technically, I just went to look for a bar, and I really wasn’t even looking for a bar, I just wanted to get out and do something normal.”

“Normal is drinking at the bar, not picking up a girl, hiding your identity, and then disappearing for a week.”

“All of it’s abnormal for me.” I decide to change the subject. “Your new outfit is cute. I don’t remember it being the one that Chris provided.”

“Your stylist came in and offered me some new clothes,” she admits. “I said no at first, but she was convincing. She said that no matter how careful you were, someone might take a photo of you and me, and wouldn’t I want to look my very best since a million plus people would be staring at it within hours of it being posted on the internet?”

“I’m going to protect you,” I repeat my earlier promise.

The small smile that appears on her face isn’t a happy one. “I looked you up while you were singing. Seems like you’re the topic of a lot of conversations. People track your dating history, where you live, and even your flights?”

It’s been part of my life. I’m numb to the lack of privacy. “People can be pretty intrusive, but you can’t focus on it or it’ll drive you crazy. There’s actually quite a few artists that suffer from anxiety because of it, if we’re honest. Before you were in my life, I wasn’t really careful, and by that, I mean I never cared to correct things that were inaccurate. One of the dating stories is that I’m having a love affair with a rapper because one drunken night, I lost my balance and fell against him. Someone snapped a photo and said we were a couple. The rapper and I thought it was hilarious, and we never made a big deal out of it because once something is in a photo, for a lot of people, it’s true.

“But it doesn’t mean any of that is real. Truth is most artists—at least the ones without heavy drug problems—are really boring. When you’re on tour, all you see is your staff and the tunnels of stadiums or the basement of arenas or the back halls of theaters. You live with that because performing is the only time you feel alive. Or that’s how it used to be, and then I met you. I know I said this before and you didn’t believe it, but I do love you. I’ve never felt like this about anybody else. Knowing that you were waiting for me, that you

were still here”—I gesture around the room—“made me feel more alive than ever before. And if you told me I can’t do this with you, I’ll shut it down and refund the tickets. I’ll move to Loveland and help James carry kegs around. It’s hard to say what the future is going to hold, but I know for a fact I’m only gonna be happy if you’re part of that.”



CHAPTER 20

CLOVER

THE LAST TWO WEEKS OF MY LIFE HAVE BEEN CRAZY. JAMES has been holding down the bar. I have some guilt because the place is overrun at the moment. It didn't take long for people to find out who I was. They tracked me back to Loveland. The plan had been for me to go back after a week, but with how things are back home, we decided it would be better if I stayed close to Dylan. He was not a fan of me going back home alone while he had to head to his next event.

With him and his security team, they can keep people at bay. It is still all very overwhelming. The crowds and people screaming his name never cease to amaze me. I didn't understand it until I'd gone to the second concert and actually watched him perform. I can see why they scream for him. The man doesn't only sing; he pours his soul into it. If I hadn't been captivated by him before, I would have been then. In hindsight, I'm happy I had no clue who he was. It gave me a chance to get to know him in a way that I don't believe many other people do.

I fell in love with the real Dylan. Not that I've told him that. He says the words often to me, but I can't bring myself to say them back. I'm not sure what is holding me back. What if I'm broken? He's so perfect. I'm finding myself to be a bit self-conscious, and I hate that. Dylan has given me no reason to think that. In fact, he's made it abundantly clear that he's taken. So much so that everyone is going crazy about him having a girlfriend that is steady and always with him.

I think to me it's the only control I have in my mind. If I don't say the words to him, my heart can't break as badly if

this all goes to hell. Or maybe I'm afraid the thrill of the chase will be gone for him. It's bullshit. Still, there is this fear of saying them. Everyone I love on this deep of a level has left me in one way or another.

"You awake?" Dylan brushes my hair away from my face. I yawn before I open my eyes. We'd taken a late-night flight out to New York from Hawaii where he'd done one concert and we got to sneak in one day of play. Dylan has to record in the studio today and meet up with a few people there.

"I'm awake." Another yawn leaves me.

"I should have let you sleep more." He nuzzles my neck.

"You have a sex addiction," I tease. "You're really turning into a rock star now."

"I have an Irish addiction." He kisses up my jaw. That he does. I still can't fathom him saying he'd give it all up for me. Especially since my own mother wasn't willing to. I could and would never ask that of him. It would breed resentment in time. To take away someone's passion? I've never really had a passion.

I guess it is Loveland. The family and people I have there. My stomach gives a small flutter thinking about family and home. The back of my mind knows that Dylan and I haven't been using protection, and there has been no period for a while. I've never tracked them before, but I have to be late.

I haven't had time to give it much thought. Dylan hadn't been lying about how fast-paced things could be. It's from one thing to another, and in between it's Dylan and me all over each other. A few times I've woken to him sitting in bed next to me writing away on a notepad. If inspiration strikes, he's always making notes. It could be in his notepad or on his phone. It really has been just work and me for him for the last couple of weeks.

I always thought this lifestyle was filled with partying and girls everywhere. Well, there are girls everywhere, but they aren't all over him. He keeps his distance a lot of the time except for some of the meet and greets, where I notice Chris

always speaks to the next group that is coming up to him to take pictures. I'm not sure what he says, but I think it has to do with touching. I'm noticing Dylan's not a big fan of people being in his personal space. With the exception of me.

"You and the rest of the world have an Irish addiction." I laugh.

My face has exploded across the internet. It's strange seeing pictures of myself everywhere. The one thing about coming from a small town is that I know for a fact that the people from Loveland weren't giving them shit about me. Not that there was really much to give. My life has been the bar.

The most the paparazzi got were pictures from a high school yearbook since I don't have social media. I have some regrets there. Maybe if I had social media, they could have stolen those pictures because my yearbook ones are not good. Wild red hair I didn't know how to control and braces that made my mouth giant. Dylan of course thinks they're adorable. The man is crazy.

"I don't like it," he mutters, pulling me up from the bed so we can get dressed. I don't miss the jealousy in his tone. It's strange how short of a time you can know someone but be so connected.

"You don't like it? Girls scream your name. They'd lick your feet if you let them."

"I'll lick your feet," he offers. I snort a laugh.

"Do I look okay? Are there going to be people taking pictures?" I ask after I'm done getting myself together before we land. I know this isn't a concert, but I swear people with cameras pop out of nowhere.

"You always look more than okay, Irish." I don't know why I asked him. "But no. This remix I'm doing is a surprise. No one knows I'm in New York except industry people who aren't talking to the paparazzi."

"Cool." I drop down into a chair and put my seat belt on so we can land. "I'm kinda excited to see you in the studio."

"Don't make me nervous." He shifts in his seat.

“I make you nervous? You perform in front of thousands of people.”

“It’s a blur of faces when I’m up there.” He shrugs. “I care what you think.” He leans over and kisses me.

When we finally land, there isn’t a fleet of people waiting. We hop in a blacked-out SUV as we always do to head to the studio. I pull out my phone to check my emails and messages. I click on the one from Oliver first, surprised she’s messaging me. James has been handling a lot of the office stuff along with my manager Christy.

“What’s that face?”

“Nothing.” I shake my head and delete the message.

“It’s not nothing.”

“It’s not something I want to talk about now. After?” I suggest as we pull up to a building. My mother isn’t a subject I love to talk about. She is trying to get into contact with me. I’m sure I know why.

“The fuck?” Dylan mutters. I follow his line of sight to see the paparazzi. “How do they know we’re even in the city?”

“I have no clue. Only a handful of people know.” Chris sounds as irritated as Dylan. “Pull around to the back,” Chris tells the driver. Thankfully, no one is back there. We hop out and make a run for the back door before they try to circle around and catch us.

“We have a leak?” Dylan asks when we enter the building.

“Not from our team but I’ll get to the bottom of it.”

“Is it that big of a deal?” I glance up at Dylan, who has me tucked into his side as we walk down a long hallway.

“It’s a big fucking problem if someone in my inner circle is tipping people off, but Chris is right. I don’t think it’s on our end, or other shit would have been out there.”

That’s true. I’m sure there is a ton they could have said about us. There are normally the same ten-ish people around us, I’ve noticed.

“Then, who did it?”

“It would have to be on her team,” Chris answers.

“Her?” Now I’m really confused and maybe a touch jealous. “Are you recording with someone else?”

“She’s twice my age, Irish.” He kisses the tip of my nose. “It’s a remix of an old song for Christmas.”

“I wasn’t jealous.” I say quickly. My cheeks warm because I totally was.

“As you shouldn’t be.”

Chris stops in front of a door, lowering his voice. “Truthfully, I wouldn’t put it past her to have leaked it. She’s been out of the limelight for a while, so maybe she’s trying to drum up press, but I’ll speak to her team. That’s not how we handle press. Audrey Carter is old school so—” Chris shakes his head, irritated.

My stomach drops. I try to step back, but Dylan has a hold on me as Chris opens the door to the studio. My eyes land right on Audrey Carter.

My mother.



CHAPTER 21

DYLAN

THE RESEMBLANCE IS OBVIOUS NOW THAT THEY'RE TOGETHER. In my defense, I haven't seen Audrey Carter up close in years. We don't run in the same circles. She's at least twenty years my senior. We don't make the same music. I make rock music, and she's a solid pop singer, but I still feel dumb as hell. Irish's face is as pale as the marble on the reception desk.

"Clover." Audrey holds out both her hands. "I've been waiting for you."

Irish backs up. "No."

"This is a mistake. Can you get the car?" Chris looks confused, but Cloudy opens the door. I put my arm around Irish to lead her back to the SUV when her mom reaches for Irish's arm. "Honey, don't turn away."

Someone shouts, "They're here." Flashes go off, stunning Cloudy. I cross over and slam the door shut but not before photos are taken.

"Shit." I arch my eyes toward Chris and nod toward the door. "Can you take care of this? Pay them off for not posting the photos."

Chris' eyes widen because I've never done that before, but he does as I ask. He might be a pain sometimes, but he's good at his job.

Irish appears on the verge of breaking down. "Find a way for us to get out of here," I order Cloudy.

He grimaces. "There's only two exits. This back fire door and the front one. It's a small studio." He shoots a dirty look

toward Audrey. She'd been the one to suggest this studio, and it's obvious why.

She smiles innocently. "I chose this because it's cozy and intimate. I recorded Christmas Fools in a studio like this one twenty years ago, and if we were going to make new magic with a remix, it seemed appropriate we recreated the original setting as much as possible."

"I need to get out of here," Irish murmurs.

I squeeze her shoulders. "Chris will think of something." I open the door to the control room where all the audio mixing and engineering takes place. "Sit in here while I get you something to drink."

I shut the door before Audrey can follow her daughter inside. It's then that I notice the videographer behind the older singer. "Are you recording this?"

"It's part of a documentary project," she admits.

"I don't consent, and neither does Clover, so you might as well put the camcorder down."

"We can blur out your face," Audrey suggests.

"And I can sue your ass from here to Paris."

The woman's face tightens, and some of her genial attitude drains away. "From the protective way you treat Clover, I'd think that kind of publicity would be something you would want to avoid."

"Are you threatening us?"

The door behind me flies open, and Irish stomps out, pushing me out of the way. She shakes her finger in her mom's face. "Don't for a minute think you're calling the shots here." She spins to me. "When did this collab come about?"

"I don't remember. Before you made it into the press, but it was recent."

"It had nothing to do with you," Audrey offers, but it was the wrong thing to say.

“Of course, it didn’t. When have you ever made a decision with me in your head?” Irish folds her arms across her chest. “But the press? This tiny-ass studio where we are practically stacked on top of each other when you both can afford something way bigger? That was all your idea. I guess because you aren’t famous anymore you decided that I was worth using as a PR tool, but you don’t get to do that. You lost that right when you walked out on Dad and me.”

“I used this as an opportunity to reconnect with you, Clover. You’ve ignored all my attempts to reach out to you.”

“Where were you when Daddy died? When I had to bury him?”

Audrey’s eyes widen, and she stumbles back. The videographer tries to catch her but can’t hold the camera and stop the older woman from falling. I leap forward and intercept Audrey before she can hit the floor.

“She’s fainted,” I state. “You—” I point to the receptionist. “Get some vodka. Or whiskey.” It’s a record studio. They should have a storage cabinet full of booze and maybe even drugs. I lift the slight woman into my arms and carry her into the control room. Irish pushes her purse off the sofa, and I lay the singer down onto the now empty cushions.

“I thought she knew.” Irish’s lower lip trembles. “I didn’t keep it from her on purpose.”

I press Irish’s face against my chest. “I know, baby.”

Her whole body shakes. “James called her. I know he did. He wouldn’t lie about that to me.” She lifts her tear-stained face, seeking reassurance.

“No. He’s very protective of you, but he wouldn’t lie about contacting your mom.”

“But she didn’t know.”

Or she’s a very good liar. “Yeah, seems that way. Come on. Let’s get your mom revived, and you can talk it out.”

Irish’s lower lip trembles. “I don’t know if I want to. Even if she didn’t know about Dad’s passing, she still abandoned

us.”

“Then don’t talk it out.”

“You won’t think less of me?”

I cup her face and thumb away some of the wetness on her cheeks. “We could leave your mom unconscious on the sofa and I wouldn’t think less of you. This isn’t my call to make. I didn’t live your life. You get to make those decisions. I’m here to back you up. No matter what call you make, I’m going to support you.”

“What if I said it’d kill me if you sang a song with her?”

“I’m not doing that damned song. That was over the minute I figured out she was your mom.”

“Isn’t it supposed to help your Grammy campaign?”

“Baby, fuck the Grammys. You’re way more important than some dumb trophy.” I wrap my arms tightly around Irish and give her a hard, affirmative kiss until the tears have subsided and her trembling is more from arousal than anger or sadness.

A knock on the door has me reluctantly releasing Irish. Outside, the receptionist lifts a bottle of ammonia in front of me. “It’s cleaning fluid, but I think it’ll work better than all our vodka.”

I thank her and take the container to the sofa. Irish grabs the cleaning fluid from me.

“I’ll do it.” She crouches down by Audrey’s head. “I’m going to pour this lye on your face if you don’t sit up.”

Audrey’s eyes flutter open immediately. “Did I faint?” She struggles to sit up. Neither Irish nor I help her. Audrey’s mouth flattens into a frown. “What happened?”

“That’s what I want to know.” Irish sets the bottle onto the floor and then settles into one of the black leather rolling chairs. “Start from the beginning and don’t leave anything out. Or make anything up.”



CHAPTER 22

CLOVER

“I’M HONESTLY NOT SURE WHAT YOU WANT ME TO SAY, Clover. I, ah, only found out about you and Dylan when it blew up in the media.” She flicks a glance over to Dylan. “Are you so sure he didn’t seek you out because of me?” Of course, she would try to make this about herself. I shouldn’t be surprised. Obviously nothing has changed. She is still self-centered and selfish.

“That’s not going to work!” I snap at my mother. “You might toy with me with your love, but you will not use my love for Dylan for any of this.” I feel Dylan tense next to me. My words weren’t exactly an *I love you* in the traditional way, but it’s the truth. I do love him, and I won’t allow my mother to use that love to manipulate this. If anything, it’s because of her I’ve been so guarded with Dylan. I’ve made him pay for the sins of my mother. My eyes start to water.

“Oh, honey.” My mother tries to come toward me, but Dylan goes to block her at the same time that Cloudy grabs my mother’s shoulder and pushes her back down into her seat. The man is not only Dylan’s driver but often acts as his security. He takes his job very seriously, and one hard rule with Dylan is that no one was to touch me unless I approved. The only exception to that would be if it was for security purposes to get me out of a situation if needed.

Dylan worried that he might come off as too overbearing at times to me, but he actually filled this void in my life. I never realized how much I longed to know there was someone that wanted to take care of me in such a way. I didn’t know how badly I missed it until Dylan was doing it.

“You keep your hands off me.” My mother tries to bat at Cloudy’s hand, but it’s already gone. He released her shoulder the second he got her back into her seat.

“Don’t be rude to him. He’s only protecting me.”

“From your own mother?!” she screeches, showing her true self. There she is. The mother I remember.

People might have loved my mother’s voice, but when she got worked up and started to throw a fit her screeches were like nails on a chalkboard or maybe I only feel that way because I grew up with her. I got to bear witness to more than a few temper tantrums.

“You know when I think back on life before you left, I always let the good memories come to the surface, but when I really think about it, there are only a handful. Seeing you today is a reminder of the bad ones. Of how poorly you treated my dad. I’ve been so mad at you for leaving, but I should be thankful. You did us a favor. We lived a happy life without you.” It’s truly awakening.

“I didn’t leave. I tried to visit. Your father wouldn’t let me.”

“There you go again. Trying to lash out at someone I love. If Dad did do that, I’m sure he had his reasons. I trust whatever decisions he made, because every one of them I bore witness to, my dad always did with love for me.” My mother’s lips purse.

“I don’t care what it would take. No one would stop me from seeing my child. No one,” Dylan says from beside me.

“You always favored him and him you.”

“I can’t believe you just said that.” I shake my head, a humorless laugh bubbling out of me. “No, actually I can.” Some things never change, and this woman standing in front of me is a prime example of that. She doesn’t even deserve to be called my mother.

“You’re jealous of the attention her father gave her. That’s some fucked-up shit.” I can feel Dylan getting madder by the second.

“What did you want me to do? Stay in that podunk town slinging beer for the rest of my life?”

“No,” I answered honestly. “You could have made it work. You chose to leave and never come back. Not even after Dad died.” She tries to speak, but I hold my hand out to stop her. “I won’t believe you if you say you didn’t know. Even if you didn’t, it only goes to show you never checked in. You didn’t come back because you couldn’t face me.”

The room grows eerily silent. I don’t speak. I let the unease build, hoping it will make her uncomfortable.

“I thought this could be our chance to reconnect. I mean, what are the odds that Dylan gets signed on for the remix and you two end up together.”

“Fate?” Is that what she’s saying?

“Yes, fate.” She perks up at that. “You believe in fate, don’t you?”

“Yes, fate brought me Dylan.”

“See?”

“I do see.” I nod in agreement. “Fate brought me here to remind me that I’ve been making the man I love pay for your sins. For me to finally wash you out of my life.”

She lets out a small gasp. I stand. “I’m ready to leave if you are.”

“The paparazzi are still outside,” Cloudy says as he shoots a glare at my mother that could kill.

“I don’t care. She’ll get her next five minutes of fame, but I don’t think she’ll enjoy it as much when the truth comes to light about who Audrey Carter truly is.”

With that, I leave the woman who gave birth to me in shock. This time, it’s me that gets to leave her behind. When the doors open for us to make our exit, the cameras start to go off as the questions start to fly. One after another. Dylan never answers them. I always stay quiet. Except one catches his attention as Cloudy opens the back SUV door for us.

“Do you guys plan to get married?!”

“As soon as I can talk her into it,” he responds before giving my ass a pat to get into the SUV. I scramble inside. As soon as the door closes, Dylan pulls me into his lap. His mouth claiming mine in a deep, hard kiss.

“You love me?” he says when he finally breaks it.

“Of course, I love you, Dylan.” I press a kiss to his lips this time. “But I don’t recall you ever asking me to marry you.”

“We’ll get married. Like I said, I’ve just got to get you to agree.”

“It might be easier than you think.” I give him a coy smile.

“Marry me,” he orders.

“That doesn’t sound like a question.” I laugh. “But yes. I’ll marry you.”

“That was easy. I thought I was going to have to wait until I knocked you up.”

“Dylan.” I smack his chest, my face warming. I don’t know why I’m blushing.

“You could be already.” His hand goes to my stomach.

“Whatever fate gives us, I’ll take, as long as I have you.”

“You’ll never get rid of me. I can promise you that. You’re mine, Irish.” And he is all mine.



EPILOGUE

DYLAN

WE START TO HEAR THE CHEERS ABOUT A QUARTER MILE AWAY. Next to me, Irish tenses. Even after half a decade, two world tours, and multiple public appearances, she's still not used to the fame and all the attention that comes with it.

"Your fans have turned out." Seated in the leather bench seat across from us, Chris looks smug. "And I'm talking about the Pretties, not your fans, Dylan." He adjusts his bow tie and winks at Irish.

I clear my throat. After five years, you'd think I'd be immune to Chris' casual flirtations with my wife, but I'm not. It's still as annoying as ever.

Chris grins wider. "It's funny making you jealous."

"Now, Chris," Irish interjects. "You don't want him to be in a bad mood for the red carpet."

"It's okay. The glowering overprotective attitude plays well to your fandom."

The Pretties. That's what Irish's fans call themselves. Someone made a comment on social media about how she was prettier than me, and from there, it just took off. Our ship name is D-rish which sounds like "dish" if you say it fast enough. There are worse names. Chris Martin said that his fans call him and Dakota Johnson, "Dartins".

"Are you nervous?" Irish leans into me.

"No. After you had Petra, I don't think I'll ever be nervous again."

Irish giggles. “I thought the nurse was going to have to sedate you.”

“I wish she had.” According to the hospital staff, Irish’s three-hour labor was categorized as easy. I was a mess from the minute her water broke until Petra cried for the first time. Nothing will ever faze me after that.

“How you going to handle this one?” Chris wonders, tilting his head toward Irish’s burgeoning belly.

I stretch my arms out. “I’m a pro now.”

“We’re going to sedate him this time,” Irish says.

“I’m going to get some drugs, yes.”

When the limo comes to a stop, everyone is laughing, including Irish. Chris and I gently push her out of the back seat before she fully registers that there are a hundred cameras pointed in her direction. The crowd noise pauses and then swells as they take in her round stomach. “She’s pregnant!” I hear someone shout.

A fan close to us waves a picket with our faces on them. “Clover! Clover! Over here! Are you expecting?”

Irish nods, and the screams grow louder.

“I think they approve,” I whisper into her hair.

“I don’t understand why I have a fandom,” she mutters through her smile.

“Because you’re beautiful, authentic, and charming, which is ninety-nine percent better than most of the celebs.” I wave to her fans.

The first year out was a rocky one. There were a surprisingly large number of fans who thought that they had a chance with me. Or maybe they just enjoyed thinking I was celibate? Or that I was with that rapper from so long ago? I’m not sure. Perhaps they thought Irish was just a passing fad, but as time went on, she became a fixture in their lives as well as mine, to the point that sometimes I would have a schedule by myself, and the fans would ask me where she was. Most of the time, we’re together, whether I’m on the road touring, at an

awards show like tonight, or chilling in Loveland at Get Lucky. She put a stage in there, and sometimes, toward closing time, I'll play the piano and sing a few songs. The locals like it. There are fans who make the trek from Las Vegas, but they're pretty respectful. James would kick them out if they weren't.

"It's worked out, hasn't it?" I ask Irish while the camera flashes blind us.

"What?"

"Everything. You, me, the music thing, the family, even the travel."

"It has." She smooths a hand over her belly. "I didn't think I'd be taking two babies on tour, let alone one, but we make it work."

"This way," A handler comes over to direct us past the photo call. "Will you be doing any interviews?" He looks hopeful.

"Afterward." I point to Irish. "We need to get Clover off her feet."

The handler flushes and nods in eager agreement. In short order, we're inside the arena and shown to the artists' lounge. A swarm of people come over to greet us, most of them pushing me aside.

"Clover, are you pregnant again? I heard you two were going on tour."

"Is it a boy? Do you know? I didn't see any gender reveal on Insta."

"They don't do that."

"They don't?"

"No, they didn't for the first one, did you, Clover?"

"I read you were doing fifty dates! How will you manage? You should stay home."

"No," I interject, maybe a little too forcefully as a number of heads swing in my direction. I put on a smile. "We all know

that Clover's my better half and that if I don't have her with me, the tour won't be a success."

Irish slides her arm through mine, probably to reassure me that no one is taking her away. "I like touring. I get to go to different cities, visit museums, shop, eat good food. Unlike Dylan here, I get to leave the hotel and the stadium, and explore. It's fun."

"If you ever get tired of him, call me, and I'll come save you," calls a very famous blond pop star from across the room.

Irish shakes her head. "I can't leave him alone. The one time he went to a tour date without me, he didn't eat anything but a bag of popcorn and almost passed out before the concert started. He said he was going to order room service but forgot because the World Cup was on."

"It's true. I'm a mess without you." I kiss the top of her head.

"Hey, no PDA in the artists' lounge. You're going to make us all jealous." The pop star pouts. "The last time I had normal human contact was..." She trails off. Everyone in the room nods in agreement. They're surrounded by managers and agents and lawyers, and real people aren't allowed in. Their gazes turn to Irish with a lot of envy.

I maneuver my wife into a corner. I slap a hand on the wall and lean close, blocking everyone's view of her beautiful body. "They're going to try to steal you away, so promise me again you'll never leave me."

Irish grins. "Is that why I'm knocked up again?"

"That and because you're so fucking sexy that I can't go ten minutes without wanting to bone you into the next year."

"You'll have to wait a few hours," she replies primly.

"Sounds like a scam."

"This is the Grammys." She tries to act scandalized, but inwardly, I'm pretty sure she's delighted.

"If you say the word, we're out of here. I can be between your legs before the car pulls out of the arena parking lot."

“As exciting as that sounds, we’d better stick it out. You’re up for all the big ones.” She straightens my collar and fixes my tie. “I don’t want to go home and tell Petra that you lost because you couldn’t sit in your seat for three hours.”

I drop my forehead to hers. “This is heavy ammunition.”

“I know, but I only save it for the big events.” She slides her hand down my arm to catch my fingers. “Let’s go to our seats and let me practice clapping. I bet I’ll have to use that skill a lot later.”

She was right. I won all the big awards. Petra was thrilled when we got home. For me, though, the real winning happened later that night when Petra was in bed, the cheers had died off, and the only thing that I could hear was the moans of Irish as I thrust into her juicy sex. Awards are nice on the mantel, and fans are great for the concerts, but none of that gives me the same high as being in the arms of Clover. I got lucky that one night, and I’ve never let it go.

MY LOVES!

Don’t you adore a rock star hero? Sa-wooon. I’ve been thinking of writing a connected series about a band. Should I? Let me know in the [Facebook group](#). What are you all up to? Keep me updated! I’m curious.

Stay hydrated, loves.

xoxo Ella

ALSO BY
Ella Goode

Marked with Love

Chasing Series

Chasing You

Chasing Us

Swiped for His Taking

Claiming His Bride

Heiress

Knocked Up by Love

Justice Series

Socialite and the Cowboy

Heiress and the Cowboy

Princess and the Cowboy

Billionaire and the Cowgirl

Secretary and the Cowboy

Insta Holiday

Connected to Forever Mine

Making Her Mine

Protecting What's Mine

Friends to Lovers

Forever Mine

Make Me Yours

The Vieth Orphans

(loosely based fairy tales)

Claiming His Queen, Stealing His Princess

A Cherry Falls Romance

123 Secret Ln

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Other stories that feature safe, sexy heroes and a safe, sexy romance.

[Cuffed for Love](#)

[Captured by Love](#)

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[Built for Love](#)

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[Always Loved You / Still Love You](#)

[Killer Love / Killer Crush](#)

[King's Castle / Alpha's Castle / Beast's Castle](#)

[Secret Baby / Love's Secret Baby / Rock 'n Roll Baby](#)

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[Finding Home & Bring Him Home](#)

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[Make Me Yours](#)

[She's All Mine](#)

[Pretty Prize](#)

[The Wolf's Mail Order Bride](#)

[Beauty in Summer](#)

[My Secret Valentine Baby](#)

[Wrap With Love](#)

(a collection of past holiday stories)

[Christmas Stalking](#)

[Three of Us](#) (Twins #1) and [Belong Together](#) (Twins #2)

I wrote a few motorcycle romances when I first started out.

[Their Private Need](#) (Michigan, Easy and Annie)

[His Bold Heart](#) (Chelsea & Wrecker)

[Her Secret Pleasure](#)

[Captive Ride](#)

My one and only LGBTQ romance.

[She's the One & My Only One](#)

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