



*Punmaround*

BIG BANDS  
BIG HEARTS SERIES

*Sandra Alex*

Runaround

*Big Bands, Big Hearts Series*

Sandra Alex

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Oh...

Oh...

That's right...

She don't like it when it's cut right  
And don't like me makin future plans  
And don't want me tryin' to live it down  
She ain't about to give an inch of ground, no.

Well she can take me for is a little ride  
Just as long as she drives me home  
Around the block, maybe once or twice,  
And then some lovin, wouldn't that be nice, yeah!

I want what I wanted

Oh, what a fool believes

I got 'er in my sights, but

Just out of reach. oh-oh

Here we go around, (round, round, round)

Run-run-runaround, yeah! (round, round, round, round)

Here we go around, (round, round, round)

She's given me the runaround, yeah, ow! (round, round, round,  
round)

I just love 'er keepin' me hanging on,

She knows exactly what I need

And right down to the knick of time,

I'm chasin love down a fine, fine line, ow!

I want what i wanted

Oh, what a fool believes

I got 'er in my sight, but

Just out of reach, oh-oh

Here we go around, (round, round, round)

Run-run-runaround, yeah! (round, round, round, round)

Here we go around, (round, round, round)

She's given me the runaround, oh, ow! (round, round, round,  
round)

(Solo)

Yeah, hey, yeah!

Ooh, yeah...

Ooh, ahhh, goes like this

Listen baby... ooh, ow, ow, uhh...

Oh, man it's hard enough, yeah.  
And you make it harder.  
Fill me up and then i'm satisfied, own me  
She owns the time.  
Here we go around, (round, round, round)  
Run-run-runaround, yeah! (round, round, round, round)  
Here we go around, (round, round, round)  
She's given me the runaround, oh, ow! (round, round, round,  
round)  
Here we go around, (round, round, round)  
Run-run-runaround, yeah! (round, round, round, round)  
Here we go around, (round, round, round)  
She's given me the runaround, oh, ow! (round, round, round,  
round)  
Oh!  
Whoa, yeah around,  
Oh, I like it  
Ow, I like it  
Uh, I like it  
Yes, I'm gonna like it  
Babe, i said i like it  
Uh, I said I like it  
Uh, I like it

Source: Musixmatch

Songwriters: Sammy Hagar / Edward Van Halen / Alex Van  
Halen / Michael Anthony

Runaround lyrics © Wb Music Corp., Mugambi Publishing

# CHAPTER 1

## Blaze

My guitar tech tuned the axe that Led gave me, but it hasn't got the sound I'm looking for, so Led told me to do whatever modifications that I want to it, just let him know, so that they can try to replicate it. So, I'm off to the guitar store, and I just happen to walk by an antique store. There's a bunch of jewelry sitting in the window, and I don't know why, but this fucking engagement ring is calling to me.

After staring at the goddamn thing for five minutes, watching someone in the store keep looking back at me, I decide to go in and take a closer look. Liz is the one for me, there's no doubt about that, but we've never spoken about marriage or anything like that, so it feels weird even looking at an engagement ring. I figure it doesn't hurt to have it, in case one day we do talk about getting married, and the timing fits. I'm about to leave, thinking I'm nuts, when the dude inside the store approaches. "Sorry for the wait. Did you want to have a look at it?"

'No, thanks' is on the tip of my tongue, but for whatever reason, I say. "Sure, man."

He pulls out a small key and unlocks the tiny lock, before pushing his arm inside and grabbing this beaut. It's like the nicest ring I've ever seen, and I think it would look kickass on Liz's finger. It's not too big, which I like, since I know that she's commented on hating gawdy jewelry. She's only got a small pendant on a chain and a birthstone ring, from what I've

seen, and this, being an antique, is delicate and dainty, matching her taste.

“How much is it, man?” As much as I know I’m rolling in dough, that’s a statement I’ve always used when purchasing anything that I think is over fifty bucks. Hell, I’ve even got offshore accounts, on the advice of my accountant, and two separate accounts I use; one for when I’m on the road, the other for when I’m home, just so I can track my expenses. Why, I don’t know, but I do that. It’s common sense, as my accountant says, to always have a nest egg, and keep what money you have under close watch.

“It’s five thousand dollars. Those are genuine sapphires, the diamond is very high quality, and it’s another three thousand for the matching wedding bands.”

I know that I’ve got at least fifty thousand dollars in my home account, so I tell the guy to hang on to the set, while I go to the bank just up the street. The road account is almost empty, so I make a mental reminder to have my accountant move my next royalty payment into that one, to replenish it. As I get to the bank, I stand in line, hoping like hell that nobody recognizes me, but since I’m wearing the usual disguise: a baseball cap and glasses with phony lenses in them, I figure I’m safe.

After I complete the withdrawal slip, I’m called to the teller. “What denominations would you like this in, sir?” He asks.

“Just large bills, please.” I ask, thinking I’m sure that the antique dealer would be ass stupid to accept a cheque from a

stranger, and the sign said, 'cash only', so I figure I better do as the man asks.

"Certainly, sir. I'll be right back after I get a signature."

"Sure. That's cool."

It's going on fifteen minutes that I've been standing in line. At least ten people have come and gone, and I'm so careful to keep my gaze aimed away from customers, so I don't get recognized. I start feeling like a stupid asshole for not bringing a bodyguard, not just for if I'm recognized, but also for the amount of cash that I'm about to withdraw. I'm wondering what the hell the holdup is, when I see the teller finally appear, but he walks right by me, as if he doesn't see me.

What the fuck?

He goes into a room in the back. Not so much as a gesture to me. Nobody is coming to tell me that he'll be another few minutes, or what the problem is, or maybe that they don't have the funds? But, what the fuck, this is a bank, right? I flag the guy down as he comes out of the room, and all he does is point his index finger in the air, indicating that he'll be a minute. The patch of sweat under his pits is evident, and I have a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. Something is wrong. Something is fucking wrong. There is more than fifty thousand dollars in that account, and I want my fucking money. I start to worry that the goddamn ring will be gone if I don't hurry the fuck up, and then I'll never find another one that...calls to me...the way that that one did.



“Excuse me, sir.” I finally shout, losing my patience. He’s standing inside the same office again, but this time he’s with someone else. He raises his head, and they both come out to me. “Do you mind telling me what the hell the problem is?” I demand.

He exchanges a look with his colleague. She’s a blonde with huge breasts, and I detect a flirtation in the batting of her eyelashes. I look around as they both hesitate, wondering if the cat’s out of the bag, and I’ve been recognized. I suddenly picture the entire building stampeding towards me, and I almost panic. Until the little fucker says something to me that makes me want to puke.

“Sir, there...doesn’t seem to be any funds in any of your accounts.”

\*\*\*

## Storm

Dez is clad in the most beautiful dress I’ve ever seen. It’s got this plunging neckline that’s making me eye the bowl of shrimp on ice beside us. I’ve got a great place to put some of that ice, because I’m on fire for her, as I watch her walk towards me, after taking a photo of the flowered altar. The wedding is about to start, and we’ve been told by Ray’s parents to take our seats. Two little kids, I’m told are Ray’s nephews, are raising hell in the back, and it sounds like they’re pulling on their aunt’s dress or something.

Slick looks so mellow I'm jealous. Hell, I can stand up in front of thousands of raving fans, but the thought of being in front of family and friends, reciting vows, well, frankly, it scares the shit out of me. I'm much better performing. Singing. Hell, maybe I'll sing my vows. Dez would totally dig that. The setup here is pretty simple. The altar is up front, covered in flowers. The white chairs, arranged in rows, with the middle row empty, for guests to move around, are covered in a fancy white satin covering. All the band members are here, including mine, Roxy's, and, of course, Jett's. Stix, Roxy's drummer, sees me, and gives me a thumbs up. Why, I have no idea.

We've got an official-looking dude standing at the altar, looking like he's bored to tears. Slick's yard is freshly clipped, with a maze of flowers lining the perimeter, and a cutesy painted shed in the back. They were smart and rented a canopy, which we're sitting under, and there's another canopy right next to us, with nothing under it, and I'm guessing that's for dancing after. A dude with a camera is snapping shots as the wedding march starts up, coming from a tape deck under the empty canopy, manned by a pimply-faced teenager. It's all quiet as Slick and his brothers appear at the altar.

As girls unknown to me, start walking down the aisle, I feel my eyes start to glaze over, until I feel Dez's hand in mine. Then when I see Ray, I wake up. She's fucking beautiful, and I suddenly start to see Dez doing that. I'd love to see her in a dress, all decked out like that. You'd never know that Ray is knocked up at all. The dress hides everything. At least to an untrained eye like mine, anyway. They say their vows, and I

feel Dez's hand squeezing mine, keeping me awake. In my defense, we did a show last night, and I haven't slept. How the hell Slick looks so rested is beyond me.

You can hear a pin drop as they say their vows, and that's when the shit hits the fan. A helicopter flies overhead, interrupting the ceremony. Guests stand up, as the pilot speaks from a loudspeaker, something that I can't decipher.

...and then I hear the gunshot.

...and Stix is on the ground.

\*\*\*

Liv

One Month Before

My fingers are shaking as I dial rapidly, watching my sister Stef's face light up, cheering me on. It's like we both climbed into our time machines and we're back in high school. Only this time, we're in our mid-twenties, chasing down free tickets to a concert, and backstage passes, something most people can only dream of getting. Why I got myself involved in this is beyond me. "Stef, we're never going to get through." I scoff, dialing for the fourth time.

"Not with *that* attitude you won't. And at least, this time, we don't have mom screaming at us from downstairs to get off the phone, so she can use it."

“It’s no different. We have a snowball’s chance in hell of getting through.” I say, after only hearing a busy signal for the third time about twenty seconds ago, during my last attempt.

And then, to my surprise, it rings. My eyes widen. Stef’s do, too. When somebody picks up, my jaw drops. Someone answers with a gameshow-host-like voice, mentioning the radio station’s call numbers, and sounding like they’re on candid camera. “You are the tenth caller!” he shouts.

“Oh my God!” I squeal, slapping my hand on my thigh. Both Stef and I are sitting, Indian-style on the floor, just like we did when we were teenagers. My plush carpeting is soft on my bare feet in the warm, summer, California heat. I’m careful not to touch my freshly painted toes on the carpet, as Stef would kill me, since she did them for me. Stef’s more of the girly-girl type, where I’m the tomboy. She’s into fashion and arts, hanging out at malls and beauty parlors, whereas I’d rather take up a self-defense class to fill my Saturday afternoon.

We’re two very different people, but opposites attract in our case, and it helps that we’re best friends. My dad’s the local Fire Marshall, and if it weren’t for a severe case of Asthma, I’d be next in line. My second choice was to become a cop, but dad refuses to let me go through bootcamp because he says my lungs won’t hold up, and although it pisses me off to no end, I go with it. Instead, I teach yoga, self-defense, workout bootcamp, and I also work armed security. Yes, I’m one of those people that you see pulling up in a big, chunky van, to various business, collecting money to take back to the bank. I

also have a part-time job working security for a local venue, which has never netted me free tickets to anything, I'll add.

But it seems like today is my lucky day. "You got a name?" he asks, his voice cheery.

"Yes, I'm Liv."

"Like to live and let live? Or Liz, short for Elizabeth?" he teases.

"No, it's Liv, short for Olivia." I chuckle, good-naturedly.

"And are you a huge fan of Buying Time?" he eggs me on.

The man is speaking so loud, Stef, who is listening in, with her ear pressed up against the phone, fighting for space with mine, shouts into the phone. "My sister is in love with Stix!"

"Oh, who is this hottie on the phone?" he jokes.

"That's my sister Stef, who I'll be taking with me to the concert, evidently." I chuckle.

"Ah, so you've got the hots for Stix, huh?" he teases.

I roll my eyes. "He's pretty cute, yeah."

"So, what are you gonna do with these backstage passes, huh? Are you gonna go and...*make friends* with Stix?" and the way he says 'make friends' is so accusatory, he might as well come out and say that I'm going to give him a blow job.

"I might." I admit. I've had a huge crush on the drummer from Buying Time forever. He's got the long, shaggy, surfer boy type hair, and his eyes are so goddamn blue, I can't help but stare at him. He's got the typical drummer's body, too, and he is a god at his drum kit. He hits those beats like he

becomes possessed on stage. I've never seen a drummer with such passion for the instrument, and it's a huge turn-on for me. No, I don't have posters pasted all over my house, or even in my bedroom, of Stix or of Buying Time, but I do have a huge, framed, color poster that Stef bought me years ago, hanging on my basement wall.

I almost had the chance to meet him once, not long ago, since my dad made an appearance at one of their concerts, when a lady jumped off the roof of the venue. Dad called Railynn, a Hollywood psychotherapist, whose family is close friends with my family, to the rescue, but the woman jumped anyway, and I never got the chance to meet Stix, until now. You see, I was working that night, during the concert, but once all the hoopla with the suicide happened, I lost my chance. Not for lack of trying though.

The radio guy tells us exactly what I've won, and tells us how to get it, which means a trip to the venue before the concert, which is tomorrow, and since the concert is in Nevada, not local, we've got quite the drive ahead of us. We stole dad's radio and homed in on this station, since we knew that they were giving away tickets. My phone bill will be crazy high this month, with long distance charges, but I don't care. If I get to meet Stix, it will all be worth it, and all these piecemeal jobs I have will finally pay off.

I'm a believer in independence. Which is why I have three or four jobs. My classes are for pleasure. Also, because, aside from MTV, there's nothing good on television these days. Physical fitness is paramount to me, which is why all my jobs are so physically demanding. One day I'll take that bootcamp

and become a full-time cop, and make my dad eat his words.

Give up all these other piddly jobs, that pay shit, by the way, but they keep a roof over my head and keep me busy, so that's that.

I hang up the phone and both Stef and I are vibrating. Sure, we've been to enough concerts, paid for from our own pockets, but this is the first time we scored ourselves backstage passes. I'm so excited I could scream. And I do. We both do. After we're done jumping up and down and screaming like teenagers, we get a hold of ourselves. "Okay, how are you going to get out of work?" I ask Stef.

"I'll take a sick day. I don't care!" she gushes. "What about you? Don't you have a fitness class tomorrow?"

"Yeah, but I can get someone to fill in."

"Oh my God! I can't believe we're going to meet Buying Time! I hear Roxy's a total badass bitch! I love her!" Stef adds.

"I know. I can totally relate to her. I don't put up with bullshit, especially from a guy."

Stef gives me a look. "Oh, but you are daddy's little girl, aren't you?"

I shrug. "We both are. Ricky's the black sheep."

"I wouldn't exactly call him the black sheep. You just say that because you're jealous that he's a cop and you're not."

"You've gotta admit that that's a bit of a double-standard, right?" I smirk. "Sure, the big boy son can be a cop, but the little girl can't?"

“Liv, you know as well as I do, that you wouldn’t pass basic training. Hell, remember what happened when you tried to run that charity marathon? You spent a week in an oxygen tent.”

I wave. “That’s because of that asshole that tried to cut me off.”

“So, you exerted yourself well beyond your capacity, and put yourself into a hospital.” She points out. My asthma is only brought on by physical exertion. The California heat helps keep my lungs dry, not too moist, and I can handle any scent, not like some people who have allergic asthma, like my mom. She even smells a cigarette or perfume and she’s running for her inhalers.

Myself, I’m lucky. I’ve got all the physical jobs, and if I don’t push myself too much, I can get away with it. The minute I go overboard, I’m sunk. Luckily, I haven’t had an asthma attack in more than a year, and the doctor says that I could be growing out of it. Mom developed it when she was in her teens. But me, I was born with it. And I’ve slowly been suffering less and less from it. Which is why, one day, I’ll be a cop, just like my brother.

“Do you want to do this now? Or do you want to start planning your outfit?” I remind.

She grabs my arms. “Oh my God! You’re right! What am I going to wear! How am I going to do my hair!” she squeals, and then she pulls my long blonde locks up in the air. “We are so going to curl your hair! Make it all big! Put lots of black



eyeliner on you! And a miniskirt! Oh! You have to wear a miniskirt! You've got great legs!"

"Me? Three out of four of my jobs are physical, and my legs don't hold a candle to yours!" It's true. Stef is a model, and she comes to almost all my classes, so I know that she works hard to look as good as she does.

She ignores my statement. "What about that black denim one? With that sexy red camisole?"

"I could wear that, sure. Just...don't tart me up with teased hair and an inch thick layer of eyeliner. I want to look like a fan, not like a whore."

"Well, you want to give a good impression, right?"

"Yeah, but the right one. I don't want Stix, if I actually get to meet him, to think that I just want to fuck him, you know."

"Well, don't you?"

My eyes widen and I laugh mirthlessly. "Stef, when have you known me to be a slut, huh?"

"Liv, if this is a once in a lifetime opportunity, you're telling me you're not going to take it?"

"Are you serious? You seriously think that if I meet him, I'm going to sleep with him? Are you off your rocker? Besides, he does have a girlfriend, I've heard."

She waves. "Please. Even if they're married, it doesn't matter. They like someone they do the deed."

"That is so cliché." I chuckle, squealing. "And, no, I'm not just going there to fuck his brains out. I actually would like

to..." I trail off, in a daze, sighing. "Stare into those big, beautiful eyes of his, you know, in person."

She smiles coyly. "And, if given the opportunity, you wouldn't slide your fingers through his hair."

My eyes widen as I bark. "Hell, yeah!"

"Well then...? I mean, Liv, it's not like you date."

"When the hell do I have time to date?" I blurt.

She teases. "Either that or you're just so in love with Stix that you're holding out."

I snort a laugh. "That's ridiculous. Like he would ever go for me. He's the drummer for one of the most popular rock and roll bands. He can have any girl he wants AND he has a girlfriend, from what I've read about in the magazines. Why on earth would he even look my way." I say as more of a statement than a question.

"The girlfriend, if it's true, is a nobody. They never mention her name in the articles. Besides, like I told you, it doesn't mean anything. Rock stars aren't monogamous."

"Oh, great sell." I scoff. "There's the man of my dreams. Just what I'm looking for. A guy that will break my heart."

"Have you seen pictures of her? She's a skankoid. Hell, he dated Roxy, and even she's, like, a thousand times better." Roxy is the lead singer of the band.

"Quit talking like I have a chance, Stef. It's...ridiculous. I'm getting a backstage pass to meet the band, not a date with

the guy. And let's not forget that there are now, what, three bands on this tour? Chances are I might not even meet Stix."

"But you might." She says, lifting a finger. "And what does daddy always say? Seize the day. So, you're going to wear that outfit, and you're going to tease your hair and get all trampy, on the minute chance that you are going to meet him."

"But, Stef, I don't want to look like a whore. If I do get to meet him, I don't want to stand out in that way."

She smiles. "God, you are so in love with him. I'll make you look beautiful then. Forget about it. You're going to be the most beautiful girl in the whole venue."

"Thanks, Stef."

\*\*\*

The drive was wickedly fun. We brought all Buying Time's albums and played them the whole way, singing along like our lives depended on it. Once we get to the piddly little motel, about an hour's drive from the venue, we check in and Stef goes to town on herself and me, using all the beatifying tools she brought. By the time she's finished with me, I have to admit, I look great, thanks to her. But then, she looks fabulous, too. And a horrifying thought crosses my mind. "Stef, what if he likes you...you know, instead of me?"

Her face scrunches up. "Liv, you know he's not my type."

“I know you like the bassist, but what happens if Stix likes you? I mean, you’re so beautiful, Stef. Sometimes it’s intimidating.”

She levels with me. “You know that I’d never do anything like that to you. Just...relax. If he likes me, I’ll just tell him straight.”

“You mean it?”

“Have I ever used my looks for gain?”

I think about it for a minute. No. Stef is a straight shooter. She’s the best kind of beautiful. She doesn’t let it go to her head. The only way that she capitalizes is for her career. And it’s an honest career. She isn’t into the drugs and binging and purging that most models do to make a career. No, Stef works out, eats right, leads a healthy lifestyle. It’s not her fault that she was just born that way, and me, I was born with Asthma. How the hell we’re so close is beyond me. You would think that with this sort of situation, that we’d hate each other. But, no, it’s just the opposite.

“No.” I answer her question honestly.

“Then you’ve got nothing to worry about.” She cracks a smile. “Aren’t you just about to die? We’re about to go backstage and meet Buying Time!”

My stomach does a flip. “It doesn’t seem real.”

“Well, brace yourself. Let’s go get our tickets and passes!”

We pump the tunes all the way there again, and, thankfully, we get our stuff without a hitch. Stef looks at our tickets and her eyes bulge. “Oh my God! These are fucking front row!”

“You’re fucking out of your mind! Really?” I bark.

“I am so not lying.” She says, showing me them.

If it weren’t for my mascara, I’d cry. “This doesn’t seem real.”

A security guard, seeing our passes hanging around our necks, also giving Stef the once-over, addresses us. “You girls want to go backstage now?”

We exchange a look, like he didn’t just ask us that. “Um... yeah!” I say.

We’re standing in front of a cordoned-off area just behind the tickets desk. He pulls the cording up, allowing us in, and instructs us on where to go. He also gets on the radio, and I’m assuming that he alerts someone of our arrival. We go to where we’re told, and it seems like a long walk to get there, beyond all the plethora of seats, and then the stage, until we get to a door that leads beyond the stage, that says, ‘no entry’. Another security guard sees us and doesn’t say a word, but opens the door and gestures for us to go inside.

The back area is noisy, with all sorts of people milling about, road crew, managers, I’m assuming, readying the place for the concert. We’re not sure exactly where to go, so we just keep walking. “Oh my God! I think I just saw one of the managers!” I say, remembering seeing a small snippet of his face in a picture in a magazine. It was a paparazzi rag, but whatever, the guy was in the picture by accident, clearly, but I recognize him all the same. “That must mean that Buying Time is here!”

“Well, of course they’re here, Liv. The concert starts in like thirty minutes.”

I hear an electric guitar way in the bowels of the place, but it sounds like Jett from Wired, not Cruz from Buying Time. How the hell I know the difference, I don’t know, but I love these bands, that I can tell you. Still, I feel a thrill, hearing something live, knowing that I’m that much closer to them. Stef, reading my mind, looks at me and gushes. “Is this the best day ever or what!”

Then, I stop dead in my tracks.

The man of my dreams.

The guy I’ve been subconsciously saving myself for...and didn’t realize it until now...

...stands not fifty feet from me.

He’s even more beautiful in person. Just standing there, talking to a bunch of fans. Talking like he’s known them his whole life.

...and I freeze.

Stef stops in her tracks and looks at me. “What’s wrong? Isn’t that...him?”

“Yes.” I say numbly, nodding. Knowing that if I only ever get this close to him, my life will have been worth living.

“God, I thought you would run to him.” She looks at me. “Are you okay?”

“I’m...in shock.”

He looks over towards us, tilting his head slightly. Then he sees me and smiles, but I'm not sure if he's smiling at me, since there are only about a hundred other people back here. But I pretend that he's smiling at me. Then a salute confirms it. He was smiling at me. And suddenly I feel like I'm five years old again, terrified to go and sit on Santa's lap, until he waves at me and curls his index finger towards him, inviting me personally to come sit on his lap and tell him what I want for Christmas.

But instead of curling his finger towards me, he gestures with his hand, motioning for me and Stef to come his way. Roxy is there, so is Cruz and Blaze, but for some reason, whether it's my imagination or not, Stix is the one encouraging me to come and say hello. Surprising me, Stef walks over, as if I'm old news to her, now that we are in the presence of a super popular band.

"Um, yeah, she's like, totally in love with you." Stef explains, and I'm guessing it's because I'm walking like Bambi does in the movie...on ice.

I swallow. "Thanks, Stef. I'm just going to...vomit now." I say aloud.

Stix smiles a scoff, and he looks so sexy I can't believe it, it's like a dream. He puts his hand out for me to shake, and, since I'm frozen, he actually has to grab my hand. "I'm Stix...but I guess you knew that already." He chuckles.

"...Liv. Not Liz, Liv with a v. This is my sister, Stef." I clarify, like an idiot.

"That short for Olivia?"

I nod, looking at his eyes. They're almost too beautiful to look at up close. Like an eclipse.

"You bring a camera or something? You want a picture?" He offers.

All I need is right here. His face and my memory. "I don't...know."

With all the makeup and hair things she brought, I have no idea if Stef thought to bring a camera. I know I didn't. I only have one of those Polaroid One-Step cameras, and that thing is so big and heavy, I wouldn't dream of bringing it here.

"You got something I can sign for you?" he asks, and I'm thinking that he's probably exhausted because I'm such an idiot. I'm standing here with my mouth wide open, and I swear I just felt a bead of drool roll down my chin.

"You can sign the back of my shirt, or my skirt, whatever." I say, not even thinking.

He looks at my arms. "Wow, that's a great set of pipes you've got there."

I lift my one arm. Sure, I'm in great shape. I should be. I work out six days a week. "I work in security." I explain.

"Yeah? Where?"

"In LA. I once worked at the venue where you guys were playing. Almost met you that night, too, if I had my way about it."

"Yeah? We should hire you to work for us with arms like that."



“Is it gross?” I ask, suddenly self-conscious, and thinking that Stef probably looks way better than me.

“No, not at all. You look like you take good care of yourself. It’s not steroids or anything.”

“Yeah, you, too. I suppose beating the hell out of drums for a living is good for the arms and abs.”

“You ever work the drums?”

“No. But I’ve watched you so many times, I could probably beat some out if I tried hard enough. It wouldn’t hold a candle to you, of course.” I’m babbling.

“What’s your favorite solo?” he asks.

I tell him and he smiles. “That’s mine, too. But I bet you already knew that.”

“Yeah. You probably think I’m a freak already, don’t you. I probably know more about you than you do about yourself.” I scoff, feeling stupid suddenly.

“No, not really, man. I get vibes from people. Some are good. Some are bad.”

“I’m guessing I’m good then?” I ask, closing one eye.

Stef is talking to Roxy, hitting it off pretty well, from what I can tell. I look over at her, thinking that my time with Stix is going to be short lived.

...then he says something that blows my mind.

## CHAPTER 2

### Stix

I walk into my dressing room and see Meg, my girlfriend, sitting with a couple of the roadies. All my band mates are either doing sound checks or talking with their techs, since we're getting ready for a show tonight. Roxy and Jett are in their room, because I just saw them go in as I left my room, looking for Meg.

They're splitting bumps of coke, probably since they know that Roxy and Jett aren't around to witness what we're not supposed to be doing. "You want some, babe?" Meg asks me.

"Na, I had some earlier." I lie. I've been doing it less and less. Call me crazy, but I feel like Roxy's sobriety and the success of this tour is contingent on us staying clean. So, I only do it when we're off, not when we're going on stage soon. And even at that I'm feeling the craving less and less.

I can tell it pisses Meg off when I don't do it with her. It's getting on my nerves. I'm planning on ditching her soon, but I just want to get through this leg of the tour before I have to deal with the drama. She's clingy and needy and I don't like it, but I also don't want her shoving her face in front of the camera and making an ass out of me in the process. She's that type, and if I had known that, I wouldn't have gotten involved with her to begin with.

I can tell that I'm irritating her too, but she's putting up with me because, well, because of who I am. It's too bad, because I really thought that she was going to turn out to be

something special. We got along great in the beginning, but now it's turned to shit. She's more in it for the drugs and the notoriety than anything. The sex was great in the beginning, but even that's turned to quick, 'get it over with, I've got better things to do', garbage, too.

"Come on, babe. This is really good shit." Meg says, trying to encourage me. She doesn't like to snort alone. She doesn't like to do anything alone, frankly, and that's the annoying part. At first, I thought she was just really big on intimacy, but it came down to the fact that she didn't even want to go to the bathroom alone. It's creepy.

I'm looking forward to tonight's show. It should be really good. We've got a lot of meet and greets going on tonight which is always really exciting. I love it when we do them before the show *and* after the show because it really pumps me up. Some of the guys hate them, but I love them. I get right into it with the fans.

It's not long before we're called down, and I can feel my heart pumping. Truth be told, I enjoy the natural high of feeling pumped before a show, way more than the feeling of the coke. There are droves of fans all over the place, and I get lost in it, taking pictures, signing autographs. I love it like this, because it's more of a controlled environment, not like when we get stopped on the street or something, and it's pandemonium. When it's backstage, and it's fans with passes, won off the radio, or from the media or celebrities, it's great.

What's even better is when you meet a fan that's shy as hell, and not acting all crazy and stupid, even though that's

sometimes cool, too, since, well, it's us that they love, and that's awesome. As a drummer, I don't usually get a lot of attention. It's the lead singer and the guitarist that usually gets the limelight, and I'm cool with that, because that's when I shock them all by standing out, taking the reigns. But tonight, it's different. There's this really hot looking chick with another hottie, and they're walking together, like they're glued. This one blonde looks like she's going to pass out from fear, and that's when I try to help.

I start talking to her, and her sister, but then her sister seems to be more enthralled by Roxy, who comes over to talk to them. We're making small talk, when I notice the great arms that she has. As a drummer, I can appreciate a good set of pipes. It comes with the territory. Liv says that she works out, and so do I, to keep everything in check. You ever see a fat drummer? Never. Nothing would disgust me more than watching my own flubber jiggle up and down and all over as I crush those beats. She seems so nervous, I feel sort of bad for her, and I can tell that she's a good kid. "Hey, you want to come to my dressing room?" I offer, lifting a hand. "Not for anything weird, man."

"S...sure." she hesitates, and I can hear the tremble in her voice. She tells her sister that she'll be right back, and her sister's eyes widen, like Liv's about to get laid by me, and my intentions could not be further from that. I'd never do a fan that's about to shit themselves, like, ever. And that's what's most appealing about Liv. She's not swooning all over me or any of the others. She's genuinely excited and shocked.

“Come on.” I chuckle, taking her hand, which feels so clammy I almost want to rub them in mine to warm them up.

The dressing rooms are way in the back. In fact, it’s not only my dressing room, it’s the whole band’s dressing room. Seriously. We actually turn around so that Roxy can get dressed in private. Places like this don’t usually have much room, and it’s much more important to have enough space for warming up than it is for dressing. I mean, we wear jeans and t-shirts on stage at the most. I just want to bring Liv back here so I can show her something.

No, not that...

Inside the dressing room it’s a total mess. Almost to the point where it’s embarrassing to even bring someone back here, but I think Liv can see beyond the clothes thrown all over the place. Under all my clothes, inside my empty case, lies another case, which I pull out and open. “This is my very first set of drumsticks.” I explain, placing them into her cupped hands. “You can see where all the varnish is worn off.”

“Wow. You really beat the shit out of these.” she observes. Then she winces. “Oh, sorry, my language.”

I snort a laugh. “And you’re apologizing...*why*? Have you not heard *my* potty mouth?”

“I was just raised not to use foul language in the company of someone I don’t know well.”

I wave. “Don’t sweat it.”

“How come you don’t still use these ones?”

“I’m scared I’ll break them. They’re my good luck charms.”

“I believe you.”

“*You* have a good luck charm?”

She hesitates for a moment, thinking about it. “I suppose my sister is my good luck charm. She’s been with me every time anything good happens to me. In fact, she was with me when I won the tickets and passes for tonight.”

God, could she be any sweeter? I reach over to a bag of drumsticks I have in the corner, and I pull out one of them, along with a permanent, fine-tip marker, and I sign one of the sticks. It’s difficult, but I do it every time. “Here.” I say, handing it back to her. “Maybe this will also bring you some good luck.”

She looks at me for a moment, staring at the stick. “Thank you so much.” Her voice sounds like I’ve just given her the goddamn Hope Diamond.

“You’re welcome. You want me to sign your skirt or your shirt, like you said earlier?”

“Sure.” The way she looks at me. It’s like I’m a goddamn unicorn. I can’t help but smile. And as I flatten the bottom of her skirt, grazing her leg with my hand, I start to feel like I want to get to know this girl better. Scrawling my name and the year on her garments, skirt and shirt, she’s eying me with so much awe it’s almost too much. This girl really is in love with me. I’ve never seen anything like it. Girls rarely go ape shit over the drummer. It’s kind of cool.

“How about you come back after the show, too. I’ll show you around some more.” I offer.

“Are you sure? Is that allowed, since we’ve already been back here?” she asks so carefully, like she’s afraid that she’ll get me into trouble. And suddenly I want her so bad. Her innocence is unnerving. Normally I’m not into virgin-like chicks, but this one, this one is really getting under my skin.

Suddenly I have visions of pressing her up against the back wall and lifting her skirt up, having my way with her. It wouldn’t be the first time. Hell, it wouldn’t be the first time even in this room. But she’s as cute as hell and not at all skanky so I’m not sure how she’ll react.

Instead, I look down at her lips and scan the rest of her body, paying attention to her body language. And just as I suspected, she has no idea. Which makes her even hotter. “Honey, that’s why you’ve got backstage passes. You can stay back here all you want if you like. But I’m sure you don’t want to miss the show. I assume you’ve seen us play live before, right?”

“Yes, several times, actually.”

”Is there anything that you’d like to ask me? Assuming that you don’t know everything about me already from having read magazines, right?”

She blushes, making me squirm. This chick is just too cute for my own good. “Is it true that you have a girlfriend?”

“I do. Truth be told, things aren’t going so well. But you can keep that between you and I, right?”

Her face turns legitimately solemn. Once again making me squirm. “Oh, I’m sorry.”

I give her the once over again. Trying to make it evident that I’m flirting. “What about you? You got anyone special?”

“Between my three jobs, I haven’t got the time.”

I love the way that she bites her plump little lips when she’s nervous. They’re naturally pink. I know, because no lipstick is transferring under her teeth when she bites them. It’s doing things to me. “What sort of work do you do?”

“Just boring stuff, but it pays the bills.”

I touch her arm, feeling her soft skin. “Come on, tell me.”

“Well, I already told you that I’m a security guard part-time. But I also teach yoga and I run a fitness class. And I also teach self-defense.”

“So you could totally kick my ass if I don’t behave myself, huh?” I say smoothly.

“You are the one person I wouldn’t do that to.”

“What...kick my ass? Sure, you would. If I was outta line, that is.”

“I don’t think you would be.”

“Oh yeah, why do you say that?”

“Because we’re alone and you haven’t been inappropriate yet.”

“I told you, I’ve got a girlfriend.”

“You also said things weren’t working out.”



Oh, she's up for a challenge. This I like. "I'm also going to be called for warmups any minute now." I take back one of the drumsticks. I scrawl something down on it and give it back to her. Curiously, she doesn't look at what I wrote.

"You make sure you come on backstage after the show, okay? I should head back before my manager comes looking for me."

"Okay." She nods, and suddenly the shyness returns. I take her hand in mine. We go back to the corridor. There are still throngs of other fans there waiting for me. I kiss her hand before saying goodbye. Her sister's eyes nearly pop out of her head. I'd sure like to be a fly on the wall for the conversation that happens after I leave.

We assemble for a group shot. Seems her sister managed to find a camera in her purse. Then her sister insists that they get a picture with the other bands. But I'm sure that's code for 'we need to get outta here so that you can tell me exactly what happened in that back room'.

Liv gives me one last look before following her sister. And I wink at her. When she's out of earshot, Jett approaches me. "Dude, what was that? You know Meg's going to punch you out when she finds out that you were hanging with that chick in the back."

I look at him. "Do I look like I give a fuck?"

"No, but I do. I don't need to hear that for the next month."

"No need to worry, man. I'm ditching the ball and chain as soon as this leg of the tour is over."

“That’s still another week, buddy.”

“You’ll live.” I say flatly.

Our manager comes out back and throws his arms over his head and claps his hands together three times to get our attention. “Alright!” He shouts over the din. “The best way to see this show is to head out to the stage to your left!” He addresses us. “You all can head to the warmup room. Get started.”

I find myself extra pumped tonight after having met Liv. Call me sappy. Call me foolish. Call me whatever you want. But Meg’s out and Liv’s in as far as I’m concerned. I’ve just gotta figure out a way to do it without getting psycho chick going ballistic on me. And it’s just like she heard me. Suddenly, Meg appears, all decked out like the whore she is. Roxy gives her a disapproving glance and I chide myself for not listening to her in the first place.

Roxy didn’t like Meg from the start. To be fair, Roxy doesn’t like anyone much, but when she came up with the affectionate nickname for Meg, ‘that slut you fuck’, I ignored the obvious slight. Roxy’s sobriety has made a lot of changes between us bands, but what we thought was going to be an embargo on debauchery, ended up becoming a sort of ‘we take you as you are’ approach, since Storm from Daniel’s List has now entered into the mix, and soon after we discovered that he’s fallen off the sobriety wagon.

Rather than turning this tour into a substance abuse sponsorship program, we’ve decided to support each other, while leaving the ugliness where it belongs. And that’s out of

sight and out of mind in case you're wondering. So the only ones that truly know what's going on are behind the scenes. And since Meg is well aware now that Roxy is being more forgiving, she's taking full advantage.

"Hey, baby. I'll see you out there." Meg says to me, eyes glassy, but keeping herself straight.

"Yeah, I'll see ya." I say, giving her a kiss, as she comes over for one.

Roxy gives me a look. "Lucky she didn't see you with that other girl. Is she the new slut you fuck?" She teases.

"No, and don't tell Meg, either, man. That's the last thing I need."

Jett interjects. "Correction. *We*. It's the last thing *we* need."

Roxy, seeing the defeated expression on my face, saves me. "Come on, man. Give him a break. Let's go get pumped up!"

I smile at her. You know, for the fact that Roxy and I used to fool around together, she sure doesn't make it hard on me anymore. She's a good shit. And I feel her vibe. Roxy is going into the zone. And I love it when she's there. That's when the magic happens. And she's awesome on stage. We do our warmup routine, practicing a few of our household cover tunes, even throwing in one from Wired's list, and we're ready to rock.

I'm on fire immediately on stage. No, really. I mean, I last a minute and my T-shirt is off. I don't know why I bother to put the thing on half the time anyway. I throw it into the audience, hoping that maybe Liv will catch it. But I'm not sure. It's not

until Roxy calls us all up to the front of the stage to introduce us that I see her.

Her smile is so bright, it's contagious. I wave to her and her sister. And her sister takes a picture of me, bravely. But then she quickly puts the camera away before security catches her. Roxy does a short monologue introducing us. And then I head back to my drum kit. Cruz and Blaze periodically come up to the drum risers and play there. They wait until the perfect moment to jump off the drum risers. Fans love that.

When it comes time for my solo, once again, I'm on fire. It's not so much about me showing off, it's just about being in the zone. It's like you are one with the audience. It's therapeutic. It's one of the reasons why I've never had to go and see a shrink, too. Ever since I learned how to play the drums, very little bothers me, and if it does, that's where you'll find me.

Cruz and Blaze make their way back to the stage about a minute before my solo is finished. They blend their solo in with mine playing with me in time with the beats. It's a nice combination. And then they both have their turn in the limelight while I head backstage for a break. Wired is back there getting warmed up for their set. I grab a towel and mop up my face and my head and grab some water.

Their warmup is much like ours, and they even pick one of our songs to warmup with as well. I'm surprised Meg didn't follow me back here. And I'm relieved. She usually stays at the side of the stage. When she's here, that is. She's gotta go

back home for a couple of weeks. I didn't think she'd be following me this much on the tour if I'm being honest.

We decided to save the best for last with this set tonight as we play our final three songs, and just rocking the roof off of this place. The last song features a very long drum solo, which is kickass. It's very difficult to replicate and I haven't seen or heard of anyone else that has been able to do the beats that I do with this one. In fact, in the recorded version of this song, I actually put coins on my snare drum. Nobody's been able to figure that part out yet...

Until tonight...

One of my roadies climbs up on stage and throws a small baggie full of dimes on the drum riser. And at the perfect time, I hit it. The audience goes bat shit over it. That's the first time I've ever played the last part of that song truly live. And it's the best feeling. Better than any high I've ever had.

We clasp hands overhead at the apron of the stage while the audience roars. My hair is soaking wet, dripping down my back, I'm sweating so much. We tend to use probably double the amount of lights that other bands would use. It gives a much better effect. But it also makes the stage feel like it's about one hundred and twenty degrees. We bid our fans adieu and then head backstage. There's a ten-minute intermission before Jett's band is on.

Meg is waiting for me backstage. She's sitting there, in just a bra and a skirt, having removed her shirt during the concert, I'm guessing. I'm not sure what sort of reaction she's expecting from me. But she doesn't seem too pleased when I

go and meet some fans for meet and greets. A few fans comment on my solo and then the revealing of the sound that I made with the dimes. It's pretty cool.

At the corner of my eye I can see her, and her sister, Liv and Stef, that is, walking towards us. I smile at Liv. But then I see Meg catch a glimpse of us off to the side. Her arms are crossed over her chest indignantly. I've already put my arm around a couple of girls to get pictures, but Meg seems to take notice when I put my arm around Liv. I'm guessing somebody squealed on me about taking her backstage before, to the dressing room. Alone. And I'm guessing she knows because of the fact that Liv is the only one with an autographed skirt and matching shirt.

But Meg knows not to come near me when I've got fans nearby. Those are the rules. Roxy's got her eye on Meg, so I know it's going to be a catfight if she tries anything. It hasn't happened yet, but I'm sure one day it will if Meg keeps it up. Roxy has a zero-tolerance policy on bullshit. And this sort of behavior, falls right into that category. "How did you ladies like the show?" I ask the girls.

"It was fabulous!" Liv gushes.

"I loved it." Stef exclaims.

"Yeah, how come you didn't stay out there to watch the rest of the show?"

"We will. We just wanted to come back here first. I hope that's okay." Liv says, and there's that concerned look again. *Honey, you can come and go as you please, as far as I'm concerned.* She may be pissing Meg off, but she's doing things

to me, with that sweet smile and those honest eyes. *Yowza*.  
Plus, she's all sweaty from being in the mosh pit. Suddenly  
I'm picturing her in the back room again. But this time I don't  
just give her my drumstick.

## CHAPTER 3

Liv

Stef's eyes are wide as I return to the hallway, with Stix holding my hand. I'm numb but my insides are like jelly. This is like a dream come true for me. Wait, it's better than that. This is about a thousand times better. I'm holding the drumstick in my hand for dear life. When he finally releases my hand, I can't help but stare at him. He is like a god. He's a thousand times hotter in person.

When he invited me backstage, I thought I would die. Inside I was screaming but I played it very cool. Stix's voice is so goddamn sexy I almost can't stand it. When he chuckles, he gives me goosebumps. "Tell me everything!" Stef insists as we head down to the mosh pit.

But I'm so numb my memory fails me. Don't you hate that? I look at the drumstick and Stef follows my gaze. I hand her it, not taking my eyes off it, as we stand in a lineup to get onto the floor aisles. "Is this a phone number?" She asks, half confused, half shocked.

"I don't know. Is it?"

"It looks like a phone number to me. Did he come onto you?"

"It didn't feel like he was coming on to me, no. Besides, he has a girlfriend, and he's not a dirtbag."

I leave out the part where he said that things weren't working out with her. It's probably a line or he just doesn't want me to feel bad. He absolutely knows that I worship the



ground that he walks on. If I were a dog, I would have rolled over onto my back so he could rub my belly. I feel like such an idiot now just thinking about it.

“Well, he definitely wants to keep in touch if he gave you a number. You should give him yours!” She gasps as we head closer to the mosh pit.

“Are you crazy?” I bark, laughing. “You can’t be serious!”

“Why not? What’s the worst that could happen? He tosses it? So what?”

“Oh...God! Don’t you think that’s just a little bit presumptuous? And then what if his girlfriend finds it? What if she comes after me?”

“Come on, Liv. He’s a rock star. He can see anyone he wants to see. He can call anyone he wants to call.”

“Which is exactly why I shouldn’t. Stef, he will break my heart. Don’t you think I’m better off with this idealistic vision of him in my head? Why bastardize it by making it real?”

She lifts a brow. “What about just sleeping with him? I know you’re no whore and you don’t sleep with anyone you’re not in love with, but would you make an exception? This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to do something completely spontaneous and stupid. Something that you’ll look back on fondly for years to come?”

I smirk. “With my luck it’ll be horrible, or he’ll knock me up, or I’ll have his girlfriend on my tail for years.”

She sighs, resigned. I know that I’m the dream crusher in her mind. But I’m also realistic. The closest I’ll ever get to

fulfilling any dream is to join the police academy and show my dad who's boss. We finally inch our way to our seats, almost fighting off some girls, one in a white shirt, paper thin, not wearing a bra, and stand in our spot. "So, are you going to call him?" Stef asks me.

"I don't know." I answer, watching the advertisements on the Jumbotron, which, by the way, looks ginormous from this angle. We're in the goddamn front row. "Probably not."

She looks at me like I just told her that I'm secretly married to a goat. "If you don't, you're an idiot. I'm sorry, but, how often does this happen in a lifetime?"

I roll my eyes, letting reality sink in, while we wait for the concert to continue. Frankly, my sister is being a buzz kill. I was floating a few minutes ago, having my moment, but now that she's getting all real on me, I want her to shut up. So, instead of telling her to shut up, I do the next best thing. "Can we talk about this later? I mean, do you want to fight now, or do you want to enjoy the show?"

"Fine. But I think you should call him. It's rude if you don't, since he gave you his number. What went on back there, anyway?"

"Just some small talk. Then he gave me the stick. He keeps his first pair of sticks for good luck."

"Did you know that?"

I shake my head no. "It's pretty cool that I didn't. I thought there was nothing that I didn't know about him."

Suddenly we hear a guitar ripping into a righteous shred, and the lights go down instantly. I forget about my conundrum and feel my heart beat faster. This is my first concert in the front row. It's very different. We hear the guitar again and then the stage lights come in and Roxy is front and center, like, almost on top of us. We're that close.

Stix is behind his drum kit, doing his magic, and when the jumbotron camera is aimed at him, I start to wonder what it would be like to be that girl that I'm not. Be that girl that acts impulsively. And then I think better of it. Chances are it won't go over well, since I could barely talk to him, I was so star struck. I would make a fool of myself.

But then I watch him beat those drums, with his lean yet muscular arms hitting the beats, sweating already under the hot lights, hair flying all over as he gives every ounce of effort away, not missing a beat. And I'm lost. He is a god. And I let my imagination wander. He would be so good in bed. At least to me he would be. Anyone with a body like that has to know what to do in bed. Plus, in front of the lens, most of the time he is sans underwear, and I've seen a very strong outline of his...bits.

Because I'm a daddy's girl and very close to my brother, who towers over me, I've never risked sleeping around. Stef is a little different. Being a model, she's exposed to other models, sometimes not a great scenario. She also has a soft spot for male models, who tend to treat her like she's disposable. So forgive me for showing restraint. I've seen my sister with a broken heart. Not for me. Not my thing. I've been in love once before, at least, I thought it was love. Turns out he

was using me to get to Stef. Shocker. After that, I guess I sort of just stayed in my own head. Falling in love has just been a pipe dream ever since. Meeting Stix was also a pipe dream. He's the guy I think about all the time. You know the fantasy. You meet, it's love at first sight, you get married, have kids, and live happily ever after?

But somehow, in that fantasy, Stix is just a regular guy, who plays drums, doesn't have a girlfriend, or a coke habit, or chase after girls on the side. In my fantasy he's the first example. And maybe I'm being a coward, but I don't want to live outside of that fantasy. It's not safe. Sure, it's also not real, but it's better than getting my heart broken, which I'm sure will happen if I call the number that he scrawled on the drumstick. I never dreamed I would ever meet him for real, and now that I have, my brain doesn't know how to process it, I suppose. Besides, he probably takes a lot of girls backstage and hands them an autographed drumstick. I saw the bag of them with my own two eyes.

I'm no different than any other fan. I'm not going to trick myself into thinking otherwise. So, I just enjoy the show, drinking in every bit of it that I can, from the front row. All the rest is just gravy. I'll never forget tonight. Like, ever. Not only did I get to meet the man of my dreams, and the man in my dreams, for that matter, but I also got to spend some time alone with him, and he gave me two gifts: a drumstick, and his phone number. How many other people can say that they ever had this experience? Suddenly, I've pulled myself out of the funk, and it's just in time, because the concert is taking off wildly. Stix is on fire, as are the rest of the band, and it's

phenomenal. I'll never get front row seats ever again. This is so awesome!

"Do you want to go backstage when they're finished?" Stef asks.

"Should we? I mean, isn't it rude to leave when Wired comes on?"

"Who's keeping score?" she shrugs. "You do want to see Stix again, don't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, then..." she trails off. Surprising us both, Roxy stops for a monologue, and brings all the band members to the apron of the stage. My jaw drops as Stix looks directly at me and waves. I'm jumping up and down with everyone else, acting like a crazed lunatic fan, but he still waves at me. He gives me a wink and I just about lose it. I'm battling with myself, as I stare at his body from down here. The lights make his lean muscles glisten, as he stands there, and they jut out effortlessly.

There's no denying it. I do feel a very strong attraction to him. But I don't know how far my brain or my heart will let me take it. I've had my heart broken once. I don't know if I can do it again. Mind you, I don't think that that was true love. Not saying that this is either. But I'm sure that the hole in my heart would be much larger if Stix was the one that broke it. But all the same, watching him stand there, looking at me, it's enthralling and it keeps making me think what it would be like if I were with him and made that phone call.

I've never been a risk taker. Is this God's way of telling me to take the plunge? The way he's looking at me, I can't tell if he looks at other girls that way, too. Wouldn't it be great if he didn't? If those eyes were just for me? And better, what if that body was just for me? His heart? Could I ever be so lucky? Or am I just partially high from the marijuana that's being passed around here.

He heads back to his drum riser and they finish their set. We head backstage and he sees me and I see him. But then his eyes trail off to a girl off to the side, who looks none too pleased. The sour look on her face tells me that this is his girlfriend. And suddenly I lose my nerve. Any brevity I had while the show was on is dissolved immediately. I can't compete with that, nor would I be fool enough to try.

But all the same, he approaches us and asks us how we enjoyed the show. Of course, we both deliver serious praise. And there are those eyes again, staring at me. Those big beautiful blue eyes. They're like a magnet to mine. And once again, I have to battle with myself, because I'm not sure if I can handle staring into those eyes. They are infectious, hypnotic. And I feel like the more I look at them, the more I have to look at them. He's no good for me. With the power that he has over me, he could draw a stake through my heart with just the word no.

I can't stop staring at him and he looks at me and puts his arm around me as though for comfort. He's dripping sweat all over me, but I feel like I want to wrap my arms around him and absorb it all up into my clothes. Is he used to this? Is that why he knows exactly what to do and it comes so naturally to

him? Or am I really a special fan? It's so hard to tell. Although I will note that he isn't giving as much attention to any of the other female fans surrounding him. Stef included. And that's saying a lot, because men usually flock to her and ignore me.

"Will you guys be making another appearance on stage?" I ask him, staring into his eyes as his arm is still wrapped around me.

He stares down at my lips for a moment, and then his eyes meet mine again. "Maybe." His voice is warm and sultry. He makes me smile. And then, suddenly, a pack of girls comes bursting into the hallway. And he releases me. Roxy gives him a look. As though they know these people. He gives me a wink before leaving me.

"Why don't we go back and watch the rest of the show?" Stef asks.

"Yeah, we can come back after, I guess." I say, watching Stix converse with these crazy women. One girl is covered in tattoos and she's wearing a ripped T-shirt. And I figure he's probably better suited for her, too. And then I chide myself for allowing those few moments of insanity where I actually pretended like there was a chance I could be with him. The other girl who I guessed was his girlfriend has left now.

We go back to the mosh pit. Even though the rest of the show is phenomenal, it still isn't the same because Stix isn't there. And then just as I think that the show is over, all three bands come out on the stage, and they perform two cover tunes. Only this time Stix is singing backup instead of being

behind the drum kit. I've never heard him sing before, and my jaw drops. Is there anything that this man can't do?

His hair is drier than it was before, but he's still not wearing a shirt. His voice is fantastic. He would play great lead vocals, too, if he had the chance, I'm sure. And I mentally record his voice in my head. Could I be more in love with this man? There isn't anything about him that I don't like. Well, except that he has a girlfriend. They all go to the apron of the stage at the end of the show and join hands overhead. I feel like Stix is standing right over us on purpose. He sees me and winks at me. At least that's what I let myself believe.

"You want to go backstage again?" Stef asks.

I hesitate, but ultimately, I know if I don't, I'll regret it. This may be my last chance ever to see Stix in person again. And as we head back there for a final time, I feel brave. I feel more of that girl that I want to be bubbling up inside me. It's strange because the same roadie that let us come back there earlier notices us right away.

"Hey, ladies. Come on back." The way he says that almost makes us feel like we're family. The bands aren't back here yet since they're still mopping up and coming down the back tunnel. It's all just crazed fans back here, some of them drunk, some of them stoned. If I'm honest, I think Stef and I are the only two sober ones back here now. Which makes me feel kind of bad for Roxy. But I guess she has to be realistic about this. It's fine to keep tabs on band members, but way more difficult to do that with the fans.



And then finally they all arrive and it's like it's a big party back here. I think this is their last night in Nevada. So maybe it is sort of a farewell gathering. Stef and I sort of hide out in the corner, watching all the hoopla going on around us. We take a couple of pictures with other band members, and some fans, too. Stix is off talking with other people. And I figure I was right pulling myself out of that fantasy. Right now, I'm old news. He doesn't even look my way.

I pull the drumstick out of my purse and look at it again. Partly just to make sure that it was real. But what happened earlier really did happen. I see his number scrawled on it. I wonder if maybe it's a fake? I wonder if this whole charade is a fake, actually. Cruz starts eying Stef, and I start to think that this would just be the perfect night for somebody to take notice of Stef now and all my fantasy will be ruined. I'm just about to start feeling sorry for myself when I see Stix come my way.

“Where are you two girls from?” Cruz asks.

“We're from LA.” Stef answers, trying not to gush but failing miserably. I shut up and let her have her moment since I did have mine earlier. And then I feel his arm hook over my shoulders, like we're long-lost friends. “Hey, do you and your sister wanna come to a party at the hotel we're staying at?”

“Are you serious?”

“I am. We're only going to be here for another hour. Are you up for it?”

The words hell yes come to mind, but I restrain myself.

“Of course, we’re up for it!” Stef exclaims. Cruz has his arm around her. I can’t help but notice that Stix’s girlfriend is standing over on other side of the room, glaring at me.

“Are you sure it’s okay? I mean, your girlfriend over there looks like she wants to eat me alive.”

“Listen, you let me worry about her, okay?”

And then I start to wonder if maybe I’m being used as a tool to help make his girlfriend jealous or to get back at her for something. Because if they have one of those open relationships, I don’t think that she’s been communicated that properly. I give her a look and she all but sneers at me. “I’m not sure.”

Then he does something that makes me want to crawl into the nearest hole.

## CHAPTER 4

Stix

Meg is staring at Liv, making the poor girl look like she's gonna to shit herself. I can see Roxy getting wind of the situation and glaring equally at Meg. And I figure I better diffuse the situation before we have a catfight in here. "Meg, come on over here for a second." I say, gesturing to her. Liv peels my arm off of her shoulder nervously. "Meg, this is Liv. Liv, Meg." I say by way of introduction. Roxy walks over as well.

"Liv, is it?" Roxy says, sticking her hand out for Liv to shake.

"Yeah, I think you met my sister earlier."

Roxy cracks a smile, surprisingly. I think she might actually like this girl. Either that or she's so sick of seeing Meg's mug that she'll settle for just about anything right now. Liv gives Meg a perfunctory handshake. But I notice that it doesn't rub the sour expression off Meg's face.

"So, did Stix invite you to the party after here?" Roxy asks both sisters. And I see Meg give Roxy the 'are you fucking kidding me?' kind of look.

Liv looks at Meg and hesitates. "Y...yes, but I'm not sure if we can make it."

"Yes, you can." Roxy says, putting her arm around Liv.

Meg looks at me. “Stix, can I talk to you in private for a moment?” Although her words are kind, her tone is not.

Roxy glares at her, but stupidly, Meg ignores it. She stomps her way to one of the back offices, and closes the door. “Are you fucking her?” she starts with.

“Who?”

Her hand goes to her hip. “The whore that you wrote all over.”

“First of all, she’s a fan, not a whore. And second of all, no, I’m not fucking her.”

“Bullshit. Wrecking Ball told me that you took her out back before the show and fucked her brains out.”

Wrecking Ball is going to find out very quickly what my fist tastes like. “And you believe that scumwad?”

“He’s not a scumwad. But that ditzy girl is. And her stupid sister, too.”

“Listen, Meg, you don’t even know them.”

“Neither do you. Or at least, not her brains, but you probably know what the inside of her cunt is like, though, don’t you.”

“Careful Meg.” I warn.

“Why? What, are you going to do, cut me off, like you already have?”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“You’re clearly not into me anymore. And you know what, it’s fine.” She scoffs, lifting a hand. “Because I’m fucking Wrecking Ball.”

Meg has quickly been downgraded from girlfriend to groupie. “Oh yeah?” I snort, humoring her.

“Yeah. And now that whore’s sister is after him, too.”

“Looks like you’ve got your work cut out for you, Meg.” I poke, not caring anymore.

“Well, you don’t want me anymore, and Roxy fucking hates me.”

“Why don’t you go home, Meg. Maybe that’s the best thing for you.”

“You’d love that, wouldn’t you.” She’s snide.

After a beat, I say. “I think it’s over.”

She genuinely looks upset. Like, if she really did sleep with Wrecking Ball, that she only did it for attention. Her gaze goes to the floor, her hand goes on her face, shielding it from me, and then I think she’s crying. “Look, Meg, I’m sorry. I thought we really had something, you know, but then you got all clingy and weird, and the spark was lost.”

Her shirt is tied around her waist, as she’s still in just her bra, but now she pulls her shirt over her head, and I can tell that her mascara is running. It’s like now she feels exposed, or she needs to protect herself. As if I haven’t seen her naked before. It’s weird. She’s weird. This whole situation is weird. But all the same, I feel like I need to change the subject. “So, you and Wrecking Ball?”

“Yeah, if that other whore doesn’t steal him, too.” She barks, wiping a tear off her cheek.

“Meg, why are you so hell bent on making it with one of us? Maybe this isn’t for you.”

She scrapes a hand down her face and growls. “Because.”

I lift a brow. “Why?”

A quick sigh. “Stix, in case you didn’t know this, I really do care about you.”

I challenge her. “And Wrecking Ball?”

Hesitation. “Seriously?”

“If you fucked him, then you must care about him, too.” I point out, not hiding the tiny scoff of indignation. “Or is it that you care about all of us, and you’re fucking all of us at some point or another.” It’s more of a statement than a question. A theory.

She goes for the save. “Fine...I fuck around. But you fuck around, too.”

“Not since I met you, I don’t.”

“Liar.” She growls.

“Where is this coming from, Meg? Why do you think that I’m fucking around on you? Aside from the fact that Wrecking Ball told you, that is.”

“Look, just forget it, okay?” she gasps, wincing, crying again. “I know that you don’t love me.”

“You don’t love me, either, Meg. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have fucked around on me.”

She shrieks. “I only fucked around on you because you were fucking around on me!”

Now I’m getting pissed. I raise my voice. “If you thought I was fucking around on you, then why didn’t you say something, instead of going off and fucking Wrecking Ball, and whoever else you’re fucking!”

“I don’t have to say anything, Stix. I know.”

“Like hell you do. I haven’t been fucking around on you, and that’s the goddamn truth. Believe whatever the fuck you want to believe.”

It’s like she’s ignoring me. “You’re fucking Roxy again, too, aren’t you.” She blurts.

“You’re fucked in the head, Meg!” I shout. “Do you honestly think that if I was fucking Roxy that Jett wouldn’t have scraped my fucking lungs out with a spoon by now?!”

“That’s because he doesn’t know...yet.” She seethes.

I scoff without a trace of mirth. “You really are fucked up, lady. I don’t know how you get these crazy ideas into your head, but none of them are the truth. I haven’t been with Roxy like that since well before Jett came into the picture.”

“Please.” She murmurs under her breath.

I lift my arms, shouting. “If you thought I was such a fucking whore, then why the hell are you still here with me?”

Are you that fucking desperate to be on the scene? What the fuck is wrong with you?"

"I know that you still have feelings for Roxy. Don't try to deny that, Stix." She says, her voice direct.

"What are you, nuts?" I point to my head. "I love Roxy, yes, but because I've been with her for so many goddamn years. We've been in the same band since the beginning, you know that! But when her and I were fooling around, it wasn't about love, it was...about need. I told you all this shit when we first got together, Meg, so I don't know why it didn't get into your thick skull."

"Because I see the way you look at her, Stix. I see the way you look at that Liv girl, too, and all the other fans that want you. You'll never look at me like that."

"And Wrecking Ball will? Who else have you fucked between the three bands, Meg?"

Her nostrils flare. "I can't believe I let myself fall for you."

"Well, if it's any consolation, Meg, I don't think you love me. I think you're in love with the idea of loving me, but deep down, I think you're just in love with being here. I think that deep down, you're just a groupie, who wants in on all the action. If you truly loved me, you would have brought this whole insecurity thing to me, not go behind my back and fuck Wrecking Ball, trying to get back at me passive aggressively."

"Fuck you. You aren't a shrink." She spits.

"It doesn't take a genius to figure it out."



She gets a snide look on her face, tugging her shirt down further, as if I'm not entitled to look at anymore, like I care. "I'm going to go find Wrecking Ball. And you better stay away from Roxy, or I will tell Jett."

"You can tell him all you want, freak. I'm not sleeping with her." I scoff, walking away, lifting my hand, giving her the finger. I notice that she doesn't move, and I wonder if she's just putting on the tough act, but as soon as I leave, she's going to cry like a baby. Either way, I don't care. She's accusing me of doing shit I'm not doing, and she's a pure slut, living up to the nickname that Roxy gave her.

I immediately go find Wrecking Ball, who has his arm around Stef, and I make eye contact with Roxy, who looks as concerned as Liv. "Dude." I say to him. "I need to talk to you."

He sets his cigarette down in the ashtray and nods. "Sure, man."

I take him to the green room, well away from the back room, where I was with Meg. "Dude, I don't mean to sound like we're in fucking high school or anything, but did you tell Meg that I fucked Liv earlier?"

A 'v' forms between his brows. "No, man, she was just looking for you. I told her you went back with that girl, probably to give her one of the drumsticks. Why? Is that what she told you?"

"Yeah." I nod. "And, not that it's any of my business, but she also told me that you and her have a thing going on."

He shrugs. “You said you were breaking up with her, man. She was all over me, and she gave me a blow job.” He lifts a finger. “Yo, but I didn’t fuck her, man.”

I’m not sure who is more of a slut. But, then, if I share my opinion, I’m just signing myself up for judgement. The truth is, I don’t sleep around much. I am monogamous. I was faithful to Meg. Sure, I had some impure thoughts of Liv, while I was technically still with Meg, but I never acted on them. Can’t say that I’m not anticipating what’s going to happen next, now that Meg’s out, but I’m only human. When I met Meg, through my dealer, I figured it was just a fling. But it did become more than that, I admit. It wasn’t until we went back on tour that things started going south.

The thing that surprised me the most about Meg was that it started becoming more. I mean, a relationship built on cocaine? Who would have thought it would turn into more? It’s unheard of. In fact, I’m surprised that we lasted as long as we did. And I did like her a lot. We started doing relationship-like things, and for a while, before the tour, it wasn’t just about the coke, either. We had great sex, we talked about shit, you know? We didn’t make any commitments to each other, mind you, but it wasn’t all just about sex and drugs, either.

I’m not crazy about Wrecking Ball either, but he’s on this tour, so I have to put up with him. He’s part of Storm’s band, and Storm’s a fucking basket case if I’m being honest. He’s just fallen off the wagon, after being sober forever, and he’s falling apart, literally. As a fellow drummer, he’s kickass, but outside of that, I could live with or without the dude. Don’t

get me wrong, I don't have a problem with him, but I just don't get a great vibe from him, either. Especially if Wrecking Ball is a lying weasel, and he did fuck around with Meg, but I don't know him well enough to be able to tell if he's as honest as I could throw him.

All this high school-like shit is starting to get under my skin, so I leave it at that. "Thanks, man."

"Hey, did you break it off with her, man?" he asks.

"Yeah." I nod. "I'm not sure how well she's taking it, but I'm sure that you can take care of that." I say, not bothering to hide the half snarky, half 'you want her, she's yours' tone.

I walk back to where the girls and Roxy are, and to my surprise, Meg is still here. Not sure what her deal is, but I'll bet it has something to do with Wrecking Ball, and a bump of coke. She's cleaned herself up, wiped away the tears, and it looks like she's unscathed. Lunatic. But regardless, it looks like Liv picked up on the drama, and her sister, too. Wrecking Ball comes in behind me and Meg goes to him, pawing him, yet keeping one eye on me. She is really disturbed, and I have half a mind to tell Roxy about it, if it weren't for her already appearing completely tuned in.

Looks like Meg's days are numbered. Roxy doesn't put up with any shit. All she's gotta do is open her mouth, and Meg is history. But then I worry that Wrecking Ball will put up a stink, since, evidently, he likes her blowing him, and then that'll add to the pressure for Storm, and that's the last thing he needs. You see how it's like a domino effect when we're on tour? And triple the fun with three bands that have to all get

along. Then again, Wrecking Ball can get a blow job from any whore he wants, so maybe the point is moot.

“So, are you girls up for a party?” I ask Liv and Stef.

Stef, wounded, since Wrecking Ball is hanging with Meg, looks at her sister with trepidation, which shocks me, since she’s a knockout, and it looks like Cruz has his eye on her, too. Women. I don’t get it. So I lay it on thick with Liv, resting my arm over her shoulder again, giving her lots of reasons to say yes, since I want to get to know her better.

“I think it’s best if we skip it.” Liv says, one eye on me, the other on Meg, who still has that, ‘watch out, bitch’ expression on her face. I’d love to go and smack it off, but that’s not my style. But it’s Roxy’s style, and she looks at Liv.

“You girls want to come and see us play in a couple of days?” Roxy offers, telling them where we’re playing in two nights. We have tomorrow off, hence the party tonight. The venue is a long drive, but doable, and I’m pretty sure that Ray, Slick’s girlfriend, will be there, too.

I feel so bad for the drama tonight, I open my mouth without thinking. “Catch a flight. My treat.”

“Oh, I couldn’t impose.” Liv says.

“It’s not an imposition. You would be my special guest.”

Disappointing, her face falls. “No, that’s okay.” Stef’s face is alight. She’s pleasantly shocked, which is what I had hoped Liv would be, too, but she’s not. Stef opens her purse and grabs something in there.

“I’m serious.” I insist. “You and your sister fly out and see us. You can have front row seats again and backstage passes. It’ll take a phone call, man. I promise.”

“It’s okay.” Liv says, backing away from me, and I’m not sure how to take it. Does she think I’m treating her like a whore? Is she scared? Is Meg freaking her out? “We should go. Don’t want to hold you up. I’m sure you have hundreds of other fans lining up to meet you.”

“Liv, what’s up?” I ask her, shaking my head slightly, searching her eyes. Stef hands me a sheaf of paper, stuffing it in my hand, only semi-concealed, and I’m guessing that that’s for Liv’s benefit.

“It’s okay. We should just go, that’s all. I don’t want to overstay our welcome.” Liv says.

I look at Roxy and she tilts her head as if to say, ‘let it go, man’.

After a brief hesitation, I search Liv’s eyes again, trying to figure her out.

“Bye, Liv.” Meg sneers.

And with that, Liv lifts her hand in a wave. “It was nice meeting you all.”

“Yeah. Nice to meet you, too.” I say, grasping her hand just for a moment, but she squeezes it and lets it go immediately.

I watch her fine ass with my autograph on her skirt, walk out to the hallway, Meg glaring at her the whole way. One look at Roxy says that shit’s going to go down. But before

that, I want to see what Stef wrote to me. I look at the sheaf of paper, all wrinkled from my hand.

...bingo.

## CHAPTER 5

Liv

I had to get out of there. The vibe I was getting was all wrong. I'm in the middle of something here, causing some serious riff between Stix, his girlfriend, Wrecking Ball and Roxy, and it was time to leave, before I made it worse. I didn't want this magical night to be sullied by the bad ending experience, and as much as it was a once in a lifetime chance to go to this elite, A-list party, I knew that if I accepted, things would only get worse. This night is all about dreams coming true, not reality, and if I went to that party, it would be real. I've got a very good memory of what it was like to meet Stix, and I'm happy with that. I'm sure Stef, with the brief moment she had Wrecking Ball's attention, was happy with that, too.

We're not groupies. We can't just put our lives on pause to go follow this band. Hell, I don't even think I could get the weekend off to go see him tomorrow night, if I'm being honest. This is life. This is not Lala Land. At some point, reality has to set back in, and now is the time. I pull myself out of my head in time to not lose myself again. Stef and I walk out of there, almost stunned from the experience, and we say nothing until we reach the car.

"Shit, what was going down in there?" Stef asks first.

"I'm not sure, but I had a feeling that that Meg girl was going to put me in a headlock."

"You could have taken her."

"Thanks, but I'll pass."

“Roxy didn’t seem to like her much.”

“No.”

“She really liked you, though.” Stef points out.

“I really like her, too. She’s cool.”

“Did you actually want to go to the party if it wasn’t for that weirdness?” Stef asks me.

After a beat, I say. “No. I think we did the right thing. We’re not cut out for this kind of thing. We came, we saw, we did. We met who he wanted to meet. What else could we ask for? Come on, like Stix really could like me. Maybe for a cheap thrill in the backroom for two minutes, but that’s about it and you know that’s not my style.”

She gets a smirk on her face.

I turn on the engine. “What?” I ask.

She lifts a hand defensively. “Promise not to get mad.”

We’re stuck in the throng of traffic of people trying to get out, just like us. “Oh, great. Because all productive conversations start like that.”

“Liv, please don’t get mad.”

“What did you do?” I sigh, defeated and annoyed.

“I gave him your phone number.” She lifts her hand higher before I can respond. “At least this way, if he calls, you know he really does like you.”

My eyes bulge. I gasp. “Are you nuts? Did you not see the daggers in that girl’s eyes for me? Do you think I need her



tracking me down and slicing me up into pieces?”

“Do you really think he’s stupid enough to let her find it?”

I ignore her response. “Besides, why would you do that? He has a girlfriend. She was there tonight; you saw with your own two eyes.”

“Yeah, but she was also pawing Wrecking Ball. Did you not see that?”

“You don’t know what her deal is, Stef.”

“And this is the only way you’re ever going to know the truth.”

I huff, resigned. “I don’t know what I’m worrying about. It’s not like he’s actually going to call me.”

“He invited us to his party. Do you think he would do that if he didn’t like you?”

“He could have just been being nice. I’m sure he just invited the next two girls to his party in our place.”

A space opens up so that we can actually get out of the parking lot. I pull out, thinking about my sister’s blunder. He’s never going to call me. I’m worrying for nothing. He’ll lose that piece of paper in two seconds. He’s lost it already. Either that or he’ll use it to scrawl some other girls’ number down on it.

By the time we actually get back to the hotel, we’re exhausted. The drive back home the next day is equally exhausting, especially since Stef and I hardly say two words to each other. I guess we both feel sort of deflated for the bad

situation that we had to leave. But we also feel elated because of the experience, as a whole. I mean, this will be a great story to tell the grandkids, right? I drop Stef off at home, and when I get home, there is a message on my machine.

My heart skips a beat. Until I push the play button and realize that it's work offering me a shift. I decide since I skipped yesterday's shifts that I might as well pick it up. So, I go to work. With my face long but my heart full. But when I get home after work, the machine is flashing again curiously. When I press play, my heart starts to beat faster. It's him. The man who I thought would never call me. He says that he missed me at the party last night. And that he would call me back tonight. Which was hours ago. So, I'm guessing that he'd be calling anytime now.

And just as I'm thinking that, the phone rings and I scream out loud, startled, like I'm stuck in a suspenseful scene in a horror movie. I pick up immediately to silence it. And his voice is calm and sultry. "Hey. Is this Liv?"

"Yes. It's me."

"Did you just get in?"

"From work, yes."

And it's like we've known each other for years. "You know who this is, right?"

"Unless it's my father or my brother, no other guy ever calls me." I scoff. "And my dad usually starts the conversation off with a weather statement."

"And your brother?"

“Half the time when he calls, he’s mid-sentence with someone, or he’s eating a donut. He’s a cop. I know, it’s cliché, but what can you do...it’s true.”

He chuckles softly. It sounds so sexy. “Were you pissed that your sister gave me your phone number? I assume she told you, otherwise you’d be asking for proof of who I am.”

“Yeah, she told me. The only thing I was worried about was your girlfriend finding it and then finding me, and then nobody else ever finding me again.”

“Her bark is worse than her bite. Besides, she’s history. We broke up.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m not.”

“I hope it wasn’t because of me.”

“It wasn’t. It was coming. Like I’d told you earlier, things weren’t working out.” he draws in a deep breath. “So, how come you didn’t want to come out to the party, man? You missed out bigtime.”

“I just...I didn’t feel right going.”

“How come?” I hear him exhale with a soft grunt, like he’s bending to tie his shoe or something.

“Well, your girlfriend looked like she wanted to eat me for dinner, among other things.” I chuckle nervously.

“Like I said, she wasn’t a problem. It turns out that she’s been having a thing with Wrecking Ball, anyway, so look who’s the fool now.”

“Really?” I sound pathetic. Like I feel sorry for him. Why? He can get any girl he wants, and clearly, he’s not broken up about it at all.

“Don’t sweat it. Hey, listen, I want you to come out and see us tomorrow night. I was serious about that. Can you make it? I’ll have my manager book your flight.”

“I really don’t think that’s such a great idea.”

“Why not? You can’t get it off work or something?”

I decide the only way out of this is to be honest. I’m a shitty liar and I’ll die trying. “I don’t want to be a groupie, Stix. Well, it’s not that I don’t want to be, I just...I’m not cut out for that.”

He laughs. But it’s not a sarcastic laugh or a snide laugh, it’s a genuine laugh. “Is that what you think? God, you are too cute.”

“What do you mean?” I ask tentatively.

“Do you think that the other night was like an initiation? That you’ve graduated to groupie? Come on. That’s too funny.”

The way he laughs says that I am being ridiculous. And I can’t help but smile. “Well, seeing as you’re laughing at me, I guess I did a bang-up job.” I’m sarcastic but good-natured.

“Seriously. Come out to see me tomorrow night.” He says soberly after a beat.

“I’m sure your manager would love to do that for you. Then I’ll have two enemies on the tour.”

“Are you always this fun?” He teases. “You let me worry about that. It’s a job my manager will likely delegate. Just like every other job of his that he delegates. It’s the way things work around here.”

“I feel like I’m your whore to be honest. You know, accepting a plane ride on your dime.”

He snorts a laugh. “I think you would be disqualified, seeing as we haven’t slept together. Seriously. I fly my folks out to see me all the time. Family. Friends. It’s no big deal. But if you don’t want to, it’s cool. I just...I thought you and I sort of hit it off, you know?”

Okay, now I feel bad. “I feel like an idiot. My sister told you that I was in love with you.”

“Well, I know that that’s not possible, since we don’t know each other. I get it. It’s an infatuation. Hell, I had an infatuation with Heather Locklear for the longest time. I understand. But just look at it from my perspective. If you and I were just normal people, meeting serendipitously, I’d ask you out on a date, right? Well, since I’m on tour, you have to come to me, and since I’m the one that’s inviting you, it’s on my dime. See? That doesn’t sound so whorish now, does it?”

Could he be any nicer? “How about if I pay my own way? That way when my dad asks how I got there, I don’t have to make it sound like I paid for it with my body.”

“Do you have that kind of money, Liv? I don’t want to put you into the poorhouse...and notice I said ‘poorhouse’, not ‘whorehouse’.” He says, being cute, accentuating the words.

“I have a little saved up. I did say that I have four jobs.”

“Okay. If that makes you feel better about it, then you take care of it. But I’m treating you to dinner, no exceptions.”

“I can live with that.”

“Got a pen?”

I hesitate, pulling a pen and paper from under my answering machine. He gives me the info. “Can I at least send a car to pick you up? You’ll be caught in the throng, otherwise.”

“God, you just don’t give up, do you.” I joke.

Another sexy chuckle. “Hey, you want me to put you in with Meg?” He teases.

Oh, I forgot...it has a name. “You think you’re funny, don’t you.”

“Come on. She liked you.”

“Yeah, she liked the thought of having my liver for lunch.”

He just snuffles a laugh.

“You know, I put your drumstick in one of my display cases in my living room. I actually picked up a little stand to put it on, so your autograph stands out.”

“You’re sweet.”

“It was a nice gift. Thank you.”

“Keep saying nice things like that and you’ll need to find a place for the autographed drum kit I’ll give to you next.”

“I’m sure my neighbors would love me for that, as if they don’t already love me for coming in all hours of the night.”

“Lots of hot dates?”

“Yeah, with work. I told you I have four jobs.”

“You weren’t kidding, were you.”

“No, as a matter of fact, I wasn’t. Like I said, I just got in from work.”

“Do your jobs not pay well enough? Is that why you have to have so many of them?”

“No, it’s more because I don’t get enough hours from all of them, so all combined, they pay my bills.”

“If you could have just one job, what would it be?”

“I want to be a police officer like my brother. Unfortunately, I have really bad asthma, so everyone is telling me that I wouldn’t pass the training.”

“You ever think about giving it a shot?”

“Yeah, but something tells me that my dad would worry too much if I did that, anyway.”

“Has your dad got some kind of mental health problem or is he sick or something?”

I chuckle. “No, he’s actually a fire marshall. I think it’s more so because he knows half of the staff at the police departments in our area. He doesn’t want me mixing with people like that.”

“And you said your brother’s a police officer? How do you get around that?”

“Well, my sister’s a model, so I’m used to living in someone’s shadow. Not that I’m complaining.”

“Not to sound self-righteous or anything. But if I had that attitude, I would never have gotten this far in my life.”

“You mean your folks didn’t threaten to beat you silly for banging on the drum kit all day and night?”

“Well, I used to beat on my mom’s pots and pans, so I guess they figured they better get me a drum kit at some point.”

“And your parents always supported you when you wanted to be in a band?”

“Yeah, I guess it’s probably because I never really wanted to do anything else. I did okay in school, but I never achieved grades good enough to get me into an ivy league college, that’s for sure.”

“You know, I heard you singing the other night. You have a fantastic voice. You ever think about singing lead?”

He sighs. “Now here’s something that you probably never read about me in a magazine. I started out singing, actually, because the band that I wanted to join, they already had a drummer. So, I sang lead for a while. Until the guy became a drunk and they kicked him out and I was in.”

“So, who sang lead then?”

“Just some other guy who wanted to join the band. He was pretty good.”



“You ever think about doing something solo? Or being a studio singer?”

“You mean for other bands? When they’re recording?”

“Yeah.”

“No, not really. Drumming is my passion. I *like* singing, but I *love* drums. Nothing beats it, pun intended.”

“Well, that’s pretty obvious, too. But your voice is very good.”

“Thanks. Well, at least if I ever break my arm, I have a backup.” he chuckles.

I giggle. “You could also be a model.”

“Stop it. My head is swelling.”

“Well, it’s true. You’re...very good-looking, to put it mildly.”

“You know something, I never even consider what I look like. It’s weird. Thanks for the compliment, by the way.”

“You’re welcome. And that’s part of the reason why you’re so handsome. Because you don’t know that you are.”

“Then you just spoiled the surprise.”

“Nope.”

“Hey.”

“What.”

“Why don’t you go for it.”

“Go for what?”

“You want to be a cop, right?”

“Well, yeah. But I already told you why I can’t.”

“Are you sure that’s the truth? Or are you just afraid of doing what you really want to do and it not being what you thought it would be.”

“What, were you a shrink in a previous life, or something?”

“No. But I told you how I started out in the band, right?”

“Yeah.”

“What I didn’t tell you is that I was terrified to play the drums at first. I’d never done it in front of anyone that wasn’t family.”

“And?”

“Well, my dad said those exact words to me, and look where I am.”

“So, you listened to your dad.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’ve got my own version of that, Stix.”

“I get it. But I think that deep down, maybe you’re afraid. Same reason why you didn’t come to the party. Same reason why you won’t let me pay for your flight.”

I draw in a deep breath. “Wow, that’s deep.” I’m facetious, but good-natured.

He snorts a laugh. “Alright, give me a break. I took a shot.”

“Okay, that’s fair.”

“I’m right, though, aren’t I.”

“You don’t know me well enough yet to know that.”

“Fair.” I hear some hooplah going on in the background.

“Hey, I gotta go, okay? I’ll see you tomorrow night?”

“You bet.”

“Okay. Hey,”

“What?”

“You’re fucking beautiful, man. I just...didn’t want to say it before and make it seem like it was just reciprocating lip service.”

I pause. A smile splits across my face. “Thanks.”

“You bet. See you soon.”

I hang up. “Yeah, you bet.”

## CHAPTER 6

### Stix

If the girl were any sweeter, she'd be goddamn sugar. I like it that she's raw and says what's on her mind, but not in a cheap way; just to get what she wants. I'm trying to spoil her, but it's not easy. I respect that, though. It's certainly better than her asking for it, pointing out either how stinking rich I am, or how dirt poor she is. Meg always stole from my stash. Not that I cared or anything, because we were both having fun with it, and technically, up until I found out about her and Wrecking Ball, she was my guest.

She'd make a hot cop. Her in her little uniform, all tight and leathered up. I start thinking about that as I set the phone down after talking to her. It's Roxy coming in behind me. I'm sitting in the back office, and it's quiet because everyone is out gallivanting, since it's our day off. Roxy sees me hanging up the phone and she looks puzzled.

"That was an abrupt end. I didn't mean to interrupt."

"No, it's fine. I was just talking to Liv."

"Oh, fuck, sorry." She says with more conviction than necessary, proving that Roxy really does like her. It's very odd to see Roxy actually agreeable with someone early on. She didn't even take well to Ray, Slick's girl, at first, and Ray is like the nicest person ever.

"It's okay. We were done talking. She's coming out tomorrow to see us play."

“Good. You want me to give that slut you fuck the boot? What’s she doing still hanging around, anyway? Is it true that she’s fucking Wrecking Ball now?”

“That’s what I hear.”

“You want her out? She’s a twisted sister, man. Gives me the creeps.”

I growl facetiously. “No. You?”

She smiles. “Fuckoff. Seriously. I can get rid of her if you want.”

“No, man. It’s not worth it. Not with Storm all fucked up.”

“Yeah. True. Hey, so, is Liv bringing her sister or flying solo?”

“I think solo, man. Why?”

She gets a smirk on her face.

“What?” I chuckle.

“Nothing. I just...it’s nice to see you liking someone decent for a change, you know?”

“You weren’t decent?”

A scoff. “I was a fucking basket case. You deserve better than that shit.”

“Thanks, man. But I’m not sure if this isn’t just good old infatuation on her part.”

“You think so?”

“It’s too early to tell, but I’ll know soon enough.”

“I think it’s true. She wouldn’t have left just because of the skankoid if she was that desperate to get with you. She’s not all needy and annoying either, and that’s saying something. I haven’t met a chick in a long time that didn’t get under my fucking skin in under two minutes.”

“Is that just chicks or dudes, too?”

“Fuckoff, man. I’m serious.”

“Alright. Since when did you become mother hen, anyway?”

“Well, since it appears that I’m the only sober one here.”

“Hey, I’m sober.” I argue kindly.

“Only because your coke groupie is fucking Wrecking Ball now. I’m not sure if your new friend is into that shit, man. If I were you, I’d keep that out of sight.”

“Roxy, you know that I hardly ever do that anymore. It was more of a thing with you and I, man.”

“You did it enough with Meg.”

“That, too, but again, I’m more of a social snorter, if you will.”

She chuckles.

“What?” I play along.

“Nothing.” She blushes, but then she changes the subject. “Hey, Ray’s finally coming out.”

“Oh, yeah? Geez, Slick’s probably relieved.”

Ray, Slick's girl, has been AWOL for over a month. It's driving Slick nuts. Her folks don't approve of Slick, seeing as they're all snooty British dudes, and he's worried that she's let her dad crawl inside her head again.

"Yeah, I'm glad she's coming out. Slick was saying that he was going to abandon ship and go out to her if she didn't make her way here."

"What do you think her deal is?"

She shrugs. "Probably just what he's thinking."

Blaze walks by. "Hey, dude!" I chuckle. "What the fuck are you doing here? Shouldn't you be hanging with Liz?"

"I am. She's just taking a shower. What are you guys doing here?"

"I was just making a phone call, and I'm not sure what Roxy here was up to. She just came to find me, I think. Tell me how much of a girl crush she's got on Liv."

Blaze smirks at Roxy.

"Shut up." she says, but the little smile on her face is telling.

"How come she didn't come to the party? Meg spook her or something?" Blaze asks.

"Yeah. She's coming tomorrow night, though."

Now it's Blaze's turn to smirk. "Should be fun with a 'Liv' and a 'Liz'. Thank God nobody has a speech impediment, or we'd all be screwed."

We all snort a laugh.

“Okay, you guys want to hang out later?” Blaze asks.

“Sure, man. We’ll see you.”

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Liv was supposed to be here hours ago, but the flight was delayed, and then there was a huge pileup on the highway to the venue, so as we’re doing warmups, she’s still not here. I’m nervous as hell because I haven’t heard from her at all, but my manager sent a driver out, so I think that she’s okay. Then I start to wonder if she chickened out. Maybe I stepped over the line with my stupid analysis of her life ambitions the other night. Not to mention that she knows Meg is still here. Speculation and concern is clouding my head as we’re called onto the stage. But I beat the shit out of the drums despite my peril, since that’s what I do best.

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Liv

I’m packing my bag, getting ready to go to the airport, screening my calls, avoiding my sister. Why, I don’t know, but I think I’m afraid that after talking with her about it, that I’ll lose my nerve. She’ll say something that will strike a chord inside my head, and I’ll back out. Which isn’t fair, because I have no way of getting in touch with Stix, and he’s sending a driver to pick me up, and if I’m not there, then I’ve wasted his time. No, I’m going. I keep telling this to myself.



I promised I would and I'm going. I got someone to cover my shift tomorrow and I had today off, anyway...I'm going.

Then my phone rings, and it's Stef. I've screened two of her calls already today, and I know that if I don't answer this time, a knock at the door will be next. "Hello?"

"Good. You're alive." her voice is flat. "I was about to send Ricky out to look for you."

"Please. Don't be so dramatic."

"What's going on?"

"Just...packing." Did I mention that I'm a shitty liar?

"Packing for what? Another road trip?"

"Yeah. Stix invited me to come out to see him at the show tonight."

A gasp. "Are you serious? How come you didn't tell me! See, I told you he would call you!"

"Yeah, because you gave him my number, Stef."

"Duh. So? Isn't that the way it works?"

"Listen, I don't want to talk about it right now, and I have to leave soon, so can I talk to you when I get back?"

"Well, you don't want me to come with you?"

"Why? So you can hook up with Wrecking Ball? He's with that freak Meg, anyway, so you're out of luck."

"No. I just wanted to come with you. That's our thing." she pauses. "Oh, shit, it doesn't matter. I'm just looking at my calendar, and I've got a shoot first thing tomorrow. I can't

show up with bags under my eyes for that one, either. They're close-up shots for some eye makeup ad for a magazine."

I let out the breath that I was holding. "Okay, Stef. Seriously, I have to go."

"I can't believe you're going. I'm so proud of you." she gushes.

"Please, just, don't say another word, or I'll lose my nerve."

She pauses. Her voice turns serious. "You're never going to let yourself have this, are you." It's a statement more than a question.

"Stef..." I warn.

"Liv, what happened with Jay was a one-off. It's never going to happen again, that I promise you. I was stupid. I didn't read the signs. Neither did you."

"Stef, I can't talk about this right now."

"Liv, you've got to let it go, sometime. This is a good sign. This is the guy of your dreams, just remember that."

"Yeah, until I find out that he's a cheating, lying, cokehead, with a lair of women, and I'm just about to add to his collection, right?"

A sigh. "Then why are you going?"

"See? I knew I shouldn't have picked up the phone. I knew that you would get inside my head. I was fine before I answered this call. I was packing and ready to go, but now... now, dammit, you're making me rethink the whole damn thing."

Her voice turns urgent. “No, no! Okay, forget I called. Just...go. Enjoy yourself. Don’t listen to me.”

“What if you’re right?” I ask, planting my butt down on my bed with a thud. My overnight bag sits next to me, the zipper is half open. “What if I am permanently scarred from Jay? I mean, he broke my fucking heart, Stef.” I say with a lump in my throat. “I don’t know if I’ll ever get over that. I thought we were going to get married and be together forever.”

“Liv, that was years ago. And since then, you’ve avoided every guy that’s ever showed any interest in you, that’s a fact. That’s also when you threw yourself into work. So you wouldn’t have to think about it. God, you’ve got so much goddamn money, your income almost rivals mine, and I’m a goddamn model!”

“What’s your point, Stef?”

“My point is let it go. This guy has a genuine interest in you. Stop thinking the worst. This is the guy that you’ve been dreaming about for as long as I can remember. And you deserve it. This is your time, Liv. Do it. Go there and let it happen. If it’s meant to be, then it’s meant to be.”

“And if it’s not?”

“Well, then, at least you know. And at least you gave it a shot. It’s better than cowering away for the rest of your life.”

“Thanks.” my voice is flat. Unimpressed. This is the problem with being so close to my sibling. She knows me, she’s like me but at the same time, so unlike me, and because we’re so close, I never get angry with her for more than a

minute, and by then, we're on to the next thing. Truthfully, we both got taken advantage of by Jay. He was an asshole. He was gorgeous, rich, popular and smart. We went to high school together, all of us, and lost touch after that, until my last year of college, while I was studying for law, in the library, he just happened to show up.

I should have known when he asked about my sister, that that was why. He had zero interest in me, yet he fucked me for two years, played the game with me, wanting to be so family oriented it wasn't funny, until I figured out why he was so close with my family. Makes me sick to think that every time we made love, he was seeing my sister's face in his head. Sure, Stef and I were a little awkward for a while after that. It was more me than her. But my distance was irrelevant, because she finally broke through when her appendix exploded about a month later, and she almost died. I vowed never to think an ill thought of her ever again, especially on account of a guy.

“Tell me it isn't true.”

“Stef, I gotta go.”

“Okay, just promise me that you'll have fun, even without me.” she says, and I know that if she were here right now, that she would wink at me, trying to lighten things.

“I will.”

“Call me when you get back. Tell me *everything*.” she says, accentuating the word ‘everything’. “Oh, but you can leave out some stuff. Like, the dirty stuff.” she snorts.

“Classy.”

“Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

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If it weren't for the hesitation, the delayed flight, the fatal highway accident and ensuing traffic jam, and the hour and a half just waiting to get out of the airport, I would think that this trip wasn't meant to be. But I'm not thinking that at all, no. Not even a little bit. Of course, when I arrive at the venue, the concert is already almost half done. Thankfully, it's the second half that I'm interested in. According to the roadie that picked me up, Daniel's List was up first, then Buying Time, and Wired is going on last.

“Hey,” Jett says, walking out of the dressing room. I was told by said roadie to wait in the green room until a security guard can come bring me to my rightful place. I look around and think that I know it's protocol, but I could so handle walking to my allocated spot alone. A handgun or two are even registered in my name, as much as I'm not carrying right now. I wouldn't dare going on a plane. When my brother was in the police academy, he once forgot to take his pistol out of his bag when we were flying to New York for some fashion thing for my sister. He was quickly apprehended. Thank God he brought his application for the academy with him,

otherwise who knows what would have happened to him, if he didn't have proof of a reason why he's carrying.

"Hey, how's it going?" I say to Jett.

"Good. I wasn't sure if you were coming. I know Stix was worried. Roxy kept telling him to get his head into the show." he says with a smile, so I know that he's just making conversation, and not saying this to make me feel guilty, even though I am. But before I can explain, he says. "We heard about the accident and the flight delay, too, so I think he's cool. Everything cool?"

"Yeah, except that I feel like I'm a day late and a dollar short."

He lifts a brow, but his smile is warm. "Yeah? How come?"

"Just that I so don't belong here. For one, that girl Meg, if she finds out I'm here, she's going to scratch my eyes out."

"She won't. I'm sure you know that she's Wrecking Ball's problem now."

"Still. She does not like me, and I know it."

He scoffs, still smiling warmly. "Please. You could totally take her."

"Probably. But that's not the point."

"I think it is. She's just jealous. I think she knows the only reason why she's here is because, I hear, evidently, that she gives good head."

I snort a laugh. “Please tell me you don’t know this from experience.”

His face looks like he just ate a lemon. “God, no. And that’s not even because of Roxy. I have standards.”

A guy wearing a black shirt marked ‘Security’ walks to me. “You Liv?”

“Yeah.” I nod.

“Come with me.”

I give a fleeting look to Jett. “It’s cool. This is Parker.” he pats Parker on the back. “I’ll see you out there.”

“Yeah. I’ll see you.”

I follow Parker out to the hallway, when his radio goes off, and he listens intently as we walk. The radio lingo makes it such that I can’t decipher what is being said, but he ends the conversation with, “Copy that.” And then we stop in the hallway. The din is a little louder, but not so much so that I can’t hear him. “You have to wait here for a minute.

Apparently, someone just puked where you’re supposed to be. I’ll figure out another plan in a minute. Just hang tight in this room.” he says, guiding me to a room at the opposite end of the hallway, where the din is so low it’s muffled.

I’m assuming that he wants me to stay here so I don’t get moved by other security people, thinking that I snuck back here or something. Nobody except crew or band members would be this far back in the bowels of the venue without using a crowbar on one of the metal doors. The electrical room is adjacent to this barren room that I’m standing outside

of. And I don't think that there's anyone in there, until I hear voices on the other side of the door. At first, I hear sniffing sounds, like someone is crying, and my first instinct is to knock, and see if whoever is behind the metal door is okay. But then I hear her voice.

*Meg's.*

"Yo, you got more of this shit?" she asks her friend.

"Lots, babe. I've got you covered."

"And the other?"

"That's a bonus. On the house."

"Why are you being so nice, Scrappy?"

"You got me in here, man. And I don't like the asshole, either."

"So, when are you gonna do it?"

Another sniff. I realize now that they're in there snorting cocaine together, discussing some weird plan. "When a situation comes right. I know enough about the bands I can figure it out. Are you willing to risk your probation on this one, man?"

"I've gotten away with enough shit, man."

He laughs. "You ain't kidding. Shit, back in high school, I know it was you that fucking stabbed that guy. You got off on that one. I don't know how many guys you fucked up that bad and got away with it."

"Yeah, and now I'm tired of it, so I rent you out."



“Me and my other buddies, that is.”

“Yeah, and he better know how to shoot, or else.” Another snort.

“Don’t worry, Meg, man. Have I ever let you down?”

“No, and if you do, you’re out of a job. You know how much head I had to give Stix to get you this gig?”

“Yeah, and I better get back out there before they figure out where I am, and what I’m doing, and with who.”

“I’ve got your back. But you make sure you fuck Stix up good, man. Or else it’s your ass, Scrappy.”

My eyes bulge. My heart starts to pound. I’m not sure if I heard correctly, because it’s difficult to decipher what someone is saying from behind a metal door, sniffing cocaine, no less. But it sounded like Meg has hired this Scrappy guy to hurt Stix, probably in retribution for him showing her the door. Which doesn’t make sense, unless her thing with Wrecking Ball has soured too, but even then, it doesn’t make sense. Why is she still here? She must still be with Wrecking Ball, or I think that both Roxy and Stix would show her the door. And why is breaking up with someone grounds for physical harm? This girl is crazy. She needs to go.

But, first, I need to get out of here, before she realizes that I’ve been eavesdropping...

## CHAPTER 7

### Stix

I mop my head with the towel when the lights go off above my drum kit. It's Blaze's solo, but I'm sticking around to add some beats in between licks, but right now he's shining all on his own. He's fucking awesome. Seriously. We didn't even rehearse this part. Mostly, for solos, we don't. It's better when those are done raw, on the fly, and straight from the heart. I do my solo next, and then I take a two-minute break, while Cruz does his solo. Slick and Roxy are going to do a duet after that, and I'm pumped. The audience goes ape shit over those.

I've had word from one of my roadies that Liv finally arrived. But they're holding her back so they can find her a spot that doesn't have puke on it. It seems that the beer vendors are cashing out at this concert. Either that or someone smuggled some harder shit in. That's what I used to do when I was a kid. So, I don't know where she's sitting tonight, until my roadie comes and tells me, and that's only if he finds out. Things are all fucked up tonight. It happens sometimes, but thankfully, it isn't often.

I feel bad because Liv has missed more than half the show. If she wasn't so stubborn, we could have gotten her an earlier flight, no matter the cost, and she would have made it a lot sooner. But it is what it is, and as long as she's here, that's all that matters. Russ, my roadie, finally comes to tell me where's she's sitting, just in time for my solo. And it's great. She's right on the stage. I guess we've got a full house tonight. I

wave to her right before I cut loose and pound the shit out of my kit for my solo. Anything that's been fucking me up lately comes out when I'm hitting the beats, and all the bullshit that's gone on tonight fuels my motivation.

The solo is bang on and I give a nod to the guys above me doing the lighting. They are kickass. This one guy, Scrappy, I don't know where he learned how to do the shit that he does, but man, he's great. The guy's like a monkey, and he has no regard for his physical safety, either, because he'll literally climb on the rebar in the ceiling to get the effect he's looking for. We call him Scrappy because he'll literally find any scrap of material to make something look better. Meg suggested him to me. That's one of the other reasons why we hit it off in the beginning. She's got a bit of a background in the entertainment industry, and she knows a few people.

I find myself looking Liv's way a lot, and when I get eye contact with her, she smiles. It's infectious. I don't know what it is, but there is just something about her that draws me to her, unlike anyone else I've met before. She's got that charisma, that charm, but she's also honest and imperfect, and I like that a lot. I like it that she didn't tell me to fuckoff when I called her out on why she isn't a cop, but she also didn't deny it, either. Maybe she also likes to be challenged. There's nothing worse than being with someone that folds like a wet piece of paper when the going gets tough. And despite her reservations, Liv is here, but on her terms. Sure, it was more of a pain in the ass, but if she likes things done her way or no way, I can respect that. And I like it, too.

The lights are so hot on my body that it feels like I'm out in the middle of the desert, midday, but something about it just keeps me going. I like the challenge. It gives character. My dad was always telling me that when I was a kid. You know, 'go cut the grass, it builds character'. But it wasn't always lame like that, and seemingly just a ploy to get me to do my chores, he also used to say, 'don't always do things that make you comfortable. Crawl out of the zone every now and again, it builds character'. I'm beating away as I see Slick and Roxy gather at the apron of the stage to do their duet.

I love it that they don't always do mushy ballads and shit. I mean, they do, sometimes, but tonight they're doing a kickass, badass tune that knocks the fans out of the park. Both of them are squealing, squeezing out lyrics that punch the audience straight in the face. They do their own take on a household song that everyone knows, which I'll note is a ballad, but they turn it over on its head and give it spunk. It's great. I know that our producer is here tonight and likely recording this, because we're also working on a live album mish mash of our own singles, plus songs done with both groups or just one of the other bands. We're going to share them, each releasing their share, so it's fair and equal among each of the bands.

When we gather at the apron of the stage for our final song, I make sure I look back at Liv, and she's beaming. Even though she was only here for like half the show, she still had a great time. We head off stage so the crew can do a brief tear down for the next band, and I go to the side, grabbing Liv, not caring much that I'm all sweaty and looking like I just conquered the fucking world. She doesn't seem to care, either,

because she gives me a great big hug. When she pulls back, I've soaked her shirt. Luckily, it's black, so it doesn't show through. I'd feel like a dick if it was white, and I just rendered her unfit for public viewing.

"God, you were great!" Liv gushes.

I kiss her cheek. "Thanks. I'm glad you could make it. Sorry for all the bullshit."

"It's okay. I made it." she shrugs. "Do you have any meet and greets?"

"Yeah, but you can come if you want to. Just stand off to the side." her eyes are so bright. So is her smile. She couldn't be any more beautiful and she's not even trying.

"Are you sure? I don't want to intrude."

"Believe me, enough people are off in the sidelines. You're not an intrusion. Come on." I nod and take her hand in mine.

A party of girls starts screaming when they see us all approach. It's pandemonium for about five minutes, while we all gather with them, giving hugs, taking pictures, and instead of standing there with her arms crossed over her chest and a sour look on her face, Liv stands there chuckling, smiling, but most of all, getting it. She knows that this is my life. Girls gush over us all the time. Especially on this tour, since there are so many of us, and we don't usually break up the meet and greets, either. My hair is still dripping wet as they snap pictures of us and take autographs on posters and other memorabilia, and one girl ran out of film, so Liv, very

generously pulls her spare film out of her purse and hands it to her.

I approach her once the throng is amicably escorted out by security. We don't have any interviews tonight, as we had a short one before the show, so I walk over to Liv. "You hungry?" I ask her.

"I could eat."

"Cool. Let's go to my room so I can get cleaned up and I'll take you out to dinner. Give you that date I promised you." I wink at her.

She smiles. "What if I want you to go looking like that?"

I lift a brow. "You're not serious."

"You look sexier all sweaty."

"Are you sure you didn't inhale some weed from the audience?"

She snorts a laugh. "No."

I chuckle, taking her hand. "Come on. I'll get my roadie to drive us to the hotel. Unless you wanted to stay for the rest of the show? We've got one more and then more meet and greets."

"You don't have to stay?"

"Na." I tilt my head. "We can come back after if we want to. But I'm not needed on the rest of the setlist."

"How come you don't have to come back for the meet and greets?"

I shrug. “Because I’m the drummer.”

She gives me a look. “Alright. If you say so. We’ll go.”

My roadie is waiting outside. Thankfully there is little traffic, so with a few minutes of small talk, we’re at the hotel. Security escorts us up to my room, and as I open the door, I say. “Don’t worry, I plan on being a perfect gentleman, and I also got you your own room.”

“Oh, I booked a room, too.”

“How did you know what hotel?”

“I didn’t. I just booked at a skeevy little place further away.”

“Why would you do that?”

“Because the last thing I want is to seem like a gold digger.”

“Listen, Liv, you’re not a gold digger. If I thought you were, I would have never asked you to come out tonight, I would have never given you my number, and I certainly would never have called you.”

She smirks but I ignore it. I smell like sewage. “I’ll be ten minutes. Make yourself at home. The bar fridge should be good and stocked.”

After I shower and freshen up, changing my clothes and brushing my teeth, I go back to the main room. This suite is pretty killer, I must admit. It’s in the Penthouse, since, evidently, those were the only rooms left. Personally, I need a pillow and a blanket, and I’m set. All these frills are

unnecessary. It's different for Jett or Cruz or Blaze, since they like to play their guitars, and sometimes make a shitload of noise, but I'm a drummer. My kit wouldn't fit upstairs. Not that I haven't tried. I mean, I could get my snare drum in, but I go big or go home. Hopefully, one day, someone will invent a smaller, electronic kind of drum kit, like those nifty keyboards they have now, and I can play wherever I want.

When I walk back into the main room, Liv is standing out on the balcony, and I join her. I've opted for no shirt, since I'm still hot as hell from the lighting and from the shower, so I'm just in a pair of jeans, no socks, nothing. I open the door and she turns around, looking me up and down. I wonder if maybe I should put a shirt on, but I don't want to, since her eyes are all over my chest. "Feel better?" she asks.

"Yeah, much. You want a drink?"

"No, I'm fine, just admiring the beautiful view." She says, but I notice that her eyes are on me, not on the sky or on the landscape.

I smirk. "I'm just getting a bottle of water. Be right back."

The bar fridge is by the door, so it's a quick, five second delay, and I down the whole bottle. When I tip my head forward again, her eyes are on me. There is a fire going on behind those eyes. I don't want to overstep, but I can't stop looking at her. Her long, natural blonde hair is pin straight and pooled around her breasts, which are small but pert, balanced with the rest of her perfectly shaped petite body. She's a little package, but one I'd never turn away, not in a heartbeat. But, ultimately, it's those eyes. Sure, they're beautifully blue, with



naturally dark lashes, but it's what's behind them that draws me to her. Right now, they're telling me everything that I need to know about this girl.

She hungers for me. And the feeling is completely mutual. But she is no whore, and I don't want to fuck it up by being too forward, at the same time, I have a feeling that unless I make a move, her feet are staying firmly planted on the concrete floor. "Hungry?" I ask, hearing the need in my own voice.

Her eyes search my lips before she answers. "S...sure."

She's dying for me to kiss her. Should I? Part of me is saying to go for it, the other part of me is saying that she'll put the brakes on. We're alone, in my room, and no good could come from me planting one on her. Except that it would be so fucking sweet to taste her, to see how far she'll go with me. But I feel much more of a connection with this girl than with anyone, and if I fuck her, will it screw all that up? Those eyes are telling me that she wants it as bad as I do, but what does her heart say?

I decide to take a step towards her and see what happens. I place a hand on her waist for good measure. "What do you want?" I ask vaguely, keeping the food topic in mind, but also reaching for what she really wants. Is she hungry for food or for something else?

She clears her throat, but her eyes are battling between my eyes and my lips. She's dying for me to kiss her. Just dying. But I don't know if I should. "Whatever you want." Liv answers, equally sultry.

I decide to go a different route, leaning in a little, to see what happens. “Do you want me to kiss you?” I’ve never asked a girl that before. Not verbally, anyway. Normally I just lean in and do it, but with Liv, I don’t want to fuck it up.

Her answer doesn’t come instantly. She’s battling with herself. Poor kid. An answer would make it real. An answer would give me permission, and maybe she’s scared of giving me that. But then she surprises me and whispers ‘yes’, so softly I’m glad that our noses are only centimeters apart. My other hand sweeps the hair away from her face softly, and it sits on her neck, as I deliver the softest, gentlest little butterfly kiss on her lips. Her eyes are still closed when I break contact, as if she’s drinking it in, firmly imprinting the moment in her memory. So, I give her another one, this time giving her bottom lip a tiny suck. Her hand is suddenly resting on my shoulder, and I take that as permission for more.

My next kiss all bets are off. Lips parted, tongue ready, I go in for the kill. Hands on her back, head tilted, I sweep my tongue inside her mouth, tasting her fully, figuring if she doesn’t want it, which I think she does, she’ll pull away. But she doesn’t. Oh, she so doesn’t. As we stand on the balcony, lips gliding over and over, tongues tangling, soft moans decorating the quiet, we make out like we’re in high school, hiding behind the library in between classes. Her hands are first tangled in my damp hair, but then they sweep down, feeling my chest, making me wish I’d opted for briefs under my jeans, which I didn’t.

As I pull her closer to me, I know that she can feel my hardened dick against her, but it seems to spur her on, as her

tongue dips deeper inside my mouth, and her breasts press closer to me. She's at least a full head shorter than me, and she's probably a hundred and twenty pounds to my two hundred and ten, so I inch my way down and grasp her, pulling her up, so her feet lose contact with the ground. The balcony door is still open, as I step over the threshold, kissing her madly, and carry her to the bed.

Liv is not fighting me at all. I figured once she realized where I'm taking her, that she'd try to escape, but no, her fingers are all in my hair, as she hugs my face while we kiss voraciously. When I press her body into the mattress, hovering over her, I pull back, giving her an opportunity to say no. Instead, her eyes search mine, and I find myself lost in her. No words come from either of us, until I can't stand it any longer, and I have to kiss her again. Palms down, my hands travel down her sides, to the hem of her shirt, and I pull it out of her jeans, lifting it over her head, only breaking contact with her lips for a moment.

Her skin is perfect. Milky and soft, tastes like candy, as I kiss her neck, down her chest, belly, and undo her jeans. I keep looking up at her, making sure that she's still game, and she is, her face says it all. My lips find every inch of her, as I remove her pants, socks, kissing every toe, taking everything in with my mouth. Gliding my tongue down the inside of her thigh, I hear her gasp, as my fingers pull her panties down. Is Liv bad enough to let me do what I want to do to her? Let's find out. Panties off, mouth on her wetness, I push my hands to the cups of her bra and lift them off, kneading her breasts as I make love to her folds with my mouth.

It's game on. I figured, at first, I'd take things slow with her, but man, I have the sudden urge to make Liv feel what I know I can make her feel, what she deserves to feel. This is the sweetest girl I know, and I want her to remember tonight. I want to give her a reason to stay. I want to give her more of a reason to be with me than her infatuation. If she can let go and let me take her places she may never have been before, that's telling me that she's got much more than just a teenage crush, or at least, it's a step in the right direction, and this is more than just lust. The way that she looks at me, it's more than that.

As I suck her clit, making her arch her back, pull at the sheets, beg for mercy, I'm thinking that this is the sexiest woman alive. This isn't all for show like with most of the other women that I've been with, no, she's feeling it for real. My tongue hits her clit at just the right spot, and at the precise moment, as her gasps become cries and her cries become shouts, and her knuckles are white, I bring her home as quickly as we ended up here, in bed together. My one hand stays on her breast as she comes down, and my licks are softer, slower, while the other searches in my back pocket for my wallet, and I grab the condom out of there.

I unzip my pants, leaving her only for a moment, while her chest heaves and I let her cool off. My pants are on the floor as I slide the condom on and meet her, nose-to-nose, entering her in the thick of it, while she's still quivering inside, and tight, oh, fuck, is she tight. God bless the condom, man. My eyes are glued to hers as I begin to move, stretching her, letting her adjust, letting her feel the aftershocks mix with the

new sensation of me, thrusting slow but deep, until I can't stand it any longer, and I have to explore her with my lips.

Her eyes tell me she wants me to kiss her, so I plant the deepest, most thigh-searing French kiss on her, feeling her tighten inside as my thrusts dance to the rhythm of my lips. My dick is like steel as her body hugs mine tight, feeling every inch of her insides, how wet, hot, and ready she is, after coming just moments ago. Lips on her breasts, I speed up, feeling her find my rhythm, pushing her pelvis in time with mine. As I suck her nipple she moans, making me so fucking hot my cock twitches, and suddenly I want to make her come even harder this time.

Leaning up on my elbows, I reach down and circle her clit with my thumb, watching her eyes roll back. Fuck it's hot. So hot. She is like fucking putty in my hands. And I start thinking about a beat, using a little technique that has proved effective in the past, as I push her past the plateau, and straight into an encore orgasm. Her breasts bob up and down as I watch this beautiful woman fucking come like thunder, as I feel her body shake and tighten around me, and my technique is out the window as she pushes her hands up, finds my weak spots, squeezing them as her body squeezes my cock, and I come with her like a fucking freight train.

"Oh, fuck." I grunt, feeling myself empty inside her, feeling defeated, but at the same time, elated, it's so fucking good. Normally I can hang on, but I don't know, this woman...does things to me.

As we recover, I stay up on my elbows, just watching her. When her eyes finally open, she says something to me that I don't expect.

"I need to tell you something." She pants. "Something that I probably should have told you before... this."

*Oh, fuck...*

## CHAPTER 8

Liv

I battled with myself. I kept going over it and over it inside my head, and I planned to tell him the second that I had the chance, but when he walked out of the shower, shirtless, with his wet hair all messed and sexy, it's like I took leave of my senses. It's like I wasn't me. It's like I crawled outside of my own body, and I was staring down at it, and a more devilish, wanton, spontaneous woman was left behind, and she kept telling me to forget about everything, even the conversation overheard behind the metal door, and do the first thing that comes to mind.

And I did. I so did. I let him do to me everything that I always wanted him to do to me. And more. So much more. And yet, even in my dreams, I never envisioned it to be so good. Sure, in my fantasies, he's always been good, he's always got me to the mark, to that magical place that even Jay could never get me to, but he did it...twice. With little effort, I'm guessing. And I forgot about everything. Until all that lust and need was finally stripped away, and as I came down from my encore orgasm, reality set in.

"W...what's up?" he asks, removing himself from me and taking care of the condom.

"Um..." I lick my lips, adjusting myself, running a hand through my hair. "How much do you know about Meg? Like, her background."

He looks at me, running a hand through his hair. “She’s got a background in entertainment. I know that she’s between jobs right now, why?”

“Do you have some guy called Scrappy on staff here?”

He nods. “Yeah. He does wicked shit with our lighting. Meg’s actually the one who recommended him.” A ‘v’ forms between his brows. “What’s going on?”

“Your roadie had me wait in the back hall while they found a place for me on stage. And I overheard a very weird conversation between Meg and Scrappy. Apparently, she’s got some evil plan to take you down.”

His neck cranes back. “Na. She doesn’t have the brains to pull off any kind of shit like that. She’s a major cokehead. So is Scrappy from what I know. Shit, he brings enough of it here.”

He crawls into bed next to me. “I’m sure they were just fucking around. She’s screwing almost everyone around here. Maybe that was some freaky sex talk or something.”

“Well, I did hear a lot of sniffing going on. I’m pretty sure they were doing lines.”

“Yeah.” He scoffs. “Besides, we’ve got enough security around here, if Meg tried to do anything, she’d never get away with it.” He tucks his hand under his face, leaning closer to me. We’re almost nose-to-nose. His little smirk is so cute and sexy I can’t help but smile. I’m so drunk on sex right now, I’d believe anything he said. “I love it that you worry about me.



My little spy.” He kisses my lips, and the warmth still makes my toes curl, even after two orgasms.

“Well, I am well trained. Not in being a spy, but in security. I keep my eyes and ears peeled.”

“Whatever you’re doing, keep it up. I love it.”

He rests his head back down. He’s so sexy I could die. I can’t stop looking at him. “God, I love you.” I blurt, still drunk on love.

He smiles. “You’re so fucking sweet I don’t know what to do with you.” I don’t expect for him to say it back. How could he love me? I’ve been in love with him for years. We just met. He’s had hours to know me to my years of perceptively knowing him.

“Are you sure you don’t want to check Meg out? Do you know her last name?”

“I think it’s Gibson. And Meg is short for Megan. The only reason why I know that is because her mom called looking for her once when her grandmother died while we were on tour before this one. But she’s cool.”

“You don’t do, like, criminal checks or anything on people?”

“Generally, no. We don’t do anything like that.” He shakes his head, frowning. “If we did that, I think some of us would be in serious trouble. I’m pretty sure that half the staff here have done time at some point. I know that Wrecking Ball’s got a record, and so does Scrappy. In fact, Meg pointed that out before we hired him, but we saw past that, since he always

had the good shit.” He says, and then a look crosses his face.  
“But I don’t really do that anymore. For real.”

“It doesn’t matter to me.” I say casually. And it doesn’t. I accept him for who he is. Warts and all. In my eyes, Stix can do no wrong.

“Really?”

“Of course not. I know it’s all part of the persona. But I also know that you’ve not been high in the times that I’ve seen you. And even if you were, like I said, I know it’s all part of your life.”

“Well, rest assured, it’s not part of mine.” He kisses me again. “But you sure are.”

I smile, looking at his lips. Am I really? I know we just had mind-blowing sex, but does that mean that we’re an item? He hasn’t said as much. That’s also part of the package. The casual sex. Maybe that’s all he’s used to and all that he wants to be used to. For now, I’ll just let myself live in the moment, and not worry about what tomorrow brings. “You are, too. But for a lot longer.”

He kisses my lips. “You still hungry?”

I am, but I don’t want to go out to eat, in fact, I have a better idea in mind. “Do they not have a smorgasbord of food at the end of these concerts? I’d love to go back and watch Wired and catch some of that food.”

“Yeah?” he looks impressed.

“Yeah.” His expression turns dark and playful. “You just wanted me to fuck your brains out and then feed you crap,

didn't you. That's my kind of girl."

I snort a laugh. He's too funny. You would think that with those words that I'd be offended, but he has a way with his tone and face, so you know that he's just joking. "Careful. You keep saying cute things like that and I'll make you do it again."

He wiggles his brows, growling playfully, kissing my neck. "Oh, I'll do it again, alright. But let's go see Wired and eat some catered shit first."

"Catered?" My eyes widen.

"Oh yeah." He barks. "We eat like kings."

"Let's get dressed and go." I say, face brightening.

He's so impressed he pulls me to him, snorting, tickling me, making me squeal, and I love it. I never knew how much fun it could be to roughhouse with a man. A man that I am totally head over heels for, that is. When we finally make our way off the bed and dress, Stix's driver is downstairs waiting for us, since we were going to go out to dinner. His hand never leaves mine the whole time we're in the car. Even though it's only like ten minutes, it's totally worth it. Wired has only just gone on, and the audience is going wild. I figure teardown must have taken a little longer for some reason, and then I find out the reason for the delay.

Apparently, Ray, Slick's girlfriend, showed up all upset, and something was going down with her, so Wired went on a little bit late. "Is everything okay with them?" Stix asks Roxy over the din. I'd hate for anything to happen to her. Ray, I've

grown up with, and her folks are best friends with my folks. She's kind of like a sister to me. Her father and my father have golfed together for years. I haven't seen her in a while, and I know that my dad had been thinking about her, too.

"I guess so. She's out there in the throng, and he's on stage, so I guess nobody died." She shouts. We're off to the side of the stage, and Slick comes out for a brief monologue after their first song. That's when we find out what the real story is. It seems that Ray and Slick are having a baby together, and he chooses to tell the whole world, on stage. A layer of cameras are pointed at him, so I'm sure that both local and network television is picking up on this. Her dad is going to have a heart attack. Unlike my dad, who is very down to earth and up to snuff with what's going on in the world, Ray's dad is very rigid and old fashioned, and I know for a fact that he had something to say about Slick, because he told my dad during a game of golf.

"Oh, shit." I gasp, holding my hands on my face. "Jesus Christ, her dad's going to kill her." I say. Stix looks at me.

"Man, he's either out of his mind, or he's got balls the size of dump trucks to make that sort of an announcement in public."

"Fuck it." Roxy shrugs. "At least it isn't that someone O.D.'d on coke or something. That would be expected given the shit that's gone down on this tour."

Stix can't help but smile, agreeing. His hand is still in mine. I don't see Meg around, and I've convinced myself that Stix is right, Meg couldn't pull anything off around here. The

place is wall to wall security guards, which I can't help but envy. I've done security at a local venue, but when you work for a band, now that's classy. I hear sometimes they treat their crew like family, and that sounds so cool. Just being on the payroll for an auditorium has its perks, like free access to some concerts, and avoiding the lineup to get concert tickets when I'm not working, but still. Roxy notices that Stix is holding my hand and looks at me. "You sticking around?"

"For tonight at least, yes."

"Cool. And don't worry about Meg, man. I've got her covered."

"I'm not worried." I smile, and I wonder if I should tell Roxy what happened behind that metal door, like maybe Stix is downplaying it, but then I don't want it to be taken as betrayal if I go behind Stix's back and tell her. I'll just have to see what happens.

The food backstage is insane, and we eat like we haven't eaten in days, as we converse and finish up the night together. Meg is here with Wrecking Ball, and she gives me evaluating glances here and there, which I try to ignore. But it's difficult sometimes, seeing as she's making an ass of herself, all doped up on coke, no doubt. I'm starting to feel a serious need to punch her in the face, but I control myself. Railynn is here with her sister-in-law, Hilary, and her best friend, Desiree, and they're huddled together, glowing from the news that Ray and Slick are having a baby. I can see Slick from the corner of my eye, admiring his girl, and it makes me ache.

Dez is with Storm, but he doesn't seem to be around right now. There are so many bandmates back here, I can't keep track. But as I sit on a couch, with my legs draped over Stix, he leans in and kisses me on the mouth. "You want to get out of here?" he asks me. Truth be told, there is nothing more I would rather do, than be alone with Stix again. Somewhere out there, Stef's head is exploding, knowing that I've already slept with him, knowing that I had no intention of doing that. But something about him, I don't know, he makes me feel different when I'm around him, almost like I'm a different person. A better person.

And when Dez walk into the room, looking as pale as a ghost, word getting around that she found him in a back room with his dealer, snorting up coke again, I figure there's no better time than now to leave.

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## Stix

This place is dripping with drama tonight and I am officially tapped out. First, Slick's girlfriend barges in here after being AWOL for weeks, and then Slick shares the news that she's pregnant, on stage. Not an hour later, Dez finds Storm out back, snorting coke, when he's promised all of us that he's quit. There's something up with Blaze, too, but I didn't stick around to find out what the story was there. I just want to get Liv to myself again. All of her. And as much as we remain calm and collected in the car on the way over to the hotel, my heart is pounding as we stand in the elevator, with

Lukas, my security guard for the night. If he wasn't with us on this elevator, I'd fuck her against the mirrored wall in a heartbeat.

Lukas stands guard outside the door as I release her hand just long enough to slide my key card through the reader.

Housekeeping has turned down the bed and placed a bottle of champagne on ice in a decanter on the bureau. The fireplace has been lit and a fruit basket has been added to the table that already had fresh flowers on it earlier. All this romantic ambience and all I can think about is pushing Liv's pants and panties down and taking her against the patio doors. I'm a fucking animal. She's making me think these barbaric thoughts and I can't help it.

Outside is beautiful, since it's nighttime, and the city is fully lit. It helps that it's a full moon tonight. Liv is like a moth to a flame. I follow her outside and snuggle her from behind, keeping my naughty thoughts to myself, for now. "So, do you think there will be any fallout from Slick's public announcement tonight? Will your record company have a stroke?"

"Probably not. Sure, some of the female fans will go a little batty over it, but as long as he doesn't marry her, it'll be fine. Actually, scratch that, it's the eighties, chicks are more drawn to guys that are married. It's a twisted world."

"Really?" she chuckles as my arms wrap tighter around her.

"Oh, yeah. Half of the chicks that show up backstage are married. They don't care."

"Have you ever been married?" she asks, twisting slightly.

“No.” I chuckle.

“You ever think you will?”

I frown. “Maybe. I’ve never really thought much about it. Too focused on this gig, you know?”

“Yeah, me too. I once thought about marriage, but never again.”

“How come?”

“Long, boring story, but in the end, I had my heart broken by some guy using me to get to my sister.”

“Dirt bag. I need a name.”

She scoffs. “Please. I already beat him up. It’s done.”

“I bet you did. With these arms, no contest, hell, even I’m afraid.”

She turns to face me, frowning dramatically, and so goddamn cute I want to take her right here. “I wouldn’t hurt a hair on your head.” Her voice is baby-like but not obnoxious. She’s being playful and sweet.

“Well, not unless I told you to...hurt me.” I say salaciously.

My tone must strike a chord, because her eyes are on my lips, and I take the cue. I don’t even start small; I want her so bad. As my lips crush hers, tongue plunging inside, her moan and reciprocating tongue tells me that she and I are on the same page. The attraction between us is uncanny. She’s barely touched me, and my dick is already as hard as a rock. There’s something about this fucking balcony, too. I’d love to take her out here, but the fucking paparazzi could be in the



next hotel for all I know, ready to shoot their lenses straight at me, and next thing I know my ass and Liv's ass will be all over the fucking tabloids.

So, I lift her again, just like earlier, and carry her into the room, this time closing the door behind us. Our kisses are more desperate, like we haven't kissed in a year, when it's only been a couple of hours. Her hands are all in my hair as her lips and tongue do very nice things to mine, and then her lips are on my neck, kissing and sucking down the length of it, as my hands cup her ass, letting her feel what she's doing to me. Liv is so fucking hot it feels like my skin is sizzling under her touch.

I'm making soft groaning noises as she makes me think about what it would feel like if her lips were on my cock, the way that she's artfully kissing my neck. She finds the hem of my shirt and lifts it up over my head with my assistance, and then she fucking wrecks me, kissing down my chest, sucking my nipples, making my dick so long and hard it sticks out of the top of my jeans. As she makes her way down my body, while I stand in front of the bed, I watch her lips as they trail over my skin, and I'm thinking that I'm the luckiest fucking guy around. Sure, chicks are all over me sometimes, but with Liv, man, it's different. I'm not dying for her to find my cock and suck it fast, so I can get her out of here faster.

Liv...hell...I don't want her to ever leave my sight if I can help it.

As I look down, I can see my cock plain as day through my jeans. It looks like I've shoplifted a fucking cucumber it's

sticking out so bad. God, she turns me on like no other, I don't know what it is. And then she does something that fucking blows my mind. The tip is poking out, and she licks it, giving me a thrill up my spine and making it twitch. "God, Liv." I breathe. She looks up at me, and I look at her, like she's a fucking unicorn, because I guess to me, she is. She's my unicorn. And my eyes must tell her something, because she undoes my button and slides my zipper down, peeling my pants away, freeing my throbbing cock, and next thing I know she's sucking it masterfully, like she's been sucking it for years.

My head rears back as my eyes roll into the sockets and my chest heaves. God, I've barely touched her and I'm like a sixteen-year-old kid here, all hard and ready, and we only fucked not two hours ago. This is the effect she has on me. I love it. Her hand is doing magic in time with her mouth and tongue, giving me so much fucking pleasure it's almost too much. My hands are in her hair as I comb my fingers through it, feeling how fucking soft it is, feeling her head move as she makes light work out of bringing me to the edge. I have to make her stop even though I so don't want to, but I can't come in her mouth like I would with other girls, I just...can't. I don't know why, but I can't. At least not tonight.

"Liv, God, baby, you gotta stop. I'm gonna come." I grunt, trying like hell to hold my wad. I feel like I would die if I blew it and shot in her mouth or on her face. Plus, I love coming with her, man. It's epic. She rises and fuck it if my dick was just in her mouth, I kiss her like my life depends on it, wanting to take every inch of her. I'm so desperate to have

her, I undress her so fast, I think I rip the neck of her shirt, but neither of us seems to care. She pushes my jeans off and as I step out of them, I remember I replenished my condom supply earlier, something that I've trained myself to do all my life, so I grab it out of my wallet and toss it on the bed.

I turn her around and gently push her onto the bed, as she smiles from in front of me, with her cheek pressed on the mattress. God, her ass is fucking hot. I'm dying to kiss it, lick it, suck it, and more. And as I do just that, her soft moans tell me that she's got as many nerve endings back there as I hoped for. Sliding my hands up her body, I tuck them under, kneading her breasts, squeezing her nipples between my fingers, as she writhes, wiggling under me. My dick is against her ass as I trail kisses up her spine, and I realize that I'd love to take her this way.

The condom is inches from us, and I reach for it, turning on my side, pushing it on. Guiding her with my hands, I help her part her legs, while lifting her knees slightly, and I enter her from behind, feeling how much fucking tighter she is this way. She lifts her ass off the mattress, like she wants more, and she meets me thrust for thrust, slapping her skin against mine until I feel my balls smack against her fine ass. My hands are on her breasts, as I press my fingers together with her nipples in between them, bringing her more pleasure. My lips find her neck as I guide her upwards, towards me, and help her sit on my thighs.

We have a steady rhythm as her back is facing my front, and I'm kissing her neck, while kneading her breasts, and she's so fucking hot it's almost too much. I feel her squeeze

my cock from inside and I know that she's getting close. Removing one hand from her breast, I slide it down to her clit, and circle it, knowing what that's going to do to her. As it has the desired response, I see her mouth open, and I feel her body quiver as my seed reaches the tip of my cock, and, like the magic that I'd hoped for, we both come together, riding on each other's noises and the responses our sexes have to each other. Hers is tight as fuck, and mine is fucking hard as steel, throbbing as I empty into the condom inside her.

She sits on my thighs, resting her head against my chest, as we both come down from the most epic, intense, God-given high. My lips kiss her neck tenderly, as her head all but lolls from exhaustion. Arms snaking around her, I speak against the skin on her neck, still winded. "We're so good together."

"We are." She licks her lips and swallows, as I pat her thigh, letting her know to get off me, so I can take care of the condom. "I have a confession to make." She says, with a tiny grin on her face.

"Oh yeah? What's that?" I ask, rejoining her on the bed.

"My last boyfriend?"

"The douche bag." I confirm.

"Yeah. Anyway, he sucked so bad in bed, that it often set my asthma off."

"Why would that set it off?"

"Because I had to exert myself so much, trying to get there."

“Oh, fuck.” I chuckle. Her eyes are so blue after sex. I can’t stop looking at them. “Are you serious?”

She nods, biting her lip, driving me mad. I grunt, leaning in to kiss her, so she’ll stop. The girl is exhausted, not used to staying up all hours, like me. As much as I’d take her again in an hour, I don’t want her to be too tired to do anything tomorrow. I kiss her tenderly twice, before resting my head on the pillow. “We should get some sleep, man. It’s been a long day.”

“Yeah, not to mention that I wore you out, too.” She says, combing her fingers through my hair.

“I think you have that opposite, Liv. You look so tired I think if you close your eyes for a second, you’ll be out.”

“I do?”

“Yeah. The rims of your eyes are all pink.” I explain. It’s adorable. I reach over and turn the light off, and then pull her close to me. Her head rests in the crook of my neck, and our legs are tangled together. The blankets only cover half of me, but I make sure that she’s well covered. “Sleep tight, Liv.”

“You, too.”

She bends up to kiss me, and about two minutes later, I hear her take a cleansing breath, which I take as her sleeping. As I lay there, I start thinking about things. Lots of things. Things that I’ve never thought of before.

...and in the morning, more drama unfolds...but for once, this time, it’s not mine.

## CHAPTER 9

Liv

I wake up before Stix does, and as I use the washroom, I realize that there's a phone in here. After I tinkle, I consider making a couple of calls, to save myself from waking Stix. The first call is to my brother, which I know will be quick, since he hates the phone. But I figure it's worth a shot. After dialing, he picks up on the third ring.

"Yeah." He answers tersely, the way he always does.

"Ricky, it's me."

"Liv? Where the hell are you? I tried calling you last night."

"Why? What's up?"

"Nothing's up." He says, irritated. "Does something have to be up for me to call my sister?"

"Stef pissing you off?" I guess, knowing that that's the way he rolls. When one of us gets annoying to him, he switches to the other. It's a thing.

"When isn't she." He states more as a statement than as a question. "So, where the hell are you?"

I tell him and he doesn't respond, meaning that he's thinking of a response that's filtered. He doesn't like the drama, so he's always careful and his words are measured with me and Stef. "Can you do me a favor?"

"Sure."

“Can you look up a Megan Gibson for me?”

“Who’s she?”

“She’s this...groupie...I think. But I overheard her talking to one of the lighting guys, who just happens to also be a cocaine dealer, and they were planning this hostile takedown of Stix. I just want to see if she has a previous criminal record or if she’s wanted somewhere.”

He scoffs. “Do you know how common both of those names are? Do you have any idea where she’s from?”

“I think she’s from LA.”

“Well, unless you come down to the station, and look at mug shots, there’s a slim chance in hell that I’m going to be able to find her. Not unless you’ve got a fingerprint, and even then, we’ll have to look through thousands of them.”

“So, you’re saying that if she does have something planned to harm Stix, that unless I catch her red-handed, he’s screwed?”

“Yeah, pretty much, unfortunately. And chances are if she’s not known to police, and there’s no warrant out for her arrest or anything like that, you’re a sitting duck. We can’t go after a civilian unless they do something illegal. You can’t just call the cops because you think you heard something incriminating from behind a metal door, sis.” His words are cutting, but his tone isn’t, so I know that he’s got his cop hat on, not his brother one.

“Damn.” I say softly. “Well, could you look, anyway? Just to see if there is a Megan Gibson on file?”

“I can try. But most likely it’s going to be a dive down a rabbit hole. I’ll let you know. Call me tomorrow night.”

“Sounds good. Thanks, Ricky.”

“Keep safe, sis.”

“Thanks. You, too.”

I hang up and dial Stef’s number, making a mental note to give Stix the money for the long-distance calls. She answers on the first ring. “This better be you.”

“Is that the way you answer your phone?” I ask flatly.

“When I’m expecting my sister, who abandoned me, and went gallivanting with a rock band, yes.” She answers, unforgiving.

“Well, I’m calling, so let it go.” I sigh.

“How was it?”

“I assume you’re talking about the concert.”

“Well, if I know you well enough, that’s all there will be to talk about.” She scoffs. I’m glad that she can’t see the smirk on my face. It’s so telling it would be a dead giveaway.

“Funny.” My voice is flat. “The concert was fantastic.”

She gasps. “Oh my God! I saw it on the eleven o’clock news! Did Slick really knock up Railynn???”

“Classy. And, yes.”

“Oh my God! I can’t wait to see the look on her father’s face when she goes home! Do you know when she’s going home?”



“I don’t know. I think soon, though, just like me.”

“Were you there when he did that?”

“In the flesh.” I say, raising my voice an octave.

“Did you see the look on Ray’s face?”

“No. She was in the mosh pit and I was on stage.”

Another gasp. “You were on stage? Like...*the* stage?”

“No, Stef. I was across the parking lot, on the other stage, where they do children’s plays and stuff...what do you think?”

“I wish I were a fly on the wall when her dad saw the news. You know he did. That man lives for the news. That’s all he watches.”

“Well, why don’t you go golfing with dad? I’m sure he’ll see him there.” I say flatly, getting slightly annoyed by how juvenile my sister is acting.

“Are you kidding? I wouldn’t dare!” Then she changes the subject, thank God. “So, how was the concert?”

“It was fantastic, like I said. And we had this huge buffet afterwards. Also, Meg, oh my God, I had to call Ricky before I called you...I overheard Meg talking to this freakass coke dealer, who’s also one of the lighting guys here? Anyway, supposedly she’s planning to do some freaky shit to Stix. Ricky says there isn’t anything that he can do aside from look her up, which is going to be like looking for a needle in a haystack, evidently.”

“Like...what kind of freaky shit?”

“I don’t know. I just overheard that they want to mess him up. They didn’t specify. They didn’t even say when it’s going down, but I figure I better say something to Ricky.”

“Good call. So, how did you hear all this?”

I explain to her what happened. “Did you tell Stix?”

“Yeah, but he says that Meg is harmless, so is this Scrappy guy. And even if they did try to pull something, they’d never get away with it with all the security here. And it’s true. Shit, Stix has a security guy standing outside the door all hours of the night. Nobody can get past any of these guys.”

“Well, all the same, just be careful, sis.”

“I know.”

She pauses for a beat. “Wait a minute...how do you know that Stix has security waiting outside all hours of the night?”

Think fast. “Because he...told me.” I answer, thickening up the irritation in my voice. I don’t know why I don’t want my sister knowing that I had mind-blowing sex with Stix... twice, but I don’t. I should be gushing and bragging and being all teenagery, letting that little girl inside me that’s been dying to do all the things I did, live vicariously, but I don’t want to jinx anything, and I’m afraid that if I blab, I will.

“And you...sound different. Did you get wasted last night or something...wait! No!” she gasps, and then squeals. “You got laid!”

And there it is.

The reason why I hate being so close to her.

Because she can read me like a book.

Lie, you say? Yeah, let's try that.

"No, I didn't."

She scoffs. "Weak. Yes, you did! Oh my God! I can't believe you did it!"

See?

Now watch me fold like a wet piece of paper. "Fine. I did. But can you just calm down and keep it to yourself, please?"

"Calm down?" she squeals. "My sister made it with Stix from Buying Time! This is no time to calm down!"

"He's a person, Stef. He's not some movie star or cartoon character."

"But this is the guy. Like...*the* guy. Was it good?"

"Gross."

"Liv, level with me, was it like 'get me the hell out of here, he's never putting that in there again' type sex, or the 'I'll just lay on my back forever and hope to God that he does it as often as possible' kind?"

"Do you want me to puke?"

"Come on! Give me something!"

I relent. "Fine. It was...mind-blowing. I have never come like that in my life."

Now she comes back to earth. "I'm so happy for you."

"But I did the stupidest thing."

“What?”

“I told him I love him.”

“And what did he say?”

“He just said I was adorable and left it at that.”

“Well, that’s better than what I would get. He could have run for the hills, Liv. Most guys do that whenever they hear those three words.”

“I didn’t expect him to say it back, I mean, he probably thinks I’m a freak, but at least I know that if he did say it, that he wouldn’t mean it, and that would be worse.”

“Exactly. The guy’s honest. That’s all you can ask for. If he had said it back, you know he’s a liar and just telling you to get more sex, especially if it was of the mind-blowing type.”

I have the sudden urge to spill everything. I’m so happy that we’re both on the same page. This could have been ugly. “Stef, I’ve never had an orgasm from a guy before, you know that, right?”

“Yeah. I imagine that record got broken several times.” She says, reading my mind.

“God, it was phenomenal, Stef. I really do love him.”

“I know you do. Did he enjoy himself too?”

“I gave him a blow job.” I brag.

“You go girl! That’s my sister!”

“Shhh!!” I giggle.

“What, can he hear me?” she teases.

“No, but maybe on your end someone can.”

“Trust me, there is nobody here to overhear anything. Unlike my oversexed sister, I am still single, alone, and from what I understand, any chance I had with Wrecking Ball is now out the door, since that freak show Meg came into the picture.”

“Trust me, it isn’t worth you losing sleep over, Stef. I mean, Wrecking Ball is cool and all, but if he’s involved with this Meg girl, then it’s best to stay as far away as possible. Besides, he didn’t give you his phone number or anything, did he?”

“Well, no. Not with freak show hanging around. I mean, that’s just murder.”

“Exactly. And I think that he did you a favor, personally.”

“So, where are you now? Are you sitting in his lair, sipping champagne and orange juice, being waited on hand and foot?”

I snort a laugh. “I’m sitting on his toilet, talking on the phone attached to the same wall as said toilet.”

She laughs out loud. “Are you serious?”

“I am dead serious.” I say. “And I should go. He’s still sleeping. I don’t want to wake him up.”

“Or maybe you do.” Her voice is teasing.

“Shut up.” I chuckle. “I’ll call you later.”

“When are you coming home?”

“Tonight. My flight leaves at five.”

“Okay, call me when you get in, or do you want me to pick you up?”

“No, my car is at the airport, but thanks.”

“Okay, see you.”

“See you.”

I hang up, wash my hands, and brush my teeth, running a brush through my disheveled locks. It looks like I got good and laid. My hair seems to think that I’ve been in a windstorm. I hear a knock at the door, and I open it. Stix looks sexy no matter what. His hair is a mess, but it just means he looks sexier. “Aw, you brushed your hair, man. I was hoping to see it all messed up and shit.” He says, sliding his arms around my waist, kissing my neck, giving me shivers.

“I made two long distance calls in here so I wouldn’t wake you. I’ll pay you back, okay?”

He gives me a look. “You’re joking, right?”

“No. I told you I’m not a gold digger, and I’m paying you back.”

“Fine.” He kisses my neck again. I’ll use the money to buy you something.”

“No, you won’t.”

He ignores me. “Are you taking a shower?” he asks, making my thighs damp, as he speaks over my skin.

“I was thinking about it.”

“Mind if I join you?....after I drain the main vein?”

I scoff a laugh. “Is that what you call it?”

He slides his hands over my ass, making me instantly wet, so much so that I don't know if we're going to make it into the shower. He's naked behind me, and I can feel him hardening already, against my naked rear. “We can call it whatever you want to, but we should shower and head downstairs, because everyone's having breakfast in the lobby.”

“Oh, okay.” I say, sobering. “I'll get started.”

He slaps my rear playfully, and I can't help but watch him walk away, half erection and all. I start the water and manage to wash my hair as I hear him pee and brush his teeth, and then as I'm sponging myself down, he joins me. It's all innocent at first, him washing my back, me washing his hair, until he leans in to adjust the temperature, and we're nose-to-nose. “Hi, there.” I say, my voice sultry.

“Hi.” He answers, so fucking sexy I can't take it. He's dripping wet, abs glistening under the water, eyelashes impossibly long and dark wet, and his hair is slicked back, and I can't decide which look for him is sexier. Never mind, he looks sexy no matter what. Next thing I know, his lips crush mine, and his tongue is in my mouth, and I can taste him with a little toothpaste. We're panting, moaning, just starved for each other, when we only had sex hours ago. He lifts me, grabbing me by the ass, and plunges into me, making me cry out in ecstasy.

I don't know what I love more, when he's gentle, or when he takes me like a stallion, the way he is now. We're in one of those rectangular, glass-enclosed showers for two, or three, or

an army this thing is so big. “God, I love you raw, baby.” He pants, thrusting into me so fast, making me climb in record time. “But I’m gonna pull out, so don’t sweat it, okay?”

“Okay.” I answer, breathlessly, feeling myself going over the edge fast, he’s so good. My back arches, as my legs start to lock up, feeling his whole penis inside me, he’s so deep. “Oh, God.” I breathe, feeling like I’m a different person. He’s hitting a spot deep inside me, and the water is causing all sorts of other delicious sensations all over my body, especially with him gliding up and down, every inch of him.

“Feel it, baby.” He pants, and then he gives me a thigh searing kiss, while grabbing my breast, squeezing my nipple just right, and I come hard, crying out with each breath, feeling the most intense orgasm I’ve ever felt, including counting last night’s mind-blowing orgasms.

He’s holding his breath, and he earns a gold star for holding out, as I’m so tight I don’t know how he’s not coming with me, but he’s doing it, and as I start to come down, he looks at me with so much intensity, I know that he needs to blow his wad badly, so I grasp his nipples, and he gets this cute, defeated look on his face, as he sets my feet on the floor quickly, pulls out, and leans right into me, rubbing his cock on my belly, as I feel his warm seed shoot up my chest, while I squeeze his nipples, and he shuts his eyes tight, feeling his orgasm.

He stands there for a moment, getting his bearings, leaning his forehead on mine, as his seed washes away. “So, shower sex, huh.” I chuckle.



He shakes his head, still leaning on mine. “Fucking raw. That was awesome.”

“It was.”

He kisses me meaningfully, with full, open-mouthed kisses. “God, I don’t know what I did to deserve you.” He says, looking at me like he’s going to tell me the true meaning of life.

“Because you’re you.” I shrug.

He smiles a cute little smirk. And then he says something to me that I would have never expected.

## CHAPTER 10

### Stix

Remember when I said that I was thinking about a whole bunch of things while Liv slept last night? Well, I just blurted one of them out, after we had fucking awesome shower sex. And I don't know if it was a mistake or not, but I did it anyway, and it's done. I'm still catching my breath from blowing my wad less than a minute ago, when I say. "Hey, why don't you come and join our security crew?"

"What?" she laughs.

"No, I'm serious." I say, in between kisses, as the water drizzles between our bodies. "You should come and do security. You'd be great, you can hang with me on our days off, and the best part is that it pays a fucking shit load of money."

"Really?" she laughs, and I'm not sure if she realizes that I'm totally serious or not.

"Yeah, really. We're not stingy with pay around here, especially for our security people. We even give a portion of our concert proceeds to them for sticking around. You have any idea how difficult it is to keep good people on staff when you don't do that? Security isn't an all year-round thing, and if they don't have a steady stream of income, they jet on us."

"Well, that's the thing, Stix, I mean, that's why I have multiple jobs. I wouldn't be able to live on just one."

I tell her what it pays per hour. Her eyes widen. "You're not fucking serious."

“No joke, man. And, hey, if you want to keep your other job while this tour is on, to see if you like it, I’m cool with that.”

I reach over and turn the water off, and she squishes the water out of her hair while I grab us each a towel. “You think about it, okay? No pressure.”

“God, I don’t know, Stix. I mean, I don’t know if I’m cut out for life on the road all the time.”

“That’s fair. I didn’t think I was, either, but once you get used to it, it’s not so bad.” I say, handing her a towel, and then drying myself off. “It’s a lot of work, I’m not gonna lie, but it’s really cool, because our managers are usually pretty good about giving us a day off in between shows, so whatever city or town we’re in, we get to check it out.”

“Yeah? So, it’s not like you wake up in a town, and you forget where you are?”

I chuckle. “Not gonna lie, it’s happened. And, hey, you need your space, you say so, and same with me. You want your own room, you get it, it’s not like we have to be glued together, you know?” I don’t know why I’m trying so hard to sell this to her. I just don’t want her to leave, even though I know that she has to today. I want to give her as many reasons to stay as possible.

“What about talking to your staff? Isn’t this a conflict of interest?” she chuckles. “The fact that you’re fucking the help.”

The way she says it isn't condescending or cheap. Liv has a way of making everything sound cute and lighthearted, and I love that about her. I look at her and we both laugh. "Well, it's true!" she barks, still laughing. "My father would be so proud!"

"Mine, too." I say, playing along. She couldn't be any cuter if she tried. "Hey, you're already my little spygirl."

She snorts a laugh. "Barely. Oh, that reminds me, I did talk to my brother. He's going to check out Meg, if you're okay with that."

I shrug. "Fuck if I care. Like I said, security is so tight here." I grab her ass. "Especially if this tight ass joins the team." I wink.

"You're lucky I love you." She says, and I stop and think what it would be like if she really did love me, you know? What if she does? What if this is the real thing? And I stand there looking at her, while she wraps her hair up in a towel. Her face is curious when she sees me still looking at her. "I'm sorry. Should I lay off that?" she asks, and her voice is so solemn yet reasonable, it tears my fucking heart out.

"No." I say warmly, bringing her close to me. "I don't mind it at all. I've never heard it from anyone before, but I like it coming from you." I kiss her lips sweetly, holding her against my body. "I love it that you say it so freely. Do you say it to your sister or your mom or dad like that, too?"

She considers that for a moment. "No, not really. I say it to Stef sometimes, yes, but if it bothers you, I can stop. I know some guys don't like to hear it, because they feel guilty for not

saying it back, when they're not 'I love you' type of guys. But I don't expect anything in return."

I go for playful. "You know...you're lucky I love you, or else I'd have to put you over my knee." Inside I'm slapping myself in the face for being so fucking stupid. Don't tell a girl that you love her if you don't love her, asshole! God, that's rule number one! But then another voice inside my head really warms to the words rolling off my tongue. Maybe it's true. Maybe I do really love her. I've never loved a girl, so I'm not sure, but it feels good saying it. I worry that she's going to flip out and make a big deal out of it, but she just snorts a laugh.

"Put me over your knee? Buddy, I could take you." She says, playing along, making me feel so relieved and glad that I said it, this way, if I ever say it again, it's not so scary.

"You think so?" I ask, putting up my dukes, making like it's on. Then I lower my hands. "Come on. We gotta get downstairs for breakfast."

"I'll be ready in ten."

When we get downstairs, hands interlaced, the mood is pretty dim. Blaze is going off about some chick named Regan that screwed him over and is now threatening him with a paternity suit. That's, like, my worst fear. No jokes. I've screwed enough women, and I'm adamant on being safe, no matter what, because of this incessant fear of mine. I don't even think I want kids and that's the truth, but I especially don't want kids from a woman I hate, and is pinning that sort of shit on me. I won't touch a girl unless I know I'm stocked

with a condom in the wallet, or, in the case of the awesome shower sex, that I've got somewhere to blow my wad that's not inside the chick.

Anyway, this Regan chick that's got Blaze by the balls is Roxy's stepsister, who she hates, so it looks like she's got this, as she takes Blaze off to the side, and talks to him in private, thank God. I'm not big on drama, and I've already had my fill for today, what with asking Liv to do security for us. We're eating breakfast, just mowing down, we're all so hungry, and again, my tongue gets ahead of me. "Hey, what do you guys think of Liv coming on board, as part of security?"

I expect her eyes to bulge in embarrassment, but she just lets it roll off her shoulders. God, I love that about her. I'm realizing more and more things that I love about her, I notice.

Jett's the first to speak. "You've got security background?" he asks, not as a dumb question, like, duh, why would I ask otherwise? More like he's surprised, and now curious.

"Yeah. I work for an armed security trucking company, and for a venue in LA, I work security for events."

"Well, sure, if you love doing it." Jett says. "You have to really love it to do it for us, since we need round the clock security on tour."

"I do love it." she nods. "I'm a closet cop." she grins.

"How come you're not a cop then?" Slick asks.

"Long story." she waves.

"Were you a bad girl in a previous life?" Slick says, wiggling his brows suggestively.

“No. It’s a health issue. Or, at least, a perceived health issue.” she informs, grinning.

“Well, all the power to you, then.” Jett says. “Any friend of Stix’s is a friend of ours.”

“Technically, I’m also Railynn’s friend, if that helps.” She adds.

“No way.” Slick says. “How come you didn’t say something sooner?”

“Well, I didn’t want to impede on all the hoopla.” Liv says sweetly. “I didn’t even get to say congratulations to her.”

“Yeah, she had to split and head back to work.” Slick says regretfully. “So, how do you know her?”

“Her family and my family are very close. Her dad’s been playing golf with my dad for years. My dad is the fire marshall that called Ray over the night that one of your fans passed away.” She says carefully. “I was working security that night, too.”

“No shit?” Jett says.

“No shit.” She shakes her head. “Railynn and I go way back. I’ve known her since before she even thought about being a psychologist.”

“Wow. Small world.” Slick says. “Definitely climb aboard this train then, man. You have my blessing.” He rises and walks over to us. Liv rises, too, as Slick gives her a warm hug. What a guy.

“Thanks.” Liv says.

“Don’t mention it. When are you heading back?” Slick asks.

“Right after breakfast.”

“So, have you made up your mind yet?” Jett asks.

She looks at me, and I try like hell to keep my face straight, but it’s tough. I so want her to come with us. In fact, if I could find a way, I’d ask her to stay, and not go home today.

“I think it’s a pretty hard deal to pass up.” She says honestly. “But I think I’ll keep my other jobs, since they’re all part-time, anyway, just as a backup. Who knows, maybe you guys will hate me or it won’t work out.”

“Well, that’s fair.” Cruz shrugs. “That’s what I did until this band took off. It’s insurance.”

“Exactly.” Liv agrees.

“So, when are you coming back?” I ask, astounded by how eager I am. What is wrong with me?

She looks down. She feels as badly about leaving as I feel about her leaving. “I’m not sure. I don’t want to leave these people hanging, either. I have to work tonight, in fact.”

I put my arm around her. “No pressure, Liv. You come back when you can.”

She looks at me and I can’t help it. I have to kiss her. God, I want to say it. I want to say it and mean it, but God strike me dead for being a coward to say it in front of everyone. Ah, fuck it. “I love you.” I say as I rub her nose.



“I love you.” she says. We’re both speaking so low I don’t think anyone can hear us. Plus, everyone’s kind of got their own conversations going on around the table. We look at each other, and I can’t believe it said it. Did I mean it? Oh, yeah, I did. There is no two ways about it. I love her. Never loved a girl before, but I know this is it. And I learn in just a few short hours, how much I truly love her.

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As much as security is going apeshit over it, I fight to go to the airport with Liv. We take one of the goons with us for good measure, at the insistence of my manager, and of Jett, who just about has a coronary, especially after some weirdness is going on within the band. Paternity suits, a weird guy from Blaze’s past popping up unexpectedly, and Storm, with his dealers creeping in and out, all the while he’s as stoned as can be. It’s all fucked up. I get it that they want to take all precautions, but I have to see her, since I don’t know when I’ll see her again. It could be weeks.

We hold each other while waiting for the final call for her flight. “Are you going to be okay with all this shit going down? I mean, what happens if Storm screws everything up?” Liv asks, eyes full of concern.

“I think Roxy’s got that under control. I heard she’s got his dealer blacklisted and she trashed his stash.” I say, stroking my finger down her hand. I kiss her lips. “You’ve still got that number I gave you?”

She smiles. "It's still on the drumstick."

I grin at her. She's adorable. Instead I give her a business card with my recording company's contact info on it, so that she can ask for the right person to get in touch with me, no matter where I am. "Here. Use this."

"Are you saying that the one you gave me is bogus?" she teases.

"No. That's my actual home number."

"So, if I'd called it, I wouldn't have reached you." her voice is flat, but her eyes are dancing.

"Sort of. But my answering machine would tell the tale."

"What, do you have a drum beat in the background?"

"Call it and find out."

"I will."

I kiss her again, as we hear the final boarding call. "I should go." She says.

"Don't." I blurt, not realizing that the words are coming out of my mouth. "Stay."

"I can't, Stix. Believe me, I would if I could. But if I'm going to give up my jobs, I have to at least give written notice or reason. I can't just abandon these people. I've been employed by them for a long time."

"No, I get it." I sigh. "I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you, too."

"I'll try to call you every day."

“Me, too.”

I look at her and lean my forehead on hers. “I really do love you, Liv.”

“I really do love you, too, Stix. I have for a long time, I just never knew it until now.”

I kiss her a dozen times before saying. “Okay, I don’t want to be the deadbeat that makes you miss your flight.”

“Okay. I’ll see you soon.”

“Yeah.”

“Love you.”

“Love you.”

I watch her until she disappears beyond the gates, and I stand there, with my bodyguard watching. My hat and sunglasses are a perfect disguise. It takes everything in me to walk away, but I do. And the next couple of weeks are torture without her.

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**Meg**

“What the fuck is the deal with your friend, man?” I sneer at Scrappy. “I thought he was going to fuck things up by now.” It’s been a couple of weeks since we last talked about things, and I’m getting pissed off. Sure, I’m fucking everyone in all three bands, and having a great time, but Stix doesn’t seem to give a fuck. He’s such an asshole, with his face dragging to the ground since that goodie-goodie two shoes left.

Scrappy sucks his teeth, fixing a light above the stage.  
“Well, he’s right in the middle of fucking up Blaze right now, and believe me, it’s easier than he thought, and if you wait long enough, it’ll be worth it, since I’ll give you a cut.”

“I better get a cut, after what I’ve done for you.”

“I’ve done lots for you, too, man. Don’t forget it.”

“So, what’s he doing?”

Scrappy looks over his shoulder. “Would you keep your fucking voice down?”

It’s so early in the morning, and the guys landed here so late, there’s no way that anyone’s up. Scrappy’s a weirdo in that he hardly sleeps, which is probably why he fairs so well with this bunch, since he can work on like two hours of sleep.

“Nobody’s here, Little Bo Peep. Spill.”

“Well, Led’s got a guy hacking into Blaze’s bank account as we fucking speak, man. This little job you want done is going to fuck the band up, alright, but it doesn’t make the money, so you wait.”

“How’s he doing that?”

“It’s child’s play to these guys. Then he’ll hire some sniper or come up with some master plan to shoot the fucker.”

“You hate him, too?”

“Sure, I can’t stand that asshole. I’d like to see him dead. He’s the reason I never got to have Roxy, you know.”

“I’ve heard this story so many times before, man, you’re making me puke just thinking about it.”

“Yeah, well, now she’s all fucking clean, and I haven’t got a snowball’s chance in hell of making it with her.”

“So, Stix got in the way the whole time, did he?” I sneer, thinking how pathetic this sounds. Me, I just gave the guy a fucking blow job and I was in, simple as that.

Scrappy ignores my jibe. “So, if you’ve still got such a hard-on for Stix, how come you want him creamed?”

“Because if I can’t have him, nobody can.”

“You’re fucking sick, you know that?” he says. This whole conversation he hasn’t looked once at me, he’s had his eyes trained on this stupid light receptacle. I hate it when men do that. When I’m talking, I want his undivided attention. Stix was good at that until that bitch Liv came into the picture. It’s amazing how much a guy’s eyes are on you when he knows you’re his next blow job.

I ignore him. “What about that shit that’s going down with that Regan chick? Is that one of ours, too?”

He snorts a laugh. “Nobody I know. Maybe he’s just bought his own set of troubles. You fuck enough of the wrong chicks, I guess some day you gotta pay the price.”

“How would you know, dog face.” I say, walking away from him, slapping his ass.

“Ah, fuck you.” He chuckles.

“Fuck you, too.”

## CHAPTER 11

Liv

The second I get in the door from the airport, I call Ricky, my brother. He answers promptly on the second ring. “Yeah.” His voice is forever terse.

“Did you look Megan Gibson up?”

“Yeah. I’ve got some mug shots if you want to come down to the station tomorrow. You’ll have to come first thing, though, so the chief won’t be there.”

“I’ll be there.” I bite my lip, wondering if I should divulge my latest job offer. “Ricky, do you agree with daddy? That I could never make a decent cop?”

“Not necessarily, Liv. I think you’d make a great cop, personally, but if you have to chase someone or hold someone down, you’re sunk. I’ve seen you when your asthma acts up. It’s nothing to joke around over.” He says, using his most reasonable, ‘I’ll level with you’ tone. “Hell, even in the shape that I’m in, sometimes I can’t outrun a perp, sis. But I wouldn’t let that stop you. You can’t join the military with your health, but becoming a cop wouldn’t be a stretch, if you really wanted to give it a go.”

“Really?”

“I wouldn’t lie to you.”

“I know you wouldn’t.” I decide to go for the kill. “I was offered a job doing security for Buying Time.”

“Oh yeah?” he seems genuinely impressed. “You going to take it?”

“I haven’t decided yet.”

“What’s it pay?”

I tell him. He pauses for thought. “All those piddly part-time jobs couldn’t hold a candle to that wage, Liv. Is this the result of going to that concert last night?”

“Yeah. I guess Stef told you.”

“You know if you want anything kept under wraps, don’t tell her.” He says reasonably. “But if it makes you feel any better, she’s really excited for you.”

“I know.”

“Just don’t do it because he asked you to. Do it because you want to do it, you know. It’s got to be what you want.”

“Well, the thought excites me, to be honest. And not just because of Stix.”

“That his real name?”

“Of course not.”

“Do you know what his real name is?”

“No, and I’m not going to ask him, either, just so you can win some stupid locker room bet, so forget it.”

He chuckles. “I’ll see you in the morning. Before nine, please.”

“Sure thing.”

“And your next call had better be to Stef, unless you want her head to explode.”

“I’m calling her right now.”

I hang up to him and dial Stef’s number. There is no answer, making me raise a brow, as my sister has been notorious for sitting by the phone and answering before it even makes half a ring. I try her three or four times until I hear a knock at the door. “Ah, so that’s the game.”

Before I get to the door, she’s using her key, so I know that it’s her. She enters my apartment as I stand there, arms crossed over my chest. “I admire your restraint.”

“Well, I figured you were either home, or on your way, and since you don’t know how to pick up a phone, I thought I’d meet you here to find out what’s going on.”

“I had to call Ricky first, and then I dialed your number about five times, before I heard you clawing your way through my door.”

“Haha, very funny.” Her face brightens. “So? How did it go?”

“It was fantastic.” I shrug, as though, like, what else could it be?

“Yeah? Did you guys do it again?”

I wince. “Gross. Stef, seriously?”

“Just answer yes or no.”

“Why? Don’t you even care at all that he asked me to join his security team, or that he told me that he loves me? Or is



the amount of times we slept together seem all that much more important.” I ask, heading towards the kitchen, feeling the sudden need to pound back a shot of scotch. And I don’t drink, so that’s saying a lot.

“What? Wait, back up. That’s a lot of information you just spewed there, sis.”

“Where would you like me to start?” I ask, pouring myself a glass of water, pretending that it’s tequila.

“He asked you to join his security team? Why?”

“Because he knows that’s what I love to do. He also knows that I want to be a cop. So, he offered me a job. It pays more than twice what all my jobs put together pay, Stef. But I’m not sure. Ricky got me thinking.”

“Ricky?” she squeals. “You told Ricky before you told me?”

“Grow up.” I sigh. “I had to call him for something else and it just came up.”

“Well, what are you going to do?”

I sit down at the two-seater table in my eat-in kitchen. Sure, the place is small, but it’s just me living here, not the Rockefellers. “I don’t know yet. Stix let me know that he’s fine if I want to just try it out for a while and keep my other jobs for now, and I think I’m leaning towards that, but I’m still on the fence.”

“What’s the problem?” she asks conversationally.

“Well, isn’t it obvious? Stix and I just got together. If I’m with him day in and day out isn’t that a recipe for relationship death?”

“Liv, if he’s being flexible, I’m sure that he understands you may need your space, just like he might need his, too. This is the eighties. People are freer. Liberate yourself. Do what makes you happy, not what dad wants you to do.”

I lift my brows. “I see the gloves are off. What’s the matter? Are you jealous or something? You jealous that I’m going to be hanging around with your boyfriend, Wrecking Ball, while you’re strutting your stuff down the runways?”

“I’m hardly a runway model, Liv, and, no. I’m just tired of you always doing things to please dad. Ricky and I live for us, not for him, and you know that I don’t mean any disrespect by that, either, so don’t even go there.”

“He did say that, you know.” I consider, completely sidestepping all the other semi-insulting things Stef just said. “That if we want to have our own rooms, we can. I think he would pull out all the stops to have me do this. And his bandmates seem pretty gung-ho about it, too.”

“Then I don’t see the problem.”

I sit there looking at her as if I’m looking through her. “I’ve got a bad feeling, Stef.”

Her face grows concerned. “What about?”

“I know that Stix thinks that Meg is harmless, but I don’t like it, not one bit. It’s like she’s there for surveillance.”

“This cloak and dagger stuff is right up your alley, isn’t it.

“It’s not that.” I pause and she’s silent, letting me think. “If she wanted to hurt him, what’s she got up her sleeve? I know that she used to get her coke from Stix, but now it seems like this Scrappy guy is her dealer. The same guy who is apparently in cahoots with her in taking Stix down.”

Stef nods, being my sounding board.

“But why wait? Is something terrible coming down the pipeline? Have they already tried something, and it didn’t pan out and we were just too wrapped up to notice?”

“What do you think they’re going to do?”

“I don’t know. But something is going on with Blaze, I’m sure that’s unrelated. And Stix said that security is so tight they don’t have a prayer. But what if there’s a mule?”

She keeps nodding, letting me feel this out for myself.

“Or, they’re waiting until off time, when security isn’t as tight.”

“Maybe you should tell Stix that he ought to ramp up security on his free days.”

“I think he is already, but I’ll remind him.”

“So, are you going to go for it? I know you can’t walk away from a challenge.”

“I think I am.” I say, making up my mind. “You’re right. I have much more at stake here. It’s not just a job, it’s now about helping to protect the man that I love.”

She smiles. “You go girl.”

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“Damn!” I swear, looking through the last of the mug shots that Ricky has given me.

“I told you, sis. It was a longshot.” he says, not trying to make me feel better about not finding Meg in any of the mug shots.

“Man. I thought I would nab her.”

“Don’t worry. If you’re on the payroll, there isn’t anything that’ll get past you.”

I look at him. He was starting to piss me off, but now he’s redeemed himself. “Thanks.”

He smiles. “You better get out of here, before the chief sees you, and I get my ass handed to me.”

“Okay. Thanks again. I’ll take you to lunch on your next day off in thanks.”

“You bet your ass you will. And you’re getting me into a concert for free.”

“Come with me next time.” I shrug.

“And interrupt your little love nest? Thanks, I’ll wait until the dust settles.”

“They’re not going to be on tour forever, Ricky. Strike while the iron is hot.”

“God, you’re starting to sound like dad, you know that?”

Time to go. “Bye.”

He winks. “See ya.”

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“You sound so tired.” I comment, listening to Stix’s voice on the other end of the phone.

“Yeah, man. I was going to fly home between shows this week, but the shit hit the fan with Storm and Dez.”

“What happened?”

“Dez...fucking...collapsed. Roxy found her in the ladies’ room, passed out on the floor. The doctors don’t think she’ll survive. It’s bad. Storm hasn’t left her side.”

“Jesus. I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“Thanks. Yeah, we’re all doing double-duty, between security and running back and forth between venues and the hospital. We’re leaving in a couple of days, and I don’t know what Storm is going to do.”

“Do you think he’ll abandon the tour?”

“Dez, when she woke up, made him promise he wouldn’t. It’s ripping his fucking heart out.” he pauses. I don’t even know what to say. The anguish in his voice is palpable. “I miss the fuck out of you, man. I wish you were here.”

“I can probably come in a couple of days, Stix. I gave my notice.”

He perks up a little. “Yeah? So, you decided to come with us?”

“How could I pass it up?” I say honestly. “It’s the opportunity of a lifetime, Stix.”

“And you deserve it.”

“Thanks. God, I love you.”

“I love you, too. Now, get your sweet ass out here, we need you.”

“I’ll do my best.”

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“How is she doing?” I ask, hearing Stix’s voice on the other end of the phone.

“Better. Thankfully Ray stepped in and got Dez a kickass specialist from some exotic place or something in the tropics. He’s got her on some medication that I can’t pronounce for some disease that I can’t pronounce more. But she’s pulled out of it and Storm is on cloud nine.”

“How is he doing? Is he holding it together?”

“Strangely enough, yeah. He’s cleaned himself up. Hasn’t had a hit since before she got sick. I think she saved his life, man. The guy was practically on death row.”

“If you didn’t know what irony was before.” I state.

“Yeah, you ain’t kidding.” he pauses. “So, do you feel like coming out to my place tomorrow? We’re off for a couple of days, and I’m LA bound.”

“Really?” I’m so excited I could squeal. I just have to make arrangements for Stef and Ricky to come make sure my apartment hasn’t been broken into and to check my mail, and I’m off to join the tour with Stix.

“For sure. I never thought I’d be so happy to come home, man. I miss the shit out of you.”

“I miss you so much. But Stix, you have to be careful. Are you going to have security around?”

“I’ve got a kickass system at home, man, no worries.”

“That’s not enough. Listen, I’ve got a bad feeling about Meg.”

“Relax, man. She’s hanging with everyone. It’s cool.”

“I’m not sure. I had my brother look into her, and I couldn’t find a mug shot, so she’s not known to police, but I still have this unsettling feeling, and I’m never wrong, Stix. I mean it.”

“Okay, Liv, seriously, it’s fine. But if it makes you feel any better, I’ll have Lukas stick around my place, make sure the coast is clear.”

“Thank you. That does make me feel better.”

“I’ll just...have to remember to close the windows when I get you alone...because we’re going to tear the roof off, baby.”

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My feet can't get me to the gate fast enough. I'm meeting Stix at the airport, and I'm staying with him, at his place, for the next two days, after which time I'll then be joining him on tour. I'm so excited my heart is skipping beats. This is the most exciting thing I have ever done in my whole life. My parents are worried, but they always worry about me, even more so than Stef, but nothing beats how much they worry about Ricky. If he doesn't call mom every day, she will literally go down to the police station, which is only a five minute drive away, and hunt him down.

As I stand at the arrivals gate, waiting for him, I feel like a kid again. I'm so excited the muscles in the back of my neck are starting to hurt from smiling so much. When I finally see him come down the escalator, with Lukas in tow, I bolt to him. "Oh, Liv." He smiles, his eyes almost not believing that I'm here. His arms hold me tight, lifting me off the ground, as I jump into his arms. "God, I'm so happy to see you."

"I'm so happy to see you, too. I missed you so much." I say into his ear, kissing his head and his hair, like he's my long-lost boyfriend, who I haven't seen in years.

"Let's get my bags and get the hell out of here." He says, pulling back. He kisses me a dozen times chastely on the lips, making playful, loud smacking noises. His record company arranged for a driver to come pick him up, but since I'm here, they just drive Lukas back to his place. When we arrive, I'm in awe. His house, I wouldn't even call it a house, it's a



mansion inside a parcel of land. The grand gates open to a code that Stix enters into a keypad and then via a winding cobblestone driveway, we're led first to a small building, that he calls his guest house, then to another building that looks more like a garage, which he says is his recording studio, and then we finally reach his mansion.

The other car is behind us, and Stix tells me that Lukas and the driver go way back, so they hang outside while we go inside. The winding cobblestone driveway up front leads into a triple car garage at the side of the house, and the house looks like something from a futuristic movie. It's made almost completely out of glass, with just slats in between each window made of a stucco type material. Painted an off-white, which is surprisingly crisp with the backdrop of all the greenery.

“This place is huge.”

“Yeah, I had it made by this wicked architect that I went to high school with.” Stix explains. “I gave him full control with no requests other than the studio. The house that was here before was just a shack. He tore it down and built this one from scratch. I lived in the studio for about a year while it was being built. This place is my baby. It's just too bad that I'm not home often enough to enjoy it.”

“You must have to pay someone a lot of money to keep it clean enough to be seen through all the glass.”

“Well, you'll notice that most of it is covered with blinds. They're all on a remote control. This architect and his buddy, who is an interior designer, they're both geniuses.”

“I can see that.” I say, my eyes not sure where to look, since the place is so grand. I feel like I’m stuck in an episode of the Jetson’s.

“You don’t like it.” He says, but I can tell that he’s not rattled.

“I haven’t even seen it.”

“Don’t worry. You’ll love it. Come on, let me show you.” He gestures to Lukas that he’s going inside, and Lukas gives him a nod. He and the driver are smiling, looking well entranced in conversation. I’m just getting an unsettling feeling, entering the house without Lukas right behind us.

...and then Stix does something that makes me squeal.

## CHAPTER 12

### Stix

I'm so excited to see her and to show her my place that I have the sudden urge to throw her over my shoulder, so I do. She screams aloud, laughing, and I laugh with her, as I carry her over the threshold, like we just got married or something. Chivalry is not dead in this house, folks. I set her back down and she adjusts herself. She scans the foyer, which is pretty cool, I must say. There is a mosaic pattern on the marble tiled floor, that very closely resembles a drum kit...mine. An artist that I met on one of our tours offered to do this, and he was going to do it for free, but I was so blown away, that I ended up giving him a whack load of well-deserved cash for it.

"This is beautiful." Liv comments.

"You ain't seen nothing yet, baby." There are bits of artistic flair all over the house. From the etched glass drumsticks on the kitchen cabinets, to the silhouettes of drum kits on the inside of the blinds when they're drawn. I also have a giant music note etched into the ceiling, done in a shimmery white paint, so it's only subtle, not in your face.

"God, this is gorgeous." Liv says.

"Now you like it."

"I love it. It's beautiful." she says, looking around, in awe. Across the living room wall is a large, blown up, custom-made panoramic mural of us on tour, performing in Wembley Stadium, one of the largest venues in the world. It spans across my whole living room, almost floor to ceiling. You see,

it's not the fixtures and furniture that make this place so special, it's the unique touches I've added. My house consists of one large room, the one with the mosaic floor, the kitchen, the music room, complete with a grand piano, an exercise room, and then upstairs is my family room, bedroom, games room, and I have a small library where I keep my bills and files and things.

There are two spare bedrooms on the upper floor, and another on the main floor, and there are three bathrooms here, too. Aside from that, my house is pretty plain, and I'm cool with that. The studio is where I go to beat the shit out of my drums, and I have a baby grand piano in there, too, since sometimes I like to beat stuff out on the piano, too. I took piano lessons when I was really young, just because I loved the sound. Still do. I used to play for my parents and grandparents all the time when I was a kid. I was pretty good, too. I've got all sorts of instruments hanging around, too, it's not just pianos and drums. Blaze and Cruz usually bring their own shit when they come over to jam, but I have backup stuff here, for them, or if sometimes I feel like playing.

“Take a look around. Make yourself at home.” I offer.

“I hope you pay your maid well.” Liv says, sliding her fingers down the marble countertop.

“She and her family take care of this place when I'm away. They're a Mexican family that barely speak English, but I don't have to speak to them, they can fucking read minds. I mean, look at this place.”

Liv looks at my piano. “Do you play a lot?”

“I do sometimes. I wouldn’t say a lot. I picked that one up just before this place was complete. The architect designed it with that in mind.”

“I love it.”

“I’m glad. You want to see the rest?”

“Sure.”

I put a hand on my head. “Shit. My manners. Would you like something to drink?”

“No, thanks.”

My bag is still in Liv’s car, but I don’t care. There isn’t anything in there that I need. Most of that stuff is just things I wanted to bring home from my wardrobe case to be cleaned and to swapped out. I could wear the same clothes every day, but my manager says that it makes me look like a bum, so I switch my shit out when I come home, just to keep him happy. She places her bag on the floor in the foyer and takes my hand. “Give me the official tour.”

I sneak a chaste kiss in, making a smacking noise. “I’m glad you like the place.” I don’t know why, but I am. Something about her feeling comfortable here is important to me.

“I love it.” She repeats, as I take her upstairs, and show her the family room, the bathroom, the other rooms, and then I take her to my bedroom, but I’m careful not to put any moves on her...yet. My bedroom is the one place, aside from my recording studio, where it’s very obvious that I’m a rocker. I have a giant, framed poster of the drummer from AC/DC, Bon

Scott, hanging above the bed. My decorator chose this one because of the subtle colors in the background. The reds and blues and pinks from the lighting are pulled into accent pillows, bedding, and even the window coverings.

“That’s such a poignant picture.”

“Yeah, he’s my idol.”

My very first set of drums is showcased off to the side, on a little rug that matches the poster. It’s just a tiny set, not a real kit, mind you, but my decorator put lighting around it to highlight it, and the way the lights ping off the metal pieces sets it right off. Another, smaller poster of AC/DC is behind the kit, with, once again, perfectly matched colors. I’ve also got a kickass sound system in my room, just because I love to listen to music, no matter what I’m doing, and it’s set up with inset speakers all around the house. My bedroom is the main hub, where I can put on anything from the radio, to cassette tapes and records.

“God, even your stereo looks pretty.” She chuckles. It’s true. It’s black and white with red accent colors, perfectly matching the other items in my room. I’ve got a walk-in closet, but I have hardly anything in it, since I’m not a fashion-y dude. My ensuite bathroom just has a glass shower, a pedestal sink, and a toilet, but I’ve got surround sound in there, baby. I’ll show her that later. “You color coordinated everything.”

“I tried to.”

“You’d hate my apartment. It’s small and messy. I could fit my whole apartment and all my things into your walk-in

closet.”

“I’m sure it’s fine.” I shrug. “I never bought this place to show off. It’s more of an investment. The glass is timeless, and I don’t have a lot of fixtures, but the ones I do have are easily interchangeable. If I ever wanted to sell this place, I could do it with little effort or upgrades. At least, that’s what my architect suggested.”

“Why would you want to sell it?”

“Well, sometimes musicians don’t have a long career, Liv. You never know. With Roxy’s addiction we didn’t know what would happen. I don’t want to have a shitload of money in a bank somewhere, I wanted to have something that would be worth potentially more money year after year, and I’m not the type of guy that does stocks and bonds and shit. I mean, I have them, I just wanted to have a house that I could live in and use as collateral, you know?”

“Sounds wise to me. All I have is my car. I have some savings, not going to lie. I’ve never spent anything other than basic living expenses and my car, and I’ve been on my own for a long time, too.”

“You ever want to save up and buy a house?”

“For sure.” She nods. “That’s what I’ve been doing.”

“God, and I made you use your savings for a flight ticket.”

She takes a step towards me, eyes dancing. “Yeah, you cheap son of a bitch.” She can’t keep a straight face. A laugh snorts out of her and then it’s contagious and we’re both laughing.

“Come on. Let me show you the studio and I’ll grab my shit out of your car.”

“What’s going to happen with Lukas?”

“Nothing. He’ll keep watch overnight. He knows his way around.”

“Are you sure? Don’t you have to feed him?”

“I will. We’ll order something soon.”

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She’s got this silk nightie that’s cute but also sexy. It’s like a shirt, but it’s as soft as hell, and it has an apron that comes down in front, but the sides are shorter, so it’s teasing me, showing me the sides of her thighs. We’re laying on my bed, listening to music, after having dinner and watching a movie. She’s scared as shit for my safety, and I can’t help but wonder if maybe she needs a drink to settle down. I’m about to offer her one, when she rises from the bed, changes the record, and lays back down again. I can’t not look at her. I’m laying across the bottom of the bed, and she’s got her head on the pillow.

We’re staring into each other’s eyes, as she strokes my hair, seemingly enthralled in just being here with me. I haven’t laid a finger on her, and she hasn’t tried anything, either. It’s like we’re letting the moment stew, savoring the incredible weekend that we’re going to have together, just her and I, for the first time. There is no doubt in my mind. I am absolutely



head over heels in love with this beautiful woman. There isn't anyone else for me. I feel like she's thinking the same thing. "Stay with me." I say, talking over the low ebb of music in the background.

"I am staying with you." she says, tossing a curl over my ear, rounding the corner of my ear with her fingertips.

"No, I mean, live with me. Here."

She lifts her head. "Are you serious?"

"I never say anything unless I'm serious."

"Gosh, I don't know." she says with her mouth, but her eyes say yes. "Isn't it a little soon?"

"Not for me, it's not. I don't want to spend even a minute without you. This place is big enough for thirty of you, but this is the one I want."

"Are you saying you'd like to clone me?" she teases.

I just smile. She has a way of diverting a question by making a joke, which means that she'll think about it, but not to pressure her. I get it. My hand smooths over her belly as I lay on her legs. I watch the peaks of her breasts perk up at my touch. My hand reaches up, palm down, skating up her belly, over her breasts, watching her react. Her eyes close and she draws in a deep breath. My cock starts to harden. I kiss her thighs and keep going up her leg. I'm just wearing my jeans, nothing else. Lips to her skin, I kiss my way up her body, pulling the silk away with each kiss.

Fingers opening the buttons, I free her naked body to my eyes, trailing kisses upward, until I'm at her eyes, hovering

above her. Her ready lips meet mine, sweeping her tongue inside my mouth, making me harder. I rest my weight on her, and she arches her back, touching my chest more. Her hand goes down to my zipper, and she undoes my jeans, immediately stuffing her hand inside, making my dick twitch. I rise for a moment to remove them and grab a condom out of my wallet, as she peels her pajamas all the way off.

Our lips crush together desperately, as our naked bodies intertwine beneath the soft lighting, as our sexes align, and I rub my shaft against her clit. Her pelvis begins to rock in time with mine, and I hear a tiny cry come from her throat. Lips moving to her nipples, I know that cry, and I know exactly what to do about it. Sucking and licking her nipples, while teasing her wet clit with my hard cock, her cries become heavier, until I feel her legs lock, and she comes against my cock.

As she comes down, I grab the condom and slide it on, thrusting into her as the last of the aftershocks are ebbing. I can't get enough of her as I bury myself in her warmth. My pumps are slow and deep, stretching her with every pass, feeling all of her, as her eyes close at the sensation. Rising onto my elbows, I hit that magical spot inside, sending her shockwaves of pleasure. Her hands skate over my nipples, taking me to places I haven't been to in weeks, making me breathe heavily, enjoying the pleasure equally with her.

With her hands, pushing me gently, she tells me to go on to my back. I do so without a struggle, pulling her over me, without losing our intimate bond. As she rides me, I revel in her fucking outrageous beauty. Liv just couldn't be any more

beautiful. Hair shiny and long, full lips, ample, pert breasts, a perfectly fit body, and arms that turn a talented drummer on in a heartbeat. She leans down and sucks my nipples, making me arch my back, making me weak, taking me to the edge quickly. Her tongue and mouth are so expert, it reminds me of her famous blow job recently that sent me to the moon.

Her perfect ass smacks my thighs as we ride the waves together. My hands squeeze her breasts, then her ass, bringing her closer to me, opening her further, making me so fucking hot I have to stop, before it's over. When my mouth finds her nipples, it's game on. Her head rears up as she rides me faster, skin slapping harder, cries growing louder, until I feel her insides quiver, and she takes me with her, sucking me in with her heavenly internal spasms. We both let it all rip, moaning, crying, making noises akin to classic porn, only this shit is real. So. Fucking. Real.

When we finally come down, her head rests on my chest, and we lay there together, listening to the sound of our labored breathing. As she lifts her head, I cup her face with my hands. "Move in with me." I tell her, searching her eyes. "Hell, I'd ask you to marry me, if I didn't think that would send you running."

Her eyes search mine, and then I see her chin quiver. "Oh, Liv, don't cry. I didn't mean to freak you out."

"You're not freaking me out." she gasps, a tear falling down her cheek. "That is not only the biggest compliment a man can offer a woman, but it's something that I've heard in my

daydreams for years, and never thought I'd hear it coming out of your mouth.”

“Well, I said it, and I mean it. I love you and I want to spend every moment with you. Whatever you want. You want to move in with me, you move in with me, you want to get married, we get married. I don't care. As long as I get to see this beautiful face, hear your beautiful voice as often as I can, everything else is secondary.”

“Let's do both.” she says, pulling herself off me. I rise and take care of the condom.

“We can do whatever you want to do.” I say, joining her in bed. We snuggle for a bit, just staring at each other. Never thought I'd ever enjoy that as much as I do. Me and Liv, we don't have to say anything to each other. Just our presence is enough. I get up and turn off the music, and turn off the light, and we lay in bed together, pulling the blankets up. We stay there until morning, when I get a call from the record company, saying that they've done a shift change, and Lukas is off duty until another guy can come over.

I take her to the studio, and as I jam a little while she watches and plays around with some of the equipment. Then we go over to her folks' house, and then to mine, getting some time in there, since our day is almost over as it is. And when we're finally back at my place, the answering machine is beeping, alerting me that there's a message. I play it back and hear Slick's voice, asking me to call him. Liv is sitting on the couch, looking at me expectantly, so I look his number up in my Rolodex by the phone, and call him back.

I have one of those fancy phones with a speaker, so I put him on that, so Liv can hear, too.

“Hey, buddy, I’ve got you on speaker, man, so don’t say anything incriminating.” I tease.

“Oh, hey, is that Liv you got there?”

“Yeah.”

“Hey, Liv. I’m glad you’re there. Saves me a phone call.”

“What’s up?” Both Liv and I ask together.

“Shit, you guys are starting to fucking sound alike.”

“Shut up. What do you want?” I chuckle.

“Hey, I asked Doc to marry me, man. We’re doing it soon, like, this weekend or next weekend, at my place. Doc wants to do it before she starts to pop, you know?”

“Yeah, I get it. That’s cool.” I say. Liv is smiling.

“So, are you guys in?”

“Yeah, of course, we’re in, dude!” I chuckle. “What do you think!”

“Ay, it’s cool. I’m just doing my job. I gotta call everyone that I want to come to this shindig.”

“I get it. Yeah, it’s cool. Congrats, man.”

“Thanks.”

“Congratulations!” Liv gushes. “Do her parents know?”

“Hey, I’m an old-fashioned guy, man, I asked her pop first.” he says righteously.

I chuckle. “Did you do it with your shirt on?”

He laughs. “Of course, man!”

“Okay. Let us know what we need to wear, man.”

“Anything you want. It’s super-cas.”

“Gotcha.”

“Okay, cool. I’ve got like a million other calls to make, so I’m out.”

“Sounds good, man. Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

“Bye, Slick.”

“See ya.”

I hang up the phone and look at her. “I’d pay big bucks to see Slick in a suit.”

She wiggles her brows. “Well, it looks like you might just get your chance.”

## CHAPTER 13

Liv

You know when you do something, and the second that you do it, something clicks, that tells you that this is your calling? Well, that's exactly what happened the second I was handed a walkie-talkie and a uniform. Once everything was on and I was given the task of watching the front row, I was hooked. I've never been so up close to the action before. Normally, when I was working in LA at the concert forum, I was in charge of doors. Woopdeedoo. Any monkey can check bags and run the metal detectors.

This, this is ultra cool. I have an earpiece and a walkie-talkie, and we have a specific lingo that we use, and it's so cool. I feel like this is what I was meant to do. Even more so than being a police officer. My eyes are so focused, I can see all the nuances and tiny movements that people are making, and I can use my sixth sense and feel when something is wrong. Like the other night, when a girl smuggled in a glass mickey of something, and she was about to throw it up on stage, and I grabbed her before she had the chance. Things like that.

Honestly, I'm worried about Slick's wedding, and the vulnerability of the groups and all the guests. That would be prime time for someone to hit us up, but Stix assures me that everything will be fine. He thinks I'm doing overkill on security here, but Meg is being too quiet, and this Scrappy guy gives me the creeps. He's always got his eye on Stix, and he has code names for any guest that comes in to see him for so-

called deliveries. Also, Blaze had a guest that looked a little suspicious, but he turned out to be just bringing him a guitar, so I've been told to cool my jets.

Maybe I am being paranoid. Am I? I spoke to my brother, Ricky, and even he thinks that I'm being paranoid. But there is no denying the feeling that I have in my gut that tells me that something is going down. I'm never wrong. But maybe my senses are just on overdrive with this new job? That could be, too. I am loving it. I get to use all my skills and I'm right in the front lines, which is the part that I loved with the idea of being a cop. This is definitely right up there with that. Stix and I are a little removed from each other, too, but I think it's healthier this way. I'm napping during his sound checks, and I'm on duty when they play, but I'm off when he does meet and greets and things, since I'm not allowed to work more than four hours at a time.

That's how they keep us sharp. There have been a few situations where I worked a little longer, but that was under my insistence. A couple of the guys on my team got hurt when one of the speaker cabinets came down, just about toppling over them, so I took over their post, along with a couple others. I wasn't leaving just to go to sleep. No way. After that, we had to have a talk with the stage crew, for not anchoring the cabinets properly, or at least having some crew behind them in case they fell over.

It's been an incredible adventure so far, and Stix and I are getting along so well. The excitement between us is palpable. Not only for us as a couple, but also for me, as an employee on the tour. It's way better than I could have ever imagined. The



traveling is a little tough, but it's no worse than trying to juggle four jobs. I've got a thicker skin than I've given myself credit for. We're three days away from Slick's wedding, and we just performed tonight, so as fans mill around, making their way to the exit doors, me and my team stand guard still.

It takes an hour to empty the venue, and we remain while teardown is in progress. Then I head to our room, while the guys do meet and greets, even though Stix told me that I'm welcome to join the others, while they wait. I never want anyone to feel like I'm stepping on any toes or overstaying my welcome, so I stay in our room, leaving my walkie-talkie on, just in case. After I relieve myself, I can hear more of my team outside, and I head there, talking casually with the guys that are on the floor. And then I see Stix come out of the elevator, and I smile.

It's so late, and Stix is all sweaty from performing, but he's got a towel around his neck, as he mops himself off. "Hey." he says, kissing me. "How was your night?"

"Great. Yours?"

"Fantastic."

I slide the key card through the reader, and we enter our room. "I was going to get changed and shower, but I got to talking with the guys." I explain.

"No, that's good." he says, hugging me from behind. "Leave it on."

"Yeah?"

“Oh...yeah.” he says, sliding his fingers up my shirt, while kissing my neck. Reaching back, I cup his bulge with my hand, carefully unzipping his fly. Slipping my shirt over my head, his hands are under the cups of my bra in seconds. Stix is not wearing a shirt, so undressing him is quick and easy. We’re naked when he kisses down my stomach, as I rake my hands through his hair, and watch him kneel, lifting one of my legs over his shoulder.

“Why don’t we just go on the bed.” I suggest, seeing what he’s up to.

“Creativity, baby.” he whispers against my thighs, and I don’t argue. Sex with Stix has always been fun, no matter what.

His mouth makes love to me, as he kisses and sucks, all the while we can hear people outside our door, but I’ve learned that that’s half the fun. And I know that he’s going to deliciously torture me with his brand of ecstasy, knowing that I have to be at least somewhat quiet, otherwise everyone will hear. Using his hand against my butt for leverage and pleasure, he brings me to orgasm, making me come until my legs feel like jelly. And then he lifts me over to the bed, slides a condom on, and enters me hungrily, thrusting slow but deep, just the way he knows that I like it.

He makes love to me, looking at me so intensely, he almost brings me to tears. Only Stix can look at me like that. He speaks on so many levels when we’re in bed. I can tell that he loves me more than life itself, based on his gaze and his technique, that is always all for me. I’m careful to add in

some sexual flair for him, and when I tighten my Kegel muscles, his eyes widen as he smirks. “Oh, you’re cruel.” he murmurs, voice laced with need.

I squeeze harder, wanting to see more of that look in his eyes, and he bears down, slowing, letting me feel all of him, filling me to the hilt. It’s game on. My hands go to his chest, and he grunts softly, telling me everything I need to know. He’s feeling it, and it spurs me on. I hook my feet over his rear and my pelvis rocks in time with him. We’re making love like we haven’t made love in months, as we drink each other in. Sex right after he performs on stage is mind blowing. Starved for each other, high on adrenaline, pumped from preparation, but at the same time, we’re mentally satiated from meeting our goals. Stix and I are on the same page on so many levels it’s crazy.

He rests his forehead on mine as I feel him get impossibly hard, telling me that he’s as ready as I am for the big finish, and I’m involuntarily tightening as he continues filling me, bringing me to the edge. When suddenly his mouth covers mine, as he delivers the strongest, most intense, deep kisses, as we both come together. His kisses buffer my cries as I feel my orgasm, only strengthened by his, as his cock turns to steel and throbs, as he empties inside me. We’re a panting, writhing, spent mess when he finally holds me tight, resting his head on the pillow.

Now we’re both ready for bed, after a long day and night, and after incredible sex. He pulls out of me gently and discards the condom, as I peel back the sheets, and we spoon

closely, falling asleep in moments. “I love you.” he whispers in my ear.

“I love you.” I whisper back.

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*The guests are sitting quietly, and I can almost picture them with their hands clasped in their laps, like in junior kindergarten. The minister is up at the altar, while Slick stands in front of his bride, hands interlaced. They recite their tender vows to each other, rings are placed on left ring fingers, and they sign the register, all the while guests still sit as still as statues. A chill runs up my spine as I look around, at the all-too-quiet atmosphere. Even the trees surrounding us are quiet. It's eerie.*

*I sit, feeling like someone is about to startle me from behind, as the hair on my arms stand on end. Stix keeps looking at me, smiling, as if reassuring me that everything is going to be okay. His hand is in mine and I'm grasping it harder than normal, not letting him go. Camera flashes go off suddenly, light lightning, making me jump. Slick rises to go take a picture, and I try to stop him, but it's like my hand is covered in butter and it slips through.*

*Begging him to stay with me, I cry out, when I see it. It's like slow motion as the bullet travels through the air, hitting him straight in the chest. I cry out loud, but my cries are on deaf ears....*

“Liv! Liv!” Stix calls, as I sit up in bed, stock still, soaking wet with sweat and tears. I’m whimpering in my half-asleep state, as the man I love tries to rouse me in a panic. I’m shaking like a leaf, crying, as I realize that Stix is right next to me, fit and well. “You had a nightmare.” he says, holding me tight to him.

“Stix, you’ve got to tell Slick to cancel the wedding.” I blubber frantically. “Something terrible is going to happen. I know it and I’m never wrong.”

He strokes my hair. “Liv, you know I can’t do that. Everything is all set. We’ll be fine. I promise.”

I lift my head, face soaked with tears, lips swollen from crying. “Please.” I beg, sobbing. “Please, Stix. I love you too much. I can’t bear to have anything happen to you.”

“Liv, nothing is going to happen, I promise.”

“You don’t understand. When I have these feelings, something always happens, that’s why I’m such a good guard. I follow my gut instincts all the time. And I’ve never had this bad of a nightmare in my life, so I know that this is going to happen.”

“Liv, whatever you’ve gotta do to make yourself comfortable, do it. You hold the reigns for the entire security plan for this wedding, okay? I mean it. You want guards lining the aisles, you get them. Spare no expense. Just don’t let anyone know about it, okay? I don’t want Slick’s guests freaked out.”

My jaw muscles are working as I think about what I could do to protect everyone, yet keep it under wraps. I look at him and the thought of anything going wrong brings the tears back. “You promise? No questions asked?”

“You got it. You know that I say what I mean, and I mean what I say.”

“Okay.” I manage a small smile. “Thank you.”

He kisses my forehead. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

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“Are you nuts?” Ricky shrieks. “A helicopter.” his voice is flat. “You want a helicopter hovering overhead while a wedding ceremony is underway? Did you snort some coke or something?”

I ignore the jibe. “Ricky, I mean flying far enough away that they can’t be heard, but in close enough range that they can come if needed. The place is huge. Slick’s estate is too big to cover without a helicopter. What if the perp runs? We’ll never find him without a chopper.”

“You’re nuts. Who’s paying for this...oh, never mind, they can probably afford a fleet of goddamn choppers if he’s got a house as big as the continental U.S.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Slick doesn’t know about this, and Stix is paying for it.”

“Wow, you really have him underfoot.”

“Ricky...” I warn. “I never ask you for anything.”

Another shriek. “Bullshit! You’re always asking me for favors! What about the mug shots, what, a couple of weeks ago?”

“Okay, fine, but I do stuff for you, too. And you know that I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important.” I say with enough conviction that it renders him silent.

“I’ll see if the chopper is free. But if there’s, like, a real catastrophe, they’re redirecting, and that’s final.”

“Absolutely. I understand.”

“And if they refuse, there’s nothing I can do.”

“Ricky, you know that everyone has a price.”

“Yeah, but if I ask a pilot and men in uniform to watch over a fucking celebrity wedding, they’re going to laugh in my face.”

“No, they won’t. They do stuff like that all the time. We are in LA, Ricky.”

“I meant what I said, Liv. I’m not putting my job or my neck on the line for this. So, you had a bad dream. You can’t prove anything. The chick doesn’t even have a record.”

“Ricky, don’t do this. How many times have you told me that serial killers and rapists, and a whole whack load of criminals, don’t get caught sometimes until they’ve committed multiple crimes?”

He sighs. “Fine. I’ll see what I can do. But you owe me, big time.”

“I will. I’ll owe you huge. Whatever you want.”

“Fine. I’ve gotta go.” he sneers.

“Thanks.”

“Yeah.”

\*\*\*

Slick comes down the stairs, dressed to kill, in a suit, bow tie, top hat and tail, all white. Stix’s jaw drops. “Dude...you clean up nice.” Here he is, in a pair of jeans and nothing else. His usual attire, which I am totally fine with, by the way. It’s amazing how good my man looks in a pair of Levis. Me, I’m in a simple dress, and my hair is down, so nobody can tell that I have an earpiece.

“Well, thanks.” Slick says.

The guys from the bands are here, in Slick’s house, waiting. Stix looks out the window at the guests milling about, as am I. He looks at Blaze. “Hey, man, is that...that Led guy?”

“The dude that gave me the guitars, yeah.” Blaze nods, but I notice that he’s looking pale and agitated.

“How come he’s here?” Stix asks.

“Well, I guess Slick’s whole plan to keep things quiet fell through, since everyone and his mother’s uncle knows about



this gig. I'm surprised there isn't a mob out there. Anyway, Led showed up and asked if he could come along, and what was I supposed to say, man? The guy's giving me free guitars left and right." I watch the man milling about, and then he talks to Meg for a moment, making my skin crawl.

Slick pats him on the back. "It's cool, man. It's my fault. I invited everyone, when I said that it would be a small wedding. I'm not surprised it ended up like this. Besides, Doc's excited as hell, so it's all good."

There are some fans gathering at the gates, but nothing we can't handle. I've got some security vans keeping watch, and so far, they're just waiting around to see all the celebrities showing up, but nobody's looting or trying to hop the fences or anything. That's what I keep telling myself. But inside, I'm trembling with fear. Ricky's told me that the helicopter is in the air, and they've got a small team of officers at the ready, should any trouble arise. I also keep using the word 'if', even though in my mind, the word is 'when'.

Slick comes downstairs, with Spex, Wrecking Ball, Cruz, and a bunch of other band members, carrying white suits, matching his. "What's this?" I ask, trying to keep smiling, even though I'm a wreck.

"It's a surprise for Doc. She thinks this wedding is cas, but when she sees me all decked out, and then all the guys decked out, too, she's gonna lose it. And the piece de resistance..." he trails off, whistling, like he's calling a dog. "Hey, Rox!"

Roxy walks out, wearing a white dress, with similar styling to the tuxedos. The dress is made of the same material as the

tuxes, and it's not too fancy, to upstage the bride. I glance at Blaze and I can see that there's something going on with him. He really looks rattled, so, I take him off to the side, while everyone is fawning over their attire. "Blaze? What's going on? You look like you've seen a ghost."

He shakes his head, closing his eyes. "Someone's trying to fuck me over."

"What do you mean? What happened?"

He looks over his shoulder to make sure that nobody can overhear. "I went to go buy a ring for Liz. The bank said I had no money in the account that I would bet my life on it that there is money in."

"Did they give you any indication of when the money was withdrawn?"

"They said that the withdrawal was made yesterday. It was a lump sum. And I don't know how they did it, but the bank is conducting a trace to find out the details."

Someone speaks in my ear, saying that the bride is ready outside. That's my cue to go do a final check to make sure that nothing looks amiss. Especially as everyone takes their seats. "Blaz, let me know what happens. I may be able to help. But I've got to go check something right now, okay?"

He nods. "Yeah. Sure. I've got to go outside and find Liz, anyway."

I give him a quick hug and let Stix know that I will meet him outside in a few minutes. He gives me a quick kiss on the lips, and I find myself wincing inwardly leaving him, but I

have to in order to make sure everyone is safe during the ceremony.

...and the next thirty minutes I'll never forget for as long as I live.

## CHAPTER 14

### Stix

“Yo, Stix!” Cruz shouts over the din of men finishing getting dressed.

“Yeah!” I shout back, pulling my trousers up.

“I got a package for you. It’s from Liv.”

He hands a big box to me. It’s one of those generic boxes that you can buy in a department store to wrap a gift in. It’s not wrapped or anything, and the box is a bit tattered, like it’s seen many gifts in the past. The note on the the box says. “Wear this. No questions. Love, Liv.”

I open it and I’m confused for a moment, not knowing what the hell it is.

...and then I figure it out.

\*\*\*

### Liv

I swallow, watching Slick walk to the altar, waiting for the other shoe to drop. The helicopter, to the trained ear, can be heard from a distance. The team is peppered throughout, dressed inconspicuously in suitable yet somewhat casual wedding attire. All the men on the band join Slick, off to the side, I’m guessing just so Railynn can see them all dressed up as a surprise for her. They look fantastic, especially Roxy, who cleans up well. She’s always found in dark clothing, jeans or leather pants, but never a white dress. And I think it

starts to make Jett think about giving her another reason to wear a white dress, based on his expression.

Stix is up there with the rest of them, as Railynn walks down the aisle, with her dad, smiling proudly, thank God. I figured he'd be the only one with a sour puss on his face. Ray's eyes light up when she sees her wedding party all in fancy white attire, and her eyes start to get misty. If I weren't in this predicament, I'd be misty-eyed, too, but I have to stay focused. My ears feel like a dog's, pointed in the direction of the chopper, which I can hear, ever so subtly, overhead, circling far enough away not to be disruptive.

Slick's estate is large, to say the least. It takes a team of riding lawn mowers to cut the grass, I'm told, and another team to clip the landscaping. I'm not sure of the exact size of the parcel of land, but I've seen smaller local zoos, to give you an idea. Trees line this area, in a conversational cluster, and the area where the altar is, there is a slight upward slope. The peak of his rooftop can be seen in the distance, where a billow of light smoke escapes from his fireplace, that must have been lit last night, and is finally snuffing out.

There is a white altar, peppered with silk flowers, in varying, soft pastel shades, the minister is dressed in a blue robe with a white collar, and a white stole, hanging in equal lengths down either side of his body. The guest chairs have a white silk covering, caught at the back with a soft pink bow that hangs down, not quite to the grass. Between the rows of seating is a silk runner that spans from where the minister stands to the start of the seating area. The wind is calm, making the large trees sway slightly.

It's like my eyes are taking a mental roll call of all the guests, but especially of the two that look the most suspicious. Meg and Scrappy. They're sitting together, to my right, but further back. I can feel her eyes burning into the back of my head. When I feel the hairs on my arms stand up, I rise nonchalantly, and walk to a spot opposite the altar, where I have a clear view of all the guests. As my heart pumps, I'm watching the movement, to see if anyone gets up out of their seat. So far, they're all still, watching the ceremony.

Ray's sister-in-law, Hilary, walks ahead of Railynn, and meets her at the altar, where she takes Slick's hand, and he kisses it. The band members then stand for a quick photo, and then they disperse, while the vows take place. Stix's gaze is on me, from the front, but something is catching my eye off to the side. The wind has picked up slightly, and some of the trees are moving more, confusing me. As the minister runs through their brief vows, I feel like I'm a fly, with fifty different sets of eyes, watching. My earpiece is silent, but the pounding in my heart tells my adrenaline to remain on standby, like the helicopter hovering above, out of earshot.

Something inside my brain clicks, and I realize that one guest is missing...

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## Blaze

I'm so pissed about my money, but I'll try to let it go, at least for a couple of hours, so I can enjoy Slick's wedding, with Liz by my side. Well, technically, she's sitting with the

rest of the guests, while me and all of the band members are up at the altar. Slick promised us a short ceremony, so it's almost over, but as the minister asks them for the rings, I see Liv, Stix's girl, who is on security, say something into the walkie-talkie, and that's when it happens. I'm not sure if it's the chopper that suddenly appears overhead, or if it's the wind, but a nearby tree is rustling, and then I see Stix collapse.

"Stix! What the fuck!" Cruz shouts, as the helicopter flies above us, creating such an updraft that all the girls' big hair is behaving like we've just been overtaken by a tsunami.

"Everyone get down!" Liv shouts pointedly, like a drill sergeant. "On the ground!"

Stix is unconscious on the ground, I hear a few screams, as someone inside the helicopter says that they've got us surrounded. Guests are running for cover, shouting, screaming, but keeping their heads down, doing only half of what Liv has instructed. Ray runs over to Stix, as we surround him, hunkering down.

"He's heading north." I hear Liv says into the walkie-talkie. "He was in the tree. Stix is down."

"Freeze." the loudspeaker from the chopper says. "We've got you surrounded."

Whoever this person is, he's still on the move, as the chopper follows him.

"You! Freeze!" Liv says to Meg and Scrappy, pointing at them. They both look at each other, and bolt in opposite directions. But they don't get far, as Liz, my girl, grabs Meg.

“Holy fuck!” Slick says. “Was he hit?” as he gets down on his knees, while Ray kneels down next to his body. I look at Liv, and think, does she see what’s happening? Did she not see Stix go down? If he dies, she’ll be fucking devastated, so will we.

...anything that could go wrong today, has, and is it over?

\*\*\*

Liv

The shooter was in the goddamn tree. I saw him rustling in there and called it in immediately. “I’ve got him.” I hear a familiar voice say in my ear, moments later. Liz grabs Meg before she can get away, and Ray’s brother, who sees Scrappy as he starts to turn, grabs him before he can escape. Suddenly, I see my brother Ricky appear, with the perpetrator cuffed from behind, walking towards us.

“Ricky?” I say.

He gives me a weak smile. “It was my day off, anyway.”

I smile back, and then look at our perp. Blaze walks towards us. “Led? It was you? You son of a bitch!” he takes a step towards him and delivers a healthy punch to his mouth. I’ll note that Ricky doesn’t stop him.

“Yo, we need an ambulance!” Slick shouts, hovering over Stix.

My heart skips a beat as all realization comes to me. “Oh my God!” I shriek, running to my love.



Ray is looking him over as I run to his side. “Is he hit?” I cry out.

“I don’t know where.” Ray says, checking his pulse.

His face and head are clear, I confirm, as I do a quick check, and then Stix’s eyes flutter open. “Baby? Are you okay?” I ask him, my voice desperate, as I scramble to pull his jacket open, and then undo his buttons, all the while praying to God that he listened to me, that he used his special, surprise gift.

Tears stream down my face as I think about him refusing it. Or thinking it’s unnecessary. Or opening the gift in front of everyone, being made fun of, and saying ‘fuck it’, like he does sometimes. “Oh, God, help me.” I blubber, and then I find it.

“Oh, Stix.” I gasp. “Did you get hit somewhere else?”

He draws in a breath. “No. I’m fine. It just...knocked the wind out of me.”

In my peripheral vision, I can see my brother and his team apprehending Meg, Scrappy and Led, and Ricky’s got the firearm in question in his hand. It looks like something out of a goddamn war movie.

“I’m glad I listened to my girl.” Stix says, opening his shirt, revealing the bullet-proof vest I borrowed from Ricky’s arsenal of protective equipment.

And that’s when I break down, resting my head on his chest, thanking God that he’s okay. “I’m fine, Liv. Just bruised. I don’t know what the fuck the prick hit me with, did you even hear a shot?”

“I think it had a silencer on it or something.” Blaze says. “I heard a tiny zip, but I thought it was the wind. Seems my buddy is rather resourceful, not just with guitars, but also with semiautomatic weapons.”

Meg struggles as Ricky cuffs her. “It was him, the son of a bitch!” she spits. “He’s got all your goddamn money!” she shouts, gesturing with her chin to Led, the man that Blaze trusted. The man that was bringing him guitars, showing up uninvited to events, including this one. “He was going to give us each a cut of it! And he was going to kill you!”

Ricky draws in a deep breath. “Just...keep talking, lady. You’re making my job so much easier.” he says with a chuckle.

Stix is about to get up, but Ray stops him. “You better just stay there until the ambulance arrives. Make sure the bullet didn’t break a rib or something.”

“I’m fine.” he waves, sitting up stubbornly. “I didn’t know a bullet could do that.”

“If it’s powerful enough, sure.” Ricky says.

The minister is behind the boys, and he takes a step towards Stix. “Well, I’m glad I won’t be reading you your last rights, at any rate.” he says with a smile.

“Thanks, man.” Stix says.

The minister looks at Slick and Ray. “Do you two want to finish the ceremony or shall we reschedule?”

Slick looks around. Most of the guests are milled around the police officers, which seem to have multiplied by the

dozens. There are cops as far as the eye can see, getting statements. The lot of us, the ones that have toured together thus far, are gathered. “Well, as long as Doc’s cool with it, I’ve got all I need to get married right here.”

Ray is unscathed. Even her hair hasn’t missed a beat, despite the helicopter updraft. “I’d like to get married.” she says with a smile.

The minister rises. “Okay!” he shouts. “This ceremony will continue as planned! Everyone, take your seats! Officers will take statements shortly! I’ve got a golf game in an hour, so let’s hop to!”

Slick snorts a laugh, taking his bride’s hand, giving her a chaste kiss.

“Save it for the altar.” The minister says, eager to get this finished.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” I ask Stix, as he buttons his shirt back up, leaving the vest on.

“I’m fine. This thing saved my life. It’s going to go in my bedroom, along with my first drum kit. This thing’s a keeper.”

“Just be careful. The bullet is still in it somewhere.”

“You okay, man?” Roxy asks, worry all over her face.

“I’m good. I’ll live.” he says with a smile, patting her back.

Roxy looks at me. “You’re a fucking genius, making him wear that. Bless you, girl.”

“It’s my brother’s. He loaned it to me.” I say modestly.

“Either way, you saved his fucking life.” Roxy grabs me and holds me close. “I owe you.”

“Give her a raise.” Stix jokes.

“Ahem...we’re ready.” The minister says.

“Can we just sit in the front row, man?” Blaze asks.

“Sit wherever you want. Let’s get us married.” Slick says.

Stix takes my hand, and we sit in the front, for the whole two more minutes it takes to unite Slick and Railynn. They sign the register, and the photographer snaps some pictures, all the while, the police are resuming taking witness statements. After the dust settles, it turns into a decent party, with all the police officers, even the helicopter pilot joins us, and we all have a great time. It’s two o’clock in the morning when the last guest leaves, and it’s just all the band members, some security people, and Ricky, my brother.

We’re sitting in Slick’s living room, Ray has changed out of her wedding dress, and the place is a mess, but Slick has told us that the cleaning crew are coming in the morning, and the caterers already took their stuff away, so it’s just garbage and party crap left. Of course, like all musicians, at least, the ones that I know, there are always instruments in each room. Well, Slick’s living room is no exception.

The boys start jamming, and Roxy and Slick start singing along, while I snap my fingers and tap my toes to the tunes. Ricky leaves, stating that Stix can keep the vest all he wants, because he has many of them. We continue singing together, and Blaze invites me over to show me a few licks on his

guitar. He shows me how to position my fingers on the strings, when I notice something. “Blaze? What’s this?” I ask.

Now, I know nothing about guitars, and won’t pretend to, either. Stix is drumming away on the small kit that Slick has, and he stops, curious. Blaze stops playing and looks at his guitar. “Oh, fuck.” he says.

“What’s up, man?” Stix asks.

“Oh, shit.” Blaze says, looking his guitar over, raking a hand through his hair.

“Dude, what’s wrong?” Slick asks.

Jett rises, taking steps towards him.

Blaze’s jaw muscles are working as he looks up and says poignantly. “It’s not over yet, guys. I think we’re in a lot of shit.”

## ERUPTION



**An explosive guitarist. A fiery temper. A flame that threatens to die with each meeting...and one slip of the tongue that changes everything.**

I get a call late one night about some band that got ripped off. When I get there in uniform, it's like showing up to class without pants on. My sneers set them back a notch. I'm no groupie. But this one guitarist in glasses, Spex, isn't afraid of me, so I bite back harder. Later that night, another call arrives, this time it hits home hard. What Spex shows me makes me look twice at him. And it's a long, hard look. More than that, it's a look that makes everything else completely different forever. And I don't think I'm ready for that.

\*\*\*

We're being treated like the dirtbags here, but I get the feeling that this Claudia chick uses a broad stroke with people. Doesn't matter if you're the guitarist in one of the most popular bands ever. She has a silver tongue but I've got ironclad chops. When I follow her to the airport, and back home, having received a mutual call, I realize that her act is just that. My glasses come off and my perspective changes,

when I see something in Claudia that I never want to see in myself. My gift to her makes her look twice at me.

**...but when the flatline sounds in the Emergency Room, all bets are off.**

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Cliffhanger ending

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Thanks so much for reading *Runaround*. A little background on this series. Since the death of Eddie Van Halen on October 6, 2020, I have suddenly found myself fully immersed in the life and loves of this artist. After growing up with the band's music (my first .45 album was 'Jump' when I was just nine years old) and seeing them perform live at the Air Canada Centre in 2007, this loss has truly hit home for me.

Like my own father, who passed away in 1992, Eddie suffered from addictions, and so his death was relatable to me, even though ultimately Eddie died from cancer, he battled addictions all his life from the tender age of just 12 years old. Being a writer, I felt truly compelled to illustrate the heartache, triumphs, lessons learned and the loves of artists, so this series was born. I wrote this book after reading several books about Eddie Van Halen and the band after learning about his death.

His life was truly remarkable, as was his irreplaceable talent, and so a part of me felt like I needed to explore that. If you're a fan of Van Halen, I truly apologize if I've bastardized anything to do with Eddie, but I did try to learn as much as I could about the background and goings-on of rock bands before giving this genre a whirl. May Eddie rest in peace.

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*~Sandra*