



Fake Silver Fox

BILLIONAIRE

GRUMPY SINGLE DAD ROMANCE

AMBER GREEN

Fake Silver Fox Billionaire

Grumpy Single Dad Romance

Amber Green

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Silver Fox Billionaire

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For those who relentlessly pursue their dreams, uphold their values, and keep their hearts open to real love - keep shining, striving, and believing.

Prologue

Zoe

It's no wonder people don't automatically assume that Freddie and I are siblings. I mean, I just turned twenty-one years old, last month, and Freddie is thirty-eight today. I don't know why there's such an age gap between us, our parents have never explained it, and to be honest, I don't think I want to know. It works out well for us, so it's fine.

That's why I'm here tonight, among his much older friends, drinking and having fun with them all. Because we've always been friends as well as siblings.

Although admittedly, I'd feel much more comfortable with my best friend, Megan, here. But her sister went into labor, so she has to be at the hospital.

"I bet this isn't your first drink, is it?" Freddie's painfully gorgeous closest mate, Remy, asks me, flashing his sparkling green eyes playfully at me. "Tonight... or any other night."

I think he's a little older than Freddie, maybe a year, which of course makes him totally out of bounds. Which would be very easy to remember if he wasn't tall, dark, and very handsome with a rough and ready look which really tingles all

the way through me. The more tattoos he gets, the more fired up he makes me. Although I *always* keep that to myself.

“Well, it was my twenty-first birthday last month,” I giggle, play-acting that I’m all sweet and innocent, as if I didn’t attend a bunch of high school parties. “So, I might have had one or two.”

Honestly, as Remy looks at me, I feel a shudder of electricity tearing down my spine. I’ve always noticed him, but he hasn’t ever really seen me before. Why would he? I’m Freddie’s much younger sister who just isn’t on the same level as him.

Well, until now. Now it seems like he’s really seeing me. I don’t know if he likes what he sees, but he’s certainly making my hormones fly all over the place. I left for drama college, thinking that I would find a bunch of guys there to have a good time with, and to grow up in many different ways, but that just never happened. I ended up throwing myself into my studies instead because the guys were all like kids. Not for me *at all*. They bore me, irritate me, turn me off completely.

It seems like I’m only ever going to be attracted to older men, doesn’t it?

“Well, you might have to up your drinking if the rumors are true,” Remy chuckles. “Freddie told me you’re headed for London at the end of the week, for an acclaimed acting academy.”

Pride swells through me. I do love what I’ve got arranged for myself after college. A lot of people in my classes were

simply headed to Hollywood after college with their fingers crossed. But not me. I've done the smart thing, and I'm going to the other end of the world.

"That's right." I lift up my glass to clink it against his. "The English are famous for their ability to drink others under the table, aren't they? I better drink up."

Although the one fly in the ointment of my move is that I'm not doing it alone. As soon as I mentioned London, my parents' eyes lit up and they told me they've always wanted to live and work in the UK. They're coming with me... it'll give me somewhere to live at first which is great, especially since I'll be studying, but it doesn't qualify the move as me spreading my wings.

Still, I don't need to get into that with Remy. He probably knows anyway, but I'd rather him look at me like I'm the cool girl, breaking away from my life here.

"So, this is basically your last night in New York City," Remy declares. "We better make it the best night of your life, right? Give you only good memories to leave with."

"Good plan... but look at Freddie. He's definitely had a few too many. I'm pretty sure my night will end carrying him to bed, and making sure he doesn't vomit all over himself."

I almost jump with shock as Remy rests his hand on my shoulder. He does it so naturally, as if it comes as easy to him as breathing. But it stuns me to the very core. It just feels so *shocking*.

“Don’t worry,” Remy says quietly in my ear. “I will help you with that.”

Oh wow. So that means I’ll be spending most of the night with this sex god. Holy hell, how am I going to control myself? Especially since I’m leaving the country, so there won’t be any strings attached. It’s too tempting, because I don’t think Freddie will ever find out...

“Thanks.” I shoot him a grateful smile. “That means a lot.”

I drink up because I have to, because I really need to take the edge off now. Sitting this close to Remy and having his breath tickling my throat and shoulder is overwhelming for me. I can’t handle it. I need to dull everything before I kiss him here, really causing issues...

“Well, tonight definitely got wild,” Remy laughs as he carries Freddie up to bed. I’m glad he’s here, because Freddie is basically asleep already. He’s dead weight and I wouldn’t be able to carry him alone. “It was fun though, wasn’t it?”

That twinkle in his eyes give me another reason to be grateful that Remy’s here. The chemistry has been undeniably sizzling between us all night long, I’m surprised that no one else picked up on it, but somehow, it’s stronger here now that we’re alone in my house.

I thought drinking cocktails would dampen the sensations burning through my body, but I think it might have intensified them. I’m pretty sure I’m out of control already and he hasn’t even touched me. Yet. I’m pretty sure neither of us will be able to hold it together.

By the time Remy places Freddie on his old childhood bed, because his apartment is way across the city and just a pain in the ass to get to, my brother is fast asleep, snoring and everything. That amps up the intense tension between us, making it almost unbearable to look at Remy.

We back out in silence, until we're standing outside of my room. As Remy's eyes finally meet mine, I know what I want to happen. I know how I want to lose my virginity, and it's right here, right now with this man that I have had a crush on forever.

Without saying a word, I take his hand and lead him into my room. Desire floods Remy's face as he follows me, and as soon as the door closes behind him, he claims my mouth with his own. The taste of his lips is even better than I imagined it would be. The sensation of his tongue massaging my own really does make me weak at the knees.

I let Remy take complete control of me as he leads me back towards the bed. I'm more than happy to put my life in his hands because he knows what he's doing way more than me. By the time my legs hit the bed, I'm happy to tumble back on to the sheets. Especially when I find him peering down at me as if I've unleashed a hunger within him. If this man wants to devour me, then I am more than willing for him to consume me whole.

He grabs my dress, yanking it up over my head rapidly, because he can't wait to see my naked body underneath. He cups my naked breasts in his hands, tweaking my nipples until

my back arches with desire. Heat pools between my thighs as I throb intensely for him.

“Fuck me, Remy,” I whisper needily, passionately. “I need you. I need all of you.”

He doesn't need to be told twice. My panties are gone quicker than my dress, and he expertly whips his own clothing off as well. By the time his fingers edge my thighs apart so he can explore my wetness for himself, I can't drag my eyes off his gorgeous, thick muscular body.

Fucking hell, I've fantasized how much of his body is covered in tattoos, and now I know. It's almost all of him, which leaves my mouth dry with need. I try and feel as much as him as I can while he spears me with those delicious velvety fingers of his. He whips the air from my lungs, leaving me dizzy and breathless as he explores parts of me that no one else ever has before.

I don't know if I should tell Remy that, but I quickly lose the ability to think rationally. I can't tell him anything because I can't speak. I'm a slave to the sensations careering through me.

“So wet,” he groans as I continue to beg him to give me all of him. “So tight.”

I roll my hips against him, letting him know with my body that I need more. Thank God Remy is an expert. He gets my message and sheaths himself with a condom before I can even catch my breath. The next time he crashes his lips to mine, he thrusts deep within me as well.

It's a shocking sensation, making me squeal maybe a little too loudly for my liking, but I'm completely out of control. I don't think Freddie will wake up to catch us anyway.

I certainly hope not because I can't stop myself now. Not a chance. This feels like it's been building forever, at the very least all night long.

I cling to Remy, eventually wrapping my legs around him, to drive him in deeper because it feels good. I didn't know it would be quite like this, having sex with anyone, never mind Remy, but it's intoxicating. I feel like I'm on the verge of unleashing a deep-seated addiction to this man. One that I might not be able to let go of however hard I try.

"Oh God," I call out as I toss my head back in desire. "Fucking hell, Remy."

There's a pressure of pleasure building which is completely different to how I can make myself feel when I'm alone. Better, I think, because every time Remy thrusts deep within me, he hits all the right spots, intensifying all the sensations within me. Every single time he buries himself deep within my cavern, I feel closer to this man, I sense a bond that has been building all night long, that only me and Remy understand. It's deep and intense, swallowing all of me.

Remy's groans of pleasure cause me to cry out louder as well. Feeling the tension of pleasure filling him causes every cell in my body to react to him, to need more from him. Knowing that *I'm* the one making this man feel good is just so intoxicating. I can't get enough.

My toes curl, my whole body stiffens. I cling to Remy, desperately trying to feel every inch of him as his deep and powerful thrusts send me to dizzying heights. By the time I erupt, like a volcano spilling lava of pleasure everywhere, I cry out Remy's name, calling it over and over again like a prayer. The burning hot bliss fizzes and burns through me, shattering my whole body in an orgasm unlike anything I had ever felt in my entire life.

I tumble headfirst into the endless abyss of pleasure, never wanting this to end because it's glorious. It's even more perfect than I thought it would be, and I would love nothing more than to remain in this moment with him. This really is *everything*. The perfect way to say goodbye to my life in New York City as I open the next chapter of my life.

CHAPTER 1

Zoe

Six Years Later...

Stepping off the plane six years after I was last in this airport feels incredibly different. The last time I was here, I was only twenty-one years old and about to start a brand-new life in England. I couldn't wait to get to London, to work hard at the acclaimed acting academy in the big city, and to see where that would take me. I couldn't wait to explore the other side of the world.

Now, at twenty-seven years of age, and back in New York City, I feel like a whole different person. A grown-ass woman who now knows exactly what she wants. I'm proud to be back as who I am today. I have my head up high and have a surge of confidence bursting free.

I don't know if I'd be here without London though, because of the moderate success I had there allowing me to find myself. I know what I want now, and what I'm good at. I won't be breaking into the American acting scene naïve and nervous. I'll be doing so with a good head on my shoulders.

Which is why I'm not going to LA, unless I absolutely have to. The acting roles in New York are grittier and more exciting to me. I love a challenge, and that's what I'll seek out.

I'm way more alone this time around, with my parents still happy in the English countryside, but I'm not going to be totally by myself. Luckily, Megan is looking for a roommate, and she's also doing some acting in New York and Hollywood too. So, what could be better than that?

It might have been a long time since I saw Megan, we kinda lost touch when I went to England, but I'm just grateful that she really knows me. Another thing that I've discovered about myself is that I'm quite guarded when I first meet people. It takes a while for the sunshine of my personality to shine free. I won't have that awkward moment with Megan because we have a past, and hopefully a cool future friendship ahead of us as well.

I don't have a lot of luggage with me, because I've lived light in London, so I can grab a cab quickly. As it whips through the city, taking me to my new home, I watch the familiar—but also somehow new—sights as they pass me by. The city brings a smile to my face which I hope will stay with me for a long time. I struggled with my decision to come back to America, but after realizing that London didn't have any more to offer my career, I started to feel excitement about it. I've missed the city, and actually I've missed my brother too. I only got to see him a couple of times when he could afford to take the time off work to fly to London, so I can't wait to see

him more regularly. Maybe we can even hang out like we used to and have a laugh...

Ooh, nice!

I'm impressed by the building Megan lives in. It isn't the sort of fancy Manhattan high rise that's shown in the movies, but I didn't expect that. It's basic, nearer to Williamsburg, but I love this. This apartment block will be where my new life begins.

"Zoe, you're here!" Megan squeals as she races out of the building with her arms outstretched. "I can't believe you're finally here. I've missed you so much... where's all your stuff? Is that *it*? Oh, my goodness, we're going to have to take you shopping."

She doesn't stop talking all the way up the stairs, making me laugh the whole time. Her fun-loving attitude reminds me what drew me to her in the first place. I relied on her friendship in high school, and loved keeping in touch with her even though we went to different colleges.

I'm going to have a great time here; I just know it. I feel great about my decision.

"So, here we are." Megan spins around with her arms wide, showing off the apartment like she works in real estate. "Come and see your room. I've got it all nice for you. You even have a massive wardrobe which we'll have to fill up now since you came with basically a backpack and hand luggage. I honestly don't know how you came so far with nothing. It's madness."

It's actually awesome. Not the biggest space, but I don't take up much room. "I love it, Megan." This room is absolutely perfect for me. It's so cutesy and cool. I love the desk and everything."

"Oh yay." She claps her hands together excitedly. "I knew you would. We're going to be superstars in this apartment, you know that, right?"

"I hope so." I drop my bags on the bed and turn to face Megan. "Actually, I've already been offered a well-paying job here in the city, but I don't know if I'm going to take it."

Megan's eyes almost pop out of her head in shock. "*What?* What do you mean? That's awesome, and seriously impressive. No one ever gets jobs here without meeting with the casting directors first. You must be one hell of an impressive actress."

I smile thinly. "Yeah, I'm happy about it, but I really don't know if it's something I'm going to do. It doesn't seem like it's a job for me, you know."

"Pfft, we can't be fussy this early on in our career, you know," Megan chuckles. "What could be so bad that you don't want to do this job? I don't understand."

I hang my head low as shame washes over me. "It's an acting role which requires nudity, and I don't think that's something I'm comfortable with. I've never had to do it before, nothing I acted in while in England even required it, so I don't know what to do now."

It's something else that I've been battling with on the plane ride over. A fight between my head and heart. Emotionally, this isn't something that I would ever want for myself, it's something I promised myself I wouldn't do from a very young age. But my head is telling me that I'll never make it if I turn down roles because of nudity. I'll become known as problematic, then no one will want to work with me. It really is tough. I hope Megan has some decent advice for me.

"Nudity? Come on," Megan groans. "That's nothing. Part and parcel of being an actress. I don't think there's anyone in Hollywood who's made it, who hasn't been naked in one film or another. I don't think you want to hold yourself back like that."

I offer her a one-shouldered shrug because I do have my own personal boundaries and morals. I wouldn't ever put them on anyone else, but they're the way I want to work, if I can. I mean, I don't want to cut myself off completely. I don't want to make myself seem like I'm more trouble than I'm worth, but I do need to decide sooner rather than later.

"Should we go out tonight?" I pipe up, causing Megan to grin. "It's been a long ass time since I was in New York. The last time I was here, I was barely old enough to go to the bars, so I didn't explore the place *nearly* enough. I have to make up for the lost time."

"Oh, hell yeah!" Megan's fist pumps with excitement. "I love that idea."

“Plus, I think Freddie might be out tonight, so I want to see him if you don’t mind?”

They always got on well too, so I can’t see Megan not wanting to hang out where he is.

“Oh my God, I haven’t seen Freddie in *forever*,” she gasps thoughtfully, probably diving back in time for a brief moment. “What is he up to these days?”

“He runs a lot of the bars,” I announce proudly. “He’s worked his way up from the bottom and really made a cool life for himself. I can’t wait to see it.”

“Fancy bars?” Megan checks. I nod. “Right, well we better get dressed up all nice then, right? I can’t imagine you have a Versace gown in that little bag of yours, do you? So, you might have to borrow something of mine. Not that I have anything designer, but I do own a lot of dresses that *look* designer which is basically the same thing. I think black for you...”

She’s getting carried away with herself, but I’m up for whatever plan she wants to throw together. I just need to blow off some steam so I’m not all tied up in knots about the nudity issue any longer. I would much rather focus on reacclimating to the city before I make any crazy decisions.

“Okay, black, fine. And what should I do with my hair?”

She runs her fingers through my ashy blonde locks. “I will style it for you. Can I do your makeup as well? I’ve been

studying the makeup artists on set and I think I'm getting better at it."

"As long as we have a drink while we dress. I'm up for anything."

Megan eagerly produces a bottle of wine and pours us both a glass. "No problem! Don't ever look at me like I'm the sort of woman who doesn't always have something in the fridge to drink. You never know when it's going to be needed. You never know when it's going to be a special night, like tonight. Or if you ace an audition... or fail one, actually."

We turn the music up to drink and dance while we get ready for a night of fun. I did have a good group of friends in London, and I enjoyed our nights out, but I'm pretty sure that none of them could ever be as fun as Megan. We really do *get* one another in a special way.

It ends up taking us a good couple of hours to get dressed, especially because Megan takes ages over my makeup and hair, but by the time we actually do leave, my confidence soars higher than ever. I feel good about myself and about the night that stretches out in front of us. I *know* deep in my heart that I'm going to kick ass here, and that whatever direction I decide to go with my career, if I take the acting job which requires nudity or not, I'm going to make it here.

Maybe not the Hollywood type of "make it," but then I don't know if I *need* that to be happy. I don't know anyone personally who has made it there, and I also don't know if I

would like that much intrusion into my life. I don't like the idea of being followed by the paparazzi everywhere.

Instead, I would love to just do what I enjoy for a career and to have happiness as well. That's another one of my more grown-up decisions. At twenty-one years old I thought the world was my oyster and I expected to have it all. Now I just want what I need to make me smile...

Yeah, maybe that's a clue that I should wait for the perfect job and not take on one with nudity after all. The more I think about it, the more I want to be able to respect myself always.

Eventually we head down the street and we find our way to one of the bars that Freddie manages. I don't know exactly which one he's in tonight, he seems kinda hard to pin down because he's so busy and needed all over the place, but I'm sure we'll find him. And at least we'll have a lot of fun on the way!

CHAPTER 2

Remy

“I don’t know, Freddie,” I growl angrily at my best friend. “I don’t know how this can be seen as positive news. The media only wants to portray me as a forty-five-year-old playboy who has a different woman in his bed every night... all because of the money I’ve made in investments.”

Freddie tosses his head back and belly laughs. “What the hell are you complaining about, Remy? That’s *exactly* what you are. As a billionaire socialite, people are always going to be very interested in you, to see how the ‘other half’ live. You just have to accept that. And you’re only going to encourage that if you have the latest ‘it girl’ on your arm. Models, reality TV stars, musicians... and anyway, that isn’t your only reputation.”

I just about resist the urge to roll my eyes. “I know. *Grumpy Alpha*, that’s what they call me. What bull shit is that? I’m just a normal guy who’s good at business and done well for myself in the past five or so years. That doesn’t make me grumpy and bossy.”

Freddie says nothing, but he doesn't have to. I know what he thinks of me. He's been my best friend for decades, and always tells me how it is. Whether I like it or not.

"I wouldn't be so worried about the press if I was you," he finally declares after taking another swig of the top-shelf whiskey I just purchased from one of his many bars. "They can make comments about your love life all they want. It's your mother you need to worry about. You *know* that she's utterly desperate for you to settle down. You're killing her with your behavior."

I scowl at him, but don't argue because I know he's right. It's my mother's dream for me to settle down and to have a family. She doesn't want anything to happen to her before I meet the *right woman* and settle down. She keeps telling me that she wants to be at my wedding one day.

It isn't my fault that no one has ever intrigued me enough to make me want to settle down...

Actually, that isn't quite true. I was going to get married once to the woman that I thought was the love of my life. Lisa was my whole world, and I thought I had everything set for life when she fell pregnant. If only I'd known that she'd die in childbirth, upending my life completely. Not that I regret anything. My three-year-old boy, Wyatt, is my whole world. And I'm also grateful to my mother for stepping up and caring for him while I work to give us the best life ever.

It's just the endless pressure for me to try and move on, to give Wyatt a mother figure, that I find hard. I know Mom only

wants what's best for me, and she only has my best interests at heart, my son's too, but what if I only get one love of my life? What if Lisa is it?

I don't want to settle. That isn't fair to me or the other person. Everyone deserves to experience true love. I don't want to rob someone of that... so I guess I'll have to keep being a disappointment to my mother. I just hope I don't actually kill her with this...

"You know, there is one way you could solve all of your problems." I look at Freddie, but don't expect much. He gets a real kick out of joking about my messy life. "You need a fiancée. Get the press off your back because you'll be with someone serious and make your mom happy as well."

"Right," I scoff back at his latest ridiculous idea. "Good plan, Freddie. Now I just need to find someone who wants to get married to the infamous 'grumpy alpha playboy.' I'm sure I'll have women lining up around the block, wanting to marry me."

"You say that sarcastically, but you probably would have that, Remy. But that's not what I mean. It doesn't have to be a real fiancée. Just someone to play the role for a while, to make it seem like you've settled down. Hire someone to be on your arm."

Upon first listen, this is the stupidest idea that I've ever heard in my whole life. But weirdly, the more I think about it, the less terrible it is. It would stop people hassling me,

wouldn't it? Give me a bit of a breather from all the complaints I have to hear about my life. I do like that.

But who? Who would be mad enough to get involved in such a scheme? I honestly can't pinpoint anyone at the moment, and it'd have to be someone I know, or we'd have to spend way too long getting to know one another and trying to force chemistry...

I don't want this to be a hassle, but I'm not totally convinced that I hate this. Maybe it's the whiskey talking, because I don't usually love Freddie's wild plans, but maybe not. For the first time in years, through his stupid jokes, my best friend might have actually come up with a good plan. Stranger things have probably happened, right?

"Oh look!" All of a sudden, Freddie leaps up and points towards the door. "She's here. I forgot that she was coming tonight. I would have called her otherwise..."

I follow his eye line, immediately feeling my heart leap up into my throat. Is that who I think it is? Freddie's younger sister, Zoe, looking better than ever. Holy shit, I haven't seen her since *that* night, our secret night of fun that thankfully no one ever found out about.

Well, my night just got a lot brighter. I grin at Zoe, loving the pink blush that adorably stains her cheeks. I don't need to wonder if she remembers what happened between us. It's written all over her face. But she mustn't have said anything, or Freddie would have killed me by now.

I hope now that she's back we can still keep our one wild night of unexpected fun under wraps. I don't even know where it came from really. I hadn't ever paid her any attention until that night. But now that she's here, I can see why. She's freaking gorgeous! No wonder she swept me off my feet. I can hardly take my eyes off of her now, she's like a freaking goddess.

"Freddie, it's been forever!" Zoe calls out as she throws her arms around her brother. "How are you? You're looking good. Hey, you remember Megan, don't you?"

They greet me too, but I'm mostly standing back and just watching the scene unfold. I might have been all grumpy and annoyed beforehand, but not now after seeing the sunshine of light that Zoe has brought into the bar. Wow, it's impossible to feel grumpy around her.

"So, you did well acting in London, right?" Freddie asks, giving me a little insight as to where Zoe has been over the last few years. "Are you looking forward to acting here as well?"

She offers her brother a one-shouldered shrug. "Yeah, I think so. But I don't know how easy it's going to be to break into the acting world here. I had contacts in London after my time at the academy. I'm excited to try but I don't know if I'll be as successful..."

Every so often she catches my eye, and there's an undeniable fizzle of excitement burning between us. It's so powerful I don't know how Megan and Freddie haven't picked up on it yet. I have to admit, the element that this is naughty

only intensifies everything for me. I almost can't sit still because it's hard to keep away from this beautiful woman. Especially seeing how strong and accomplished she's become. I have to say, I'm impressed.

"Hey, well you know, there *is* a way you can get into acting," Freddie says, interrupting the complaints coming from Megan and Zoe about how hard it is to be taken seriously and to uphold boundaries. "Because Remy needs an actress right now."

My spine stiffens as everyone turns to look at me. I haven't got any plans for any upcoming ads or anything like that, so I don't know why I would need an actress. But Freddie has put me on the spot now, and I don't know what he wants me to say. I wish he'd communicated this before.

"Remy needs someone to act like his fiancée, to get the press off his back, and also to make his mother happy. You could do that, Zoe. You know Remy pretty well, right? He'd pay you..."

I glare at my friend. I know we talked about this, but nothing was set in stone or anything. It was just a silly idea that he's now bringing other people into and I don't know why.

"What?" Freddie acts like he has no idea what he's done. "That's a win-win situation, right? It would make you look good, Remy, and Zoe, it would get you out in the public eye more."

"Hmm, he might be right." Okay, so Megan isn't thinking straight either. She's clearly had one too many to drink if she

thinks Freddie is talking sense. The plan might be okay, but with Zoe... that's just asking for trouble. She fits the criteria I set for myself, but she's also dangerous. It might have been years ago that we crossed the line, but that still happened. We can't escape that.

“What do you mean?” Zoe asks her friend. “How is Freddie right?”

“My experience in New York is that you're way more likely to get hired if you're a known face.” To be fair, Megan doesn't look too impressed by this. “Which is a real issue with all these influencers now making an appearance. Some of them don't even have any talent, but because they are a familiar face, they'll get hired. I guess on the thought that they're a face which will draw in an audience. Something that's a real slap in the face to people like us who have been acting forever. But what can you do? You have to keep up with the times. Trust me, it's worse in LA.”

“So, if I'm seen in loads of press photos, that will help me?” Zoe bites down on her bottom lip thoughtfully. My heart races as she does because it already seems like it's spiraling out of my control, and I haven't even said a word yet. But I get the strange sensation now that if I say something negative, I'll crush Zoe. I don't want to do that. “Well, that's interesting...”

She turns to look at me with hope in her gorgeous, piercing blue eyes. As Zoe flicks her bright blonde hair behind her shoulder and smiles with those delicious plump lips of hers, I

don't know what to say. I kinda give her a semi-nod, which is all she needs.

“Well, it looks like that's it then.” She beams so happily I know I can't put an end to this now. It looks like it's happening regardless, however dangerous this is. “It looks like I'm going to be a fiancée for a little while. I hope these paparazzi pictures are positive.”

Freddie has no idea what he's just unleashed, does he? He has no idea about the can of worms he's just opened. But he's smiling and patting Zoe on the shoulder gratefully, glad that he's done something positive for us all. I guess this will help me to look better, I suppose. With Mom too. I'm sure she'll love Zoe and like her for me. But she might like her a little too much.

This really does feel dangerous. I don't know how this will end...

CHAPTER 3

Zoe

“**O**h my God.” I can’t even sit up because my head is absolutely pounding. The cottonmouth isn’t helping my swirling my stomach one bit. I definitely went a little overboard last night. I mean, it was fun and everything, I definitely had a great time, but now... wow. I feel rough.

I slowly push myself up into a sitting position with my hand on my head. I blink a few times, letting the bright lights gently enter my eyes. As I adjust to where I am, my exciting new home, memories creep back into my brain as well. Last night was definitely a whirlwind, but there are stark memories that definitely stick out. Such as the bar where we *finally* found Freddie...

Oh, and Remy too. That was a shock, especially since he struck me like lightning, and the teenage crush I once had on him which culminated in one incredible night of fun, came flooding back in one giant rush. He *still* looks freaking amazing, even though he must be in his mid-forties by now. He’s still rough and ready, and those tattoos still do it for me.

Thank *God* no one knows what happened between us six years ago. Not even Megan because I don't think she'd have had the presence of mind last night to keep her mouth shut in front of Freddie. That would have been a disaster... and certainly wouldn't have led to what happened next...

“Remy needs someone to act like his fiancée, to get the press off his back, and also to make his mother happy. You could do that, Zoe. You know Remy pretty well, right? He'd pay you...”

My brother's words still ricochet through my mind. It doesn't matter what I'd had to drink, that would have stuck with me no matter what. Freddie is pushing me towards Remy, wanting me to spend more time with him, wanting me to be on his arm all the time.

For a job, sure. But still, it's a little crazy, right? I definitely think that we all got carried away last night. We set in stone a plan that I don't know if I'm prepared for. I don't think being engaged to Remy is going to stretch my acting ability too far.

But Megan might be right, I suppose the exposure could be good for me.

“Urgh, I don't know,” I groan to myself as I bend my head between my legs. “I don't know what the hell to do. This is a mess. I'm in a mess. I'm never drinking again!”

I stay where I am for a few moments, trying my hardest not to puke. It takes a little while for everything within me to steady myself before I finally rise upwards. I pad across the

apartment, towards the kitchen where I find a sickly-looking Megan boiling a pot of coffee.

“You look as pale as I feel,” she chuckles weakly. “What a crazy night, huh?”

I laugh and gratefully take a mug of coffee from my friend. “It was nuts. Especially the job stuff. I can’t quite wrap my head around what Freddie was talking about...”

“Oh, the fiancée thing.” Okay, so Megan recalls it as clearly as me. So, it definitely happened. “Yeah, I don’t know if that was just drunken talk or not.”

My heart lifts and sinks all at once. Since I don’t know how I feel about the stupid job, it’s probably for the best if it wasn’t a real offer. It means I don’t need to panic too much.

“Okay, yeah, so I probably should just forget it, right.” I sip my mug thoughtfully.

“Shame, because Remy is a hottie, don’t you think?” I snap my head up at Megan as she laughs gravely. “Wow, Freddie has great taste in friends.”

My chest constricts with jealousy I know doesn’t belong there. Just because we hooked up that *one* time—which Remy might not even remember—doesn’t mean I have a claim over him. But I can’t help the way I feel, I can’t help the possessiveness I have over that man. I bite down on my bottom lip so I don’t lash out and say something I’ll end up regretting.

None of this is Megan’s fault. Remy *is* smoking hot after all.

Ring, ring... Ring, ring... Ring, ring...

I stare at my cell phone in horror. I didn't even know I had Remy's number stored in my phone, so that makes it even more shocking that he's calling me.

"What the hell?" I gasp in shock. "What do you think this will be?"

Megan's eyes damn near pop out of her head. "Shit, maybe it wasn't just drunken talk after all. Maybe he really does want you to work for him as his fiancée."

My heart thunders angrily against my rib cage as my trembling fingers reach out to grip the phone. I know I need to answer, I really should, just in case, but I'm flooded with anxiety.

"H... hello?" I answer, stammering awkwardly.

"Hey, Zoe. I think we should meet up to discuss things. You know, from the plan last night?"

I swallow hard, nodding to Megan because this *is* him wanting to have me on his arm. As nervous as this makes me, there's no denying the little glimmer of thrill sparkling in the pit of my stomach. I *want* to see him because being around him makes me feel good.

"Oh right, sure. You want to meet... where?" I sound like an idiot. I know it, but I can't stop.

"At the Artisan Coffee Shop, it's on Bedford Avenue near where I live. Is that close to you?"

Oh! Remy looked more like a Manhattan man last night, I'm surprised to hear that he's practically my neighbor. Although I imagine he's in one of those luxury penthouse suite type of apartments. That's going to put me on edge all the time, just knowing that he's nearby.

"Yes, that's not far from me. I can meet you there, Remy. Whenever you like."

"Thirty minutes? Does that work for you? Are you close enough for that?"

I glance at the clock. I can make it, as long as I dress quick. I won't be able to fancy myself up or anything, teenage me would be horrified, but I'll do what I can. I agree before I hang up the phone and stare at Megan in shock. I guess this is happening after all.

"Get some clothes on then!" Megan declares with a little laugh. "You have to go. This could be one hell of an opportunity for you. You need to make it right."

I do as she commands, dressing in the way that Megan indicates for me to, then before I know it, I'm out the door and on the way to this coffee shop. It might not be a date with Remy, but aside from *that* night, I don't think I've ever been alone with him before. How will I react? How the hell am I going to cope? I don't know what will happen next.

There he is. Remy is here before me, sitting patiently at one of the tables for me to join him. It takes everything that I have to push myself through those doors to join him.

I expect a smile as he lifts up his eyes to seek me out, but that isn't what I get. He seems more stoic and unimpressed. Grumpy, maybe. I try to grin back anyway, just in case it's awkward for him to be around me after what happened in the past.

“Hi, Remy. Good to see you.” I take a seat opposite him. “What a night, don't you think?”

Instead of engaging in chit-chat with me, Remy dives right into business. “So, I think we need to talk about our work together and how this will look.”

I'm taken aback. He's completely different when he's sober. I don't know how to adjust to this version of Remy. “Er, right, so what did you have in mind?”

He slides me a piece of paper that looks like a contract. I run my eyes over it quickly, wishing I wasn't quite as hungover as I am. This is all a little challenging for me. But I *do* know what I'm looking at as I see the pay part of the contract.

“What's this?” I demand. “This isn't a real payment, is it? My time is worth more than this.”

Remy continues to scowl. “Well, this is beneficial for you as well, isn't it? You're going to get exposure and it will boost your career, so do you really need more than this?”

The payment is insulting. I wouldn't care if it wasn't so hurtful. I rise to my feet, scraping back my chair, as I glare at

Remy for being such an asshole. “I don’t act for exposure. No one does.”

Remy lets out a little laugh which only infuriates me more. Who the hell is this man sitting in front of me? I know I never really knew him when I was younger, but this doesn’t seem like the guy I had a crush on at all. He clearly doesn’t value me and what I do, which truly upsets me.

I’ve had to face this sort of misogynistic behavior before, and I always hate it. But getting it from Remy digs deep and hits me in a way that it normally doesn’t.

“Okay, okay, well if you don’t think the exposure will be enough then I can up the pay.” He holds up his hands in a surrendering gesture, but that doesn’t make me feel any better. “We don’t need to get all weird about things. We can have a discussion.”

I’m not sitting down. Not until he changes that number to something that feels much more suitable for me. Something that shows respect.

“Look, it won’t be for a long time,” Remy continues. “I don’t need you to be my fiancée forever, and I will make sure that I can get us a lot of press. If you want, I’ll also see what doors I can open for you. I will make this worth your while, I swear to you.”

Again, my head and heart battles it out. I hate the idea of making the wrong decision, especially when I don’t know how to open those doors myself. This really could be the opportunity that I need. I might not be too keen on this version

of Remy, because it seems like he's cold and distant, but if I think about my career, then this really could be the best thing for me.

“Fine, I'll listen to you.” I sink back down into my seat. I even let Remy order me a coffee. “But I don't want to be disrespected, Remy. Because I know my worth. I've been through a lot of shit in my time, and I don't want to have more.”

Remy nods slowly. “I understand. I apologize. I shouldn't have treated you that way. I get that exposure doesn't pay the bills. I shouldn't have even suggested it, but I wouldn't have made my money if I didn't try and push the barriers here and there.”

I fold my arms protectively across my chest. This is clearly just a business transaction for him. He isn't looking at me as a real person, much less Freddie's sister who he had a bit of a fling with one night. I guess that's for the best, so we know where the barriers are.

“Fine. Change the number and I will see if this is something I agree with.”

Remy might push the boundaries with other people, but he won't with me. I'm too strong for that. He's about to learn that he's met his match with me. I won't back down. The sooner he learns that, the better.

CHAPTER 4

Remy

I'm still not convinced that this is the best idea I've ever had. Or Freddie has ever had anyway, but as soon as Zoe started to reject me, I just *knew* I had to make sure she stayed. It became a bit of a game in my head, and I couldn't stop myself. I *had* to win her over.

So now, I'm paying her a fortune, much more than I was planning to, and I've also purchased her a designer dress for dinner with my mother. Tonight. I figured it was best to introduce Zoe to my mother first, before the press gets ahold of the story. Mom would *hate* to find out through the media.

It isn't worth the hassle for me, so it's best to get her off my back first.

"Wow." I've been so distracted by what tonight might look like, I haven't been thinking too much about Zoe. Until now. I've told myself that I intend to remain fully professional around Zoe, because this is only a business transaction, but it isn't going to be easy when she looks like *that*. The designer dress is absolutely gorgeous on her. It hugs her curves

perfectly, with her hair cascading down her back, swishing perfectly around. “Hot damn, Zoe.”

My pulse kicks up a notch as I step out of the car to open the door for her. It takes every bit of strength that I have not to automatically lean in and kiss her. She isn't *actually* my girlfriend, she's not even a date. I have to behave, or we'll all be in trouble.

“Hey, Remy.” She smiles softly at me. “Are you ready for this?”

The word *this* holds so much weight. This is us basically going public. Letting the press into our lives, to really see us. Plus, I'll be letting Zoe deeper into my life as well. But it's the right thing to do, and I know it. I've thought it through, and I know now that this is *it*. This is the perfect win-win situation for the both of us. I need a lovely-looking woman on my arm who's my fiancée, and Zoe needs exposure. Freddie was right about that much.

“I think so.” I smile thinly. “Are you? You look great, by the way.”

“So do you.” She points to my suit. “I like that look on you.”

I step aside and invite her into the car. As she takes her seat, I feel a little calmer, knowing that I'm not on my own with this anymore. Zoe will be the wall I can lean upon if it gets tough. I know that we still have a lot to learn about one another, but it's good that we know each other somewhat. We can make this work, I'm sure of it.

“So, what’s your mother like?” Zoe asks as we drive towards the house. “I haven’t ever met her before, from what I can remember.”

“Oh, she’s great. But a bit full on,” I laugh. “You’ll see. She doesn’t live too far away from me, so we’ll be there in a moment. You can see for yourself.”

It really doesn’t take us a long time to arrive, and as soon as I pull up the car, I sense nervous energy burning off of Zoe, just as it is me. I reach out and touch her hand, letting her know that I’m here for her. The reassuring gesture causes us to lock eyes for just a moment, overshadowing the nerves with a bunch of other emotions instead. Emotions that we probably shouldn’t be feeling, but I guess we can’t just turn it off.

“Remy!” Mom’s sharp voice snaps us out of this moment. “Come on. Wyatt is waiting.”

“Wyatt?” Zoe gushes quietly by my side. “I didn’t know your mom had a boyfriend.”

“No... er, I probably should have told you this before.” I purse my lips thoughtfully. This is definitely the wrong time to bring it up, but I’ve left it too long now. “Wyatt is my son.”

Zoe says nothing, but I can almost sense her retreating in on herself. I need to find the words to make this right, but Mom has already yelled us inside so I can’t take too long.

“I’ll explain everything properly,” I tell her rapidly. “But Wyatt is my three-year-old boy. His mother died in childbirth

so it's just me and him. Well, and Mom as well. She helps out a lot."

"Oh, my goodness." Zoe claps her hand to her mouth in horror as she does her best to process this. "I'm so sorry. That's really sad. You guys... I hope you're okay..."

I squeeze her hand once more. I will tell her more later on when we have the time alone, but for now I want to take her inside to impress my mother with the new love of my life.

"Come on," I whisper. "Let's do this. It'll be great."

Oh God, Zoe is still in shock. This isn't going to be great for our introduction, but that's all my fault. I'm not very open and honest with people about my past, because I truly don't think it's anyone else's business. However, that rule doesn't apply here. I'm an idiot for being closed off.

I don't like sympathy, but I don't like shocking people more.

"Daddy!" Wyatt runs happily into my arms and hugs me for a few moments. "I drew you."

He takes my hand and leads me into the living room where he has a bunch of pictures he's been drawing. I try my best to focus on what my son is telling me, but I can't stop myself from anxiously darting my eyes backwards to see how Mom and Zoe are getting along.

Mom's grilling her. Shit. I can't help her while I'm here...

Eventually though, Mom offers to pour us drinks, so Zoe is now sitting on the couch with Wyatt. She's looking a little

weakened by Mom already which means I need to have a strong word with her. I storm into the kitchen to try and find out more.

“Is *that* your fiancée?” Mom hisses, starting in on me first. It seems like she was waiting for me to come in here. “She’s twenty-seven years old, Remy. Do you know that? You’re forty-five. That age difference is insane. Plus, she’s an actress. You *know* women like that are only after money. Or fame, whatever you can give them. What are you playing at?”

A possessiveness starts to rise up in me. “Zoe isn’t like that at all,” I insist. “I’ve known her for years. She’s a great person, with a heart of gold. Have you even taken the time to get to know her or are you just making an assumption based on a couple of facts?”

Mom scoffs. “Well, I’m not happy about this at all. If you want me to trust this gold digger, then I’m going to have to see how you’re living. If I can see you are living as an engaged couple, then I will be able to see what her intentions are. I don’t like this *at all*.”

Oh God. I thought Mom was going to be happy about this. I thought she’d be the easy one to open up to about our relationship. I thought that she’d be so happy to see me “in love” that she wouldn’t push things. How wrong I was.

“Mom, I don’t think you need to stick your nose in so much...”

“I am also Wyatt’s guardian,” she snaps back. “I will do whatever I can to protect that boy. Your head might be up in

the clouds because you've been swept off your feet by a young woman, but I have my feet firmly fixed on the ground. I need to be involved in this. In the wedding planning and everything. You'll appreciate me doing this in the end."

She hands me drinks and sends me back out into the living room. Now I'm the one in shock. I know my mother is overprotective of me and Wyatt, but I don't want her to get *this* involved. What am I going to do to stop this before Mom gets way too involved?

As I put the drinks down on the table, I hear my phone beeping with a message.

Zoe: Your mother doesn't like me, does she?

My heart breaks as I scan my eyes over those words. I shouldn't have brought Zoe here just to make her feel like shit. I can't let my mom keep on doing this.

Remy: It just takes her a while, that's all.

Zoe: She thinks I'm with you for all the wrong reasons...

Remy: How little she knows! We're both in it for the wrong reasons.

It pleases me to see her smiling. I'm glad I can do that for her.

Remy: It looks like Wyatt adores you anyway!

Surprisingly, Wyatt really does seem to have warmed to Zoe quickly. He's already sitting beside her, talking to her about things happening on the TV. He doesn't normally react this

way to people. I'm impressed! At least one introduction has gone well.

Zoe: He's a cute kid. You've done a great job with him. What a sweetheart!

See? If Mom gave Zoe a chance, she would love her. I really am surprised by her reaction. I don't think that Zoe looks too young for me. I guess it is an eighteen-year difference between us, but age is just a number, right? It doesn't need to be something she gives me a side-eye about.

"Dinner is almost ready," Mom barks from the kitchen. I can tell she isn't coming in here to prove a point. I know she was excited about this meeting at first, when I called her about it, so this is all just to wind me up and let me know what she thinks. "Do you want to set the table, Remy?"

My mother's opinion wouldn't normally matter. The only reason I'm upset is because this plan is based partly around her, so her rudeness is shocking. Plus, she really is deeply involved in Wyatt's life, so I have to listen to her a little.

But for now, I'm on Zoe's side. I'm going to defend her to the bitter end. I want her to know that I'm going to support her no matter what my mother says.

"Come on, Zoe. Give me a hand if you don't mind."

She smiles gratefully at me, before taking my hand as I lead her into the dining room. The feel of her skin against mine is just too much. The sparkling chemical reaction in my body is

just too much. I can't remember the last time I felt like this with anyone.

I'm surprised my hawk-eyed mother can't see this. Or maybe she can and that's why she's upset. I can't work out what goes on in my mother's head, and I probably shouldn't try.

"We might need to go for a drink after this," I murmur to her, quietly, bringing her beautiful smile back on her face. "What do you think? Wyatt is staying here anyway because I have work in the morning, so I can talk to you a bit more then..."

"Oh, hell yeah, I definitely like that plan. That'll help me get through this."

I nod in agreement, completely understanding what she means. It's heavy. Much heavier than I warned her about. I owe her a few drinks to recover. I also need to pray my mother doesn't put her off me forever.

"Not much longer," I mutter in what I hope is a reassuring gesture. "Dinner, then drinks."

She nods with a newfound determination. "That sounds like a good plan to me. We're a team, let's do this."

CHAPTER 5

Zoe

***T**his is a mistake, I can't help but think as I glance at Barbara across the dinner table, to see her refusing to meet my eyes again. *I shouldn't be here. I should just leave, right?**

There have already been so many red flags, so many reasons why Remy and I shouldn't be doing this, but his mother is the worst one. She's terrifying, and very intrusive. I'm pretty sure she's guessed what we're up to here, that she thinks there's a plan afoot because she's questioning me and Remy a lot. If she doesn't believe the relationship, then who will?

It's starting to feel like no one, which is a real issue for us. If this doesn't work, then what?

***Remy:** Not much longer. Wyatt needs to go to bed soon, don't worry. x*

The texts haven't stopped, thank goodness. This private communication between me and Remy is just about the only thing keeping me sane. It's like a little lifeline in this hell. I *know* Barbara isn't keen on me, she's made that very clear, and

I heard some of what she said about me in the kitchen, so I know... this reassurance from Remy is lovely.

Who is Remy, really? Is he the nice guy who's supportive and sweet? Or is he the grumpy asshole I met in the coffee shop the other day? It's amazing that we even managed to come to an agreement that day, I didn't think we would for a while. I can't put two and two together and come up with anything for this man. He's an enigma.

"I have a question," Barbara pipes up, before I can respond to Remy. "Why is there no ring?" We both stare at her in horror. "No engagement ring?"

God damn it. I might need to ask for even more money for this job. Jesus. Barbara is too much.

"The ring is being resized." Luckily Remy is used to his mother. He snaps into action quickly. "So, we will have it next time we're here."

"Hmm, right. Strange." Barbara pouts. "I don't think that I would like to be engaged to a man who hadn't bothered to buy me a ring. Seems unusual."

"Mom, I just said that I bought Zoe a ring." Remy rolls his eyes. I don't know if he's genuinely annoyed or if he's just playing along with his mother's game. "It's just being resized."

Zoe: I didn't even think about a ring, did you?

Remy: Nope! I will sort things out though. x

Oh God, if there's a ring involved it means I can't escape. I'm stuck trying to convince Barbara that I'm not the devil in disguise, trying to steal everything that her son has worked for all his life. I don't even know too much about Remy's business or how wealthy he is. He was just a normal guy as far as I know, the last time I was here. It's a little insulting that Barbara just makes terrible assumptions about me, but I guess she doesn't know me at all.

Remy: Right, I'm going to tell Mom we're going now. Get ready for it. She might start bombarding us with a bunch of awful and intrusive questions. x

Zoe: Start?!

Remy lets out a little chuckle which he has to disguise rapidly as a cough once his mom catches his eye. "Mom, Zoe and I are going to leave now. You know I have work early in the morning..."

"You *have* to go?" she snaps, sounding angry about this. "Already? You don't want to stick around for a little longer so Zoe and I can get to know one another better?"

My heart sinks. Why does she want to know me if she doesn't like me? It's such a relief when Remy shakes his head. "No, not tonight. There will be plenty of time for you to get to know one another. I really do need to get some sleep before work. You know how busy I am."

"Hmm, I suppose I can learn more when I come to visit you at home, and when I help you plan the wedding." Oh God, what is *that* about? "I will see you soon then."

Before we leave, Remy takes Wyatt to bed. If Barbara wants to take a moment to get to know me, it could be now. But she doesn't. She takes the plates in the kitchen pointedly, shooting me glares as she goes. I offer to help, but she shakes her head at me.

“No, I don't need any help, thank you. I have done this alone for a long time.”

My heart weirdly starts to ache for her in that moment, because she must have been through a hard time as well. With the mother of Wyatt dying, the whole family has been thrown into disarray. No wonder she's wary about me. She's probably wary about anyone. Even though this is a ploy between me and Remy, I do want to prove myself to her. I want Barbara to see that I am worthwhile. I know this isn't real, but I want to show my pure heart.

Eventually Remy descends the stairs and it's time for us to go. Finally, I can blow out a breath of relief because we're about to escape and hopefully go for a drink as well. I really do think that Remy needs to explain a lot to me. I would much rather have known what I was coming in to rather than it coming as a complete shock.

I know it must be hard for Remy to open up about such a tragedy in his past, but if he's bringing me in to his world so I do need to know these things.

“Okay, let's leave,” Remy whispers as he takes my hand. I love the sensation of his fingers laced through mine. It's such a relief, such a warm and comforting sensation. Just what I need

after the stressful night I've just had in his mother's home.
"Come on. Drink time."

We get back in the car and pull up at Remy's home, which is, as I suspected, a lot fancier than the building that Megan and I live in, and we head to a bar nearby. One that's actually pretty much halfway between where I live and Remy does, for our drink.

The bar is a nice one, which is good because we're all dressed up fancy for the dinner. Remy orders us drinks right away, the sort of drinks I would never pick out myself because it's the top-shelf stuff. Pricey. But it tastes good, so I can understand why he likes it.

"So, I suppose you have a ton of questions for me," Remy laughs awkwardly. "I don't blame you. I did kinda drop you in the deep end tonight, didn't I?"

"Er, yeah, you kinda did. I wasn't prepared for any of that. Wow, your mom is..."

"I know." I don't need to finish this sentence. He knows what his mother is like. "I'm sorry. I didn't think she was going to be like that. I thought she'd be happy to have me bring someone home. She keeps going on about wanting me to settle down, to find someone to make me happy..."

"Yeah, I think I might be the problem. I don't think she likes me."

He reaches out and holds my hand for a little moment. I wish he'd keep his hand there, because I love the feel of it. I

adore the tingles that shudder down my spine.

“She will like you, given half the chance. She’s just protective, that’s all.”

I eye him curiously. “Is that because of Wyatt’s mother?”

I know this might be a sensitive subject, but we do need to dive into it. We do need to make it make sense so I can process being his fake fiancée from here on out. I see Remy wince a little because he doesn’t like it, but thankfully he keeps on talking to me.

“Yeah, I think it might be. Because we both thought that Lisa was it. The one.” He sighs so heavily I don’t know if I can stand it. All I want to do is take away his pain. “So, when she died, it was a massive shock for all of us. I think that’s why she’s so tough.”

I nod wishing I had something to say. I would love to know the right words to make him feel better, but I’m just too stunned to the core to find the right words. I’m useless, hopeless because I don’t have any experience with death, or love. I feel young and out of my depth.

“I get it,” I murmur to him. “That’s why I tried to take everything she said on the chin.”

“Oh, you did amazingly!” Remy gushes. “I was surprised that you did so well with her.”

Eventually, the conversation drifts off to other topics as we shared a couple of drinks. Much as I need to hear all the heavy stuff that’s happened in his life, I’m enjoying the small talk as

well. I like listening to all the little things about him, peeling back the layers of this man.

He's fascinating, he really does intrigue me, he's awesome...

"Oh my God." All of a sudden, Remy changes. His whole body language stiffens and his face returns to the stoic man I met in the coffee shop. This instantly gets my back up, because I don't want to be here with this version of him. I need to get out of here quick. "The paps are here."

"Paps?" It takes me a couple of moments to work out what he's saying. "Oh, the paparazzi."

My heart begins to thunder hard against my rib cage. I can hardly catch my breath because what does this mean? I know we want to go public at some point, but I wasn't expecting it to be right now. We just dealt with his mother, I'm not ready for this.

"What do we do?" I hiss. "Do we get out of here? Can we sneak out?"

His eyes lock in on mine. "We don't want to run away from the press, do we? This is for you. You need exposure and attention. I think we should do this now."

He grabs my hand and lifts me to my feet before I'm ready for it and takes me to the bar window so the press can see us better. His hands cup my cheeks and before I can even catch my breath, he crashes his lips against mine and kisses me. Gently, but passionately as well. Wow, holy shit. I know this

might be a fake relationship, but this kiss sure as shit feels real.

The sparks come flooding back, even more desperately than before. I've felt them as his hands touch mine, but this takes things to a brand-new level. I'm blown away. I never want this kiss to end; it's whipped me off my feet completely. I'm weak at the knees, my legs have turned to jelly—no wonder I don't have any air in my lungs when I'm around Remy.

He pulls away after a couple of moments, but rests his forehead on mine, staring lovingly into my eyes as the photographers continue to snap pictures of us. I can't really focus on the press right now, I can't plan out how I'm going to look or anything, because I'm completely lost in this man's eyes. It's almost as if the rest of the world has melted away into nothingness.

It's only Remy and me.

"You're good," he whispers reassuringly to me, seemingly assuming that the rapid reaction in my body is all nerves. "Don't worry. This is going to be amazing. This is the start of *you*."

The start of *me*. I have to admit, I like that a whole lot.

CHAPTER 6

Remy

*R*ing, ring... Ring. Ring... Ring, ring...

I stir in my bed, shifting from side to side as the shrill sound blasts. I'm not really in the mood to talk to anyone, not when I'm still exhausted. My alarm hasn't even sounded yet so it must be way too early in the morning. But the ringing never stops. Whoever it is, isn't even giving up.

With a deep and irritated sigh, I reach across to my nightstand and hit the answer button without even opening my eyes to see who is calling me.

"Remy, what the hell is going on?" Freddie's sharp voice snaps me back to reality. "I just saw a bunch of photos of you kissing Zoe all over the internet."

I'm silenced with shock. Did he not expect this? He's the one who suggested that Zoe be my fake fiancée, so why would this come as a surprise? He sounds horrified.

"I... yeah I guess we went public last night," I tell him honestly as I rub my forehead hard. "It wasn't on purpose. We went to have dinner with my mother, and Mom was... well, a

bit much.” That’s putting it politely. “So, we went for drinks and the press caught us.”

“So, you kissed?” Oh God, Freddie is fuming. I might not understand this reaction, but I know I need to make things right if I don’t want to lose my best friend here. “I didn’t know things were going to get physical with the two of you. I didn’t know this fake fiancée thing would require that. I have to admit, it makes me really uncomfortable to see.”

Shit. That sucks. I never wanted this. What a freaking good thing he doesn’t know the truth. I certainly don’t intend to mention now that there was a spark when we kissed. A flicker of a flame from the past, and one that made us both yearn for more. I’m sure I wasn’t on my own with that sensation because I could see the intensity of the desire flooding her body.

I don’t know if she wanted to come home with me. I *really* wanted to invite her, but I didn’t think I should. I knew both of us were trying our hardest to be smart, so we stayed away.

Now I’m glad because this call would be a hundred times harder if Zoe was in bed beside me.

“I’m sorry, Freddie. I didn’t mean for this to shock you. Neither of us planned it, it just seemed like a good moment to get our ‘showmance’ in the open. I want the press to pay attention to my new relationship, and I want to get Zoe’s name out in public as well.”

“Mmm yeah. I see.” Freddie sounds deflated which only makes me feel worse. I need to make sure we establish those

barriers to make sure nothing real actually happens. “Okay, well maybe a little bit of warning next time. It definitely caught me off guard.”

Guilt floods me. it overflows and sickens me. I swallow hard, trying to seek out the right words to make this all okay, but what can I say? How can I make Freddie trust me?

“Sorry, Freddie. Like I said, we’d spent the evening with Wyatt and Mom...”

“Oh, how did that go? Is she pleased?” he asks cautiously. “Does she like Zoe?”

“Wyatt loves Zoe. It was surprising actually, how quickly he warmed to her. Mom... she was less sure. She seems to think that the age difference is a big thing. Maybe not for a fling, but for something long-term. I’m sure she will come around though. It’ll just take time.”

The silence on the other end of the phone is way too much. I hate the damage I’ve caused just with a spur of the moment kiss. It seemed like such a good idea at the time, I thought it would be perfect, and obviously it was. We drew a lot of attention our way, which will make sure people think that Zoe and I are a legit couple. It’ll also get Zoe’s name in the public eye.

But Freddie... he’s the person I wasn’t thinking about in the heat of the moment. I feel bad about that. If he suggested this, then obviously he was doing so thinking that it would be a pure relationship, no physical touching, just for show. I need to make sure it is just that.

“I hope her reaction hasn’t upset Zoe too much,” Freddie muses. “I am worried about my little sister, because she’s in a vulnerable position here. Just trying to kick her career off in New York City. She’s left our parents behind in England and is trying to find herself...”

I don’t see Zoe like that. She doesn’t seem vulnerable and struggling to me. I think she’s a strong, confident woman who knows exactly what she wants. I know my mother can be off-putting and a bit much, but Zoe held her own in the best way that she could.

“I will look after her,” I reassure my friend anyway. “I’ll do what I can to make sure she’s okay. Like I said when we were at the bar, I’ll see what doors I can open for her career. I swear to you, Freddie, I will make sure this benefits us both. It’ll be good.”

By the time he seems to semi-forgive me, I’m fully awake, so far from sleep that I get my sorry ass out of bed. We continue to talk for a little as normal, about nothing in particular, but I sense there’s still a bit of tension there. This has already had an impact on our friendship, which isn’t what I wanted. How the hell are we going to come back from this? This is *all* on me, and I need to ensure that everything ends with us all okay. Somehow...



My eyes flicker over the selection of diamond rings in the jewelry shop, wondering which one is right for Zoe, for our fake relationship. I’m thinking we need to go flashy and

gaudy, over the top so everyone can see it. That isn't what I'd pick out for Zoe if this was real, because she comes across as more understated and less impressed by the flashier things in life.

But this isn't really for *us*. It's for the press to spot, and to shut Mom up too. Although she probably made a good point, really. It wouldn't be a real engagement, and no one would be able to take us seriously without this silly symbol of love. It might be insane, but if this is what we need to make things work, then this is what we shall do.

"Can I help you, sir?" The girl behind the counter shoots me an award-winning smile as she eyes up the commission that she might get here. "Is there anything that interests you?"

I don't want this to be a long-winded thing which involves her putting on the big sell. Quickly I point out a princess cut diamond which I know will capture the light the way I want it to. I've seen plenty of photos of engagement rings of the people in my life, so I know what works well.

"I think this is going to be the one for my bride to be. Thank you very much."

"This one here?" Her eyebrows raise high as she sees which one I'm looking at. I'm guessing that look means the price tag is a high one. This whole fake fiancée scam is going to end up costing me a fortune. But it's bound to work out well, right? It'll make me look like I'm finally settling down, which might give me a break from the society pages. It's worth the cash. "Of course."

She pulls it out and flashes it at me, showing it off some more. I nod and hand her my credit card. She grins from ear to ear, definitely delighted by this sale. It works out well for her, because she hasn't had to do much, and she's got a good commission. Good for her.

Once I have the ring, I make the drive to Zoe's home. I haven't heard from her since our photos went public, so I don't totally know where her head is at. I don't know if she's had a telling off from Freddie either. If we're going to keep our communication open and honest, then I want to start that right away. I hope she feels the same way as me.

At least I know where she lives. I'm sure Zoe wouldn't have given me her address if she didn't think I would just turn up like this... at least that's what I try to convince myself as I head towards her apartment, because I know this is a chat that we need to have.

Knock, knock, knock.

I step back waiting for the door to swing open, and thankfully it does. Zoe mutters to Megan, assuming it's her roommate instead of me standing there. So, her eyes pop wide when she spots me.

"Remy, what the hell are you doing here?" She pulls her bathrobe tighter around her body, cutely covering herself up. "I didn't know that we were meeting today..."

"I got the ring. I thought I would bring it over to you."

She steps aside and lets me in, curiously eyeing the bag in my hand. “Right, the engagement ring. To make your mother happy...”

“Yes, and to show the press that we’re engaged as well. We made some good strides last night, which is something that we must carry on with...” I can see that she’s struggling with this, which can only mean one thing. “I see Freddie called you as well.”

“He talked to you too?” she gasps. “He wasn’t happy at all. It made me question everything.”

“Don’t forget that he’s the one who made this suggestion. I reminded him that we kinda have to do this for the plan to work out. As long as I look after you, that’s all that matters.”

She purses her lips and nods tautly. “I see. Well, that’s good. I guess he was a lot nicer to you than he was to me. I’m glad that means we can keep moving forward.”

I hand her the ring and she takes it nervously. She’s stunned by the sight of it, but I’m hoping she understands the reasons why. I can’t stop myself from smiling as she slides the ring on.

“It suits you,” I laugh. “I think it adds to our look as a couple really well.”

“This seems way too fancy for me to wear in public,” she says, finally sitting on the couch beside me. “I don’t know if this is a good idea at all. Can’t we get something a little more...”

“We need it to be seen,” I remind her. “We need everyone to pay attention to us and this ring. We need to get out more in public as well. And PDA might be necessary.”

Even though I tried to tell myself that I would hold back from the physical connection before, being in Zoe’s presence just makes me crave her. I can’t help myself. I know it’s wrong, but Freddie does know what this is and what it has to be...

“You think that’s a good idea?” she asks doubtfully.

“You don’t?” I cock a knowing eyebrow.

“I don’t know what I think anymore. My head is all over the place.”

Mine is too. We need to take a step back so we can set our boundaries and make sure we both get what we want out of this, so we don’t upset Freddie anymore. So why do we seem to be drawing nearer to one another by the second?

Shit. We really are in trouble, aren’t we? And throwing ourselves deeper in to it...

CHAPTER 7

Zoe

I haven't yet mentioned to Remy that aside from Freddie yelling at me, I've actually had some really great emails and communications this morning. Megan was right, having my name out in the public eye just a little bit has drawn talent agents to me.

I haven't even had a chance to look through it all yet, because it's been a little overwhelming. I don't know which jobs look perfect for me, that I want to go forward with, but how can I think of *any* of that right now, when Remy's gorgeous lips are edging towards me?

The kiss last night was shocking, and it came out from nowhere, but we both knew why we were doing it. It was all part of the plan. But this... this is private, just for us. It reminds me of that special night we shared at Freddie's birthday party all those years ago.

My heart pounds. It races like crazy as I breathe him in deep. My eyes flicker, closing once his lips lightly graze against mine, sending a flurry of tingling everywhere. Holy

shit, how are we supposed to keep away from one another when the chemistry feels like this?

“What are we doing?” I whisper as we pull ever so slightly apart. “This is madness.”

His hands hook around the back of my neck, commanding my body, holding me in place. We don't know what the hell we're doing, do we? But it feels good. I lean in and crash my lips to his harder, allowing the passion to shine free. His tongue invades my mouth first, but I'm the one who starts pushing back, caving to the intensity of the deep-seated desire.

I *know* this is wrong, we both do, especially after we've been yelled at by Freddie, but this has always been taboo and that didn't stop us beforehand, so why now? The boundaries have always been blurry, and we've already crossed them so now doesn't matter. Right?

Oh God, I don't know. Nothing makes sense, but yet this feels perfectly right. My heart damn near explodes with joy as he starts to push me backwards until I'm lying back, and my bathrobe has fallen open. I had a shower about an hour ago and haven't bothered to dress. Now I'm grateful as Remy's eager hands explore my sizzling skin.

Shit, there's a little glimmer of familiarity there. My body reacts with a burning hot bliss that's never quite vanished even as the years passed us by. But it's also brand new, and that's thrilling too. I absolutely lose my head in the overwhelming flurry of sensations as he drops to his knees on the floor, running kisses all the way down me, edging to where I'm

absolutely aching for him. The deep throbbing between my thighs needs to be explored.

After speaking to Freddie, I was going to cut physical contact out completely. Even for the cameras because I thought we didn't really need that anymore. But as soon as Freddie's fingers brushed over me for the very first time, all that went out the window. I can't ignore the way I want him, the way I still have a crush on him after all these years.

"Ooh wow," I cry out as a powerful shudder tears down my spine. "Fuck, Remy."

His lips graze kisses over the hypersensitive tops of my thighs while his fingers lightly stroke my soaking wet slit. My back arches with pleasure, my hips grind against his hand with desire. By the time he plunges deep inside my folds, I can't contain myself. I call out his name once more, loving the way it feels on my lips. It feels *right*, like it belongs in my mouth.

The thrusts of his fingers make my head loll to one side with desire. I can hardly keep my eyes open as he massages me, hitting all the right spots, absolutely intoxicating me. I remember the last time we were together; I had the sensation that I was an addict, and that Remy was my drug.

I feel the exact same way now. My addiction is a million times worse. I want him so badly my body feels like it will wither away and die if it doesn't have him.

By the time, Remy's beautiful plump lips crash against my clit, I can't contain the screaming. Thank God Megan is at

work because I absolutely can't contain myself. He has me out of control.

If we're going to be unable to control ourselves like this, then we're definitely going to have to be more careful. I don't think we'll be able to be around other people. Certainly not those who will kill us for overstepping these lines.

His rough, hot tongue circles my clit, building up an absolutely intense pressure of pleasure. I grip tightly onto the couch cushions as my body flips out of control. I don't want to keep moving away from his mouth, but my hips are doing whatever the hell they want. I have lost power over myself completely, which continues as his tongue plunges deep within me too. This wonderful sensation is incredible, I never want it to end. Fucking hell, who knew it would feel like *this* to have his mouth wrapped around me, to be at the tip of his tongue?

As soon as Remy senses what I really enjoy he becomes a madman on a mission, the bliss is an onslaught. The waves build up powerfully, with every broad stroke of his tongue, until the lightning bolt of pleasure explodes electricity all the way through me.

The tsunami of orgasm washes through me so hard, I don't recognize the primal sounds vibrating in my chest, nor do I realize that I've wrapped my legs around his neck until I start falling down the other side of pleasure mountain, sinking deep into the waters of desire.

Fucking hell, that was powerful, it was overwhelming, I can hardly breathe as I remain lying back on the couch, completely

under his spell. The gasping ragged breaths make my chest rise and fall as I try my absolute hardest to gather myself up quick. Because I'm not done with Remy yet. Not even close, he might have sated me a little, but I still crave more.

He's unleashed a dragon of desire within me, one that needs *everything* from him. Does Remy sense it? I'm sure he must know that he's swallowed me up whole. I just hope he doesn't end up spitting me out and leaving me without him. My body won't take that.

Remy grabs my thighs and yanks me to the edge of the couch rapidly, knocking even more air out of my lungs. I push myself up into a sitting position to seek out his lips as soon as I can get hold of them. I *need* a freaking kiss *now*. What I'm not expecting though is the taste of myself on his lips. Another new sensation which is phenomenal with this man.

No one has ever made me feel like that before, ever, which might be why no one ever stuck. Remy might be all wrong for me, but he's the only man who sets me alight as much as this. By the time his thick, throbbing erection teases my entrance, the addiction is so bad I can't tease him even if I want him. I *need* him, so I slide myself forward, drawing him in me.

I'm not the only one groaning with bliss as we interlock around one another, with my legs tightly gripping to his back once more because I know I can't let him go, not now. I can't work out who's noisier as the thrusts intensify. I know we've already been in this position once before—although maybe not *this* position—but it feels all new. Every time this gorgeous man

buries himself deep inside of me, I get dizzy with bliss. The pleasure hasn't really left me. It's still there careening through me, which means it's even more powerful than ever.

By the time I tumble over the edge and orgasm for another round, I'm not alone. Remy's body is bucking with pleasure as well. He's losing his freaking mind, and I love it. I lean back and watch him, because he's at his most gorgeous when he's vulnerable and falling apart. I remember that from the last time we were together. It's one of the memories that's remained in my head all these years. My heart melts, my chest heats up as I watch him lose his mind. The sight of Remy in ways that I know others don't get to see, really amps up the pleasure.

Every fiber of my being is consumed in fireworks, every cell in my body reacts to this man. I really do feel like I'm *all in*, in a way I haven't been before. With anyone. Fucking hell, why does it have to be this way with the one man who's off limits?

Eventually we crash onto the couch together, panting, sweaty, and in one another's arms. Remy is way too clothed for my liking here, I'd love to be able to run my hands all over his body, just as he is mine, but I can't catch my breath enough to speak. He really has drained and exhausted me in the best way possible. Grateful that he's still here, I hold on to him for as long as I can.

But eventually, the heat shrouding us starts to subside, leaving us both in cold, stark reality. It's then things become just a little uncomfortable because we know we've fucked up.

Again. I'm shocked how I managed to swipe reality to one side so we could fool around once more. Just because it feels good, doesn't mean it *is* good...

"I think we should talk," I say quietly as we slowly pull apart from one another. "A bit of an awkward one, but one that I think we need."

"Mhmm, yeah, you're right," he agrees with a similar strain in his tone. "We've got to be a bit more careful, haven't we? So, we don't make things more complicated than the already are."

Sickness swirls in my stomach because we've just gone from riding a powerful and intense high, to a sinking low. All because we know we shouldn't cave in to temptation.

"So, I'm your fiancée in public only," I reiterate, trying to act like this is fine. Because really, I do need Remy on my arm. This publicity is vital for me. "That's good. I think if we stick to that, then everyone will be happy around us."

As Remy moves away from me and dresses himself, I tightly tie my robe around me, but more for protection this time, rather than just to cover myself up. My heart feels like it's sitting on the line here, far more than it should be, which means it could be stomped on at any given moment.

"I have to go to work," he mutters, almost under his breath. I hate the way he can't meet my eyes now. Not because I feel used or anything, I know this isn't like that, but because we have to stuff down our feelings which means we might not be

able to meet eyes again. “But I will be in touch, okay? We’ll sort out how this will work.”

I swallow hard. “Sure, whatever you want, Remy. Whatever works best.”

My whole body deflates like a balloon as I watch Remy leave. Things weren’t supposed to go this way. He wasn’t supposed to leave like this. It actually might be the best for both of us if we set out some strong boundaries and stick to them, so my heart doesn’t get damaged. His too, because we really can’t ever make this real. No matter how much we want to.

CHAPTER 8

Remy

I'm supposed to be in the office right now, I know that, but I haven't got the brain for work. Not after what just happened. This whole fake fiancée thing was supposed to make my life a little better. I thought it would be easier to have my mom think that I'd found love, and I also thought that the press thinking I'm settled down would be easier for me to manage.

I wasn't expecting the one person who became my fake fiancée to make everything more complex.

That's why I've come to my happy place, where I can be distracted and take everything off of my mind for a while. I'm in the Congregate Care unit, a place where I can actually help out and make a positive difference in the world. No one knows that I do a lot of charity work with the underprivileged kids of the city, but they don't have to know. This is just for me.

"Remy, this check is huge!" Mary Lou calls out as soon as she sees what I've handed her this morning. "Are you sure about this? You have already given us so much."

I chuckle with laughter. “I know you guys want more equipment for the playground, and I want to contribute to that. Plus, you can buy more books. The collection is looking a little shabby.”

Mary Lou laughs and nods. She might be acting all casual about it, but I know how much all the staff here appreciate my involvement. I actually spent a lot of time here before making my first donation, playing with the kids and volunteering my time, to check that this was the right charity for me. I know there are a lot of corrupt charities out there, that will use the money wrongly, and I don’t want to be any part of that. But Mary Lou and her team really care about these kids and want to give them what they can.

Some of these poor children don’t have a lot of anything. Their families live in poverty or their home life is horrible. The Congregate Care unit is the only space where they can really be at peace.

“Well, we can have a nice dinner for the kids this weekend then,” Mary Lou continues. “I’m sure they will all be really grateful to you for that much.”

A tugging on my pant leg draws my eyes downwards where I see Alice, a child who gets a *lot* from the unit, smiling up at me. “Hey, are you coming out to play with us today? Ben and Rebecca want to play tag, but we need some more players. They want you to play with us.”

I immediately nod. These wholesome kids who just need a bit of respite from their lives force everything else out of my

head. Their smiles and happiness which come from something so small allow me to ground myself in reality. *Nothing* is that important, ever. Not even the fuck ups that I can't seem to stop making when it comes to Zoe. Even if they feel devastating right now.

I head outside to the playground I paid for, excitedly wondering how they will expand it, and I play some games with the children for a while. I don't even feel guilty about missing work when I'm here, because my volunteered time is so worth it. Spending time with these children today only makes me want to do more for them. I will have to speak to Mary Lou.

But I also want to spend my time off work with my own son, which is why I have messaged my mother to meet me here at lunchtime for a picnic. My lifestyle is busy, and it can be that way because Mom is there to look out for Wyatt, but I know I could do more. Another mistake I make is getting too lost in my work, telling myself that I need to do this for our future, without thinking about the present. I would love to correct that, as much as I can, before it's way too late.

The only problem is it's hard for me to see Wyatt without seeing Lisa, too. Even three years later, I find it a bit of a struggle to see him, and to know that she isn't here anymore. I guess that's something I really need to work on, along with everything else I've messed up too.

God, I really am in a mess, aren't I? Everything is messy in my life. Sleeping with Zoe *again* has only piled it on more.

She needs to keep her distance. How can I tell her that us being together intimately only makes things worse? If she can't already see that, then I need to make her understand one way or another.

“Remy, before you go...” Mary Lou calls out as she catches me putting my coat on. “Can I have a word with you?” I follow her into her office, wondering what this might be. “The kids want to have a bit of a party for you, to say thank you for everything that you have done.”

“Oh no, you don't need to do that.” I shake my head rapidly. “I appreciate it, but you know I don't do this for the attention, I don't need any kind of party.”

“I knew you'd say that, but the children really want to do this for you. It was actually Alice's idea. I can't let them down by not doing it. It won't be anything massive.”

I sigh heavily. “Okay, fair enough. If it's small, I can come in next week?”

“I will text you within a day, if that's alright?” I nod. Mary Lou lets out another little laugh. “Sorry, I know that you have a busy schedule, but the kids...”

“The kids are more important. I know that. But I do need to leave now.”

We say our goodbyes with promises to see one another the following week, before I head outside to find my mom. Wyatt instantly lets go of her hand to run and hug me. I hold him for as long as I can before he gets irritated and wiggles free. I

make a silent promise to myself as I hold my son to put him first as well. I always have done that, to the best of my ability, now I just need to be better. Simple. Wyatt deserves the best parents that he can get.

“Do you want to go to the park nearby?” I ask my over-excited son, who of course agrees. “Come on then, it’s just over there. Let’s take a walk, shall we?”

I might be exhausted from running around with Alice and her friends, but Wyatt has given me another surge of energy. I’m actually starting to push my Zoe related anxiety to one side, to focus on what I can change and make better for my family.

“So, what’s happening with you?” Mom asks sharply, reminding me that I’m not out of the woods yet. Not if she has anything to do with it. “Why are you not at work?”

“I wanted to fulfill my charity commitments today, that’s all.” I offer her a one-shouldered, blasé shrug. “Plus, I know Wyatt likes this park, so I thought it’d be nice.”

Mom frowns. Not the reaction I want. “And your little girlfriend isn’t here?”

I just about resist the urge to roll my eyes. “She’s not my ‘little girlfriend,’” I remind her. “She’s my fiancée, and she’s working today so she can’t be here.”

“Working... right. Acting. And she’s happy with that job, is she? Are you happy with it?”

“Mom, it isn’t up to me what Zoe does for her job. She loves acting.”

God damn it, I might not have invited her if I knew that I’d be in for the third degree. I would love it if Mom was just happy for Zoe and I like I thought she would be. This is ridiculous. I wanted to calm her down because Freddie freaked me out with my comments that I’m “killing her,” but meeting Zoe seems to have made her worse.

If this was just about Mom, and the press wasn’t an issue, then I might put an end to it here and now, but Zoe has a lot to gain from this as well, which is why I don’t shut down now. The press seem to have mostly responded very positively to me being with Zoe. I’ve seen it, and everyone is intrigued by her, which can only be good for her career.

“I don’t know how you even managed to meet this young actress, Remy. It seems strange to me. The more I think about it, the weirder it is. Where did you meet her? How did you end up dating someone so much younger than you? I need to trust her.”

“Well, you love Freddie, don’t you?” I reply wryly. “It’s his sister.”

If that doesn’t make Mom trust her, then I don’t know what will happen because she’s always been very warm and friendly with my best friend. I think I might have hit the nail on the head here, and finally found something that will silence my mother... but again, I’ve misstepped, which only becomes

clear the moment Mom's facial expression completely changes.

"I can only imagine that Freddie is *very* upset with you then," she hisses, letting anger drip off her tongue now. "What are you playing at, Remy? You don't want to lose your best friend over this. Freddie has always been there for you. He was there even during the darkest times of your life, which helped you survive it. Don't push him away now."

I hang my head low, allowing the guilt to wash over me once more. Because Mom's right. I lost many friends when Lisa died because I was so closed off and I struggled so much. But Freddie was always there, and he wasn't going anywhere no matter how much I tried to push him away.

This is exactly why Zoe and I *need* to keep our distance. Easier said than done, but I suppose we can try and counteract it by making sure we aren't alone again. If this showmance is for the public eye, then we need to keep it in the public eye always.

"I won't lose Freddie, Mom. This isn't going to come to that."

"I think we need to spend more time together," she insists. "And like I said, I want to see how you and her are living together, to check that it's a suitable environment for Wyatt. I want to come to dinner with you both, so I can get a look at you in your own home. I want to check that everything is child friendly, and there isn't a toxic relationship between you both. I know you say you're happy, but I need to see it."

Great, just great. I'm not too keen on any of this because it's an added pressure that I don't need, but convincing Mom that this is good for me has become something that I need to stick to. I might even be doubling down because of her ambush.

"Fine," I respond as we finally reach the park for Wyatt to play in. "What about this weekend? Will that work for you? But if you're going to come to my house, I want you to be a bit kinder to Zoe. She hasn't done anything to deserve so much harshness from you."

Mom scoffs, as if this isn't true. But she knows. She has to know. She was there during the last dinner, and she must have heard herself being so cruel. She can dismiss me all she likes, but I don't intend to let her hurt Zoe again. I feel like I might be doing a great job of that all by myself.

The last thing I want to do is hurt Zoe, but if I can't keep away from her, then what do I do?

CHAPTER 9

Zoe

The panel members whisper to one another, before their eyes finally meet mine once more. I wonder how many of my thumping heartbeats they can hear from over there. I can't stop twisting my hands anxiously around in front of me because I'm drowning in nervous energy.

I *really* want this job. I want it so badly because it's awesome. It's a gritty drama with a great script full of twists and turns. Of course, I'm only up for a small role here, because I am just getting started in New York City, but my hopes are sky high.

These people reached out to me because of the paparazzi photos of me with Remy. He has a *massive* part in this, but he doesn't even know it. Not yet anyway. I'll tell him though, if this becomes good news once I get out of here. Because it's been a couple of days, and I would like an excuse to speak to him again, just to check where we stand.

"Thank you very much for coming to see us today," the woman sitting in the middle of the panel, who's name escapes me right now, says. "We appreciate it, and actually we would

love to work with you. We believe you're perfect for this role..."

My heart leaps excitedly into my throat. "Oh, my goodness, that's great news. Thank you."

"We have your number," she continues. "So, we will be in touch when we want to have our first table read, to check that all the characters work well together."

I nod eagerly because I love a table read. I know a lot of actors find it a pain to do, but I love seeing the absolute beginnings of the characters coming to life. It's an adventure, and that's the first real step in the right direction. "That sounds great."

I'm so glad now that I didn't take the first role I was offered, before I even set foot in New York, because I can keep my morals wrapped up tightly here. Nudity isn't even an issue in this TV series, certainly not for my character, so I can just enjoy it here.

My cell phone is already in my hand before I even leave the building because I'm just so excited to let Remy know what's going on. I can't wait to hear his voice as well, because I've missed it more than I would like to admit. Especially since I've been telling myself that we need to keep a professional distance from one another.

"Hello?" he answers warmly, sounding pleased to hear from me which sends warmth trickling down my spine. "Zoe, is everything alright?"

“Hey, Remy, I just wanted to let you know that I got an acting gig. A real one.”

“You did? That’s amazing news. Did this come from the press we got the other night?”

“Yeah, it did.” We *have* to do more. We need to keep on with this positive path which is giving my career a much-needed kick start. “Isn’t that awesome? I’m so excited...”

“I’m at home at the moment,” he interjects. “Do you want to come over to talk about our plan from here on out? Because we need to make a plan, right? About what’s next.”

I don’t say anything at first, because I’ve promised myself that I wouldn’t ever let myself be alone with Remy again, to protect the pair of us from getting our hearts stomped on by a situation that neither of us can control. But this seems like a good idea, doesn’t it? Because I really do want to carry on with the positive work that we’ve both been doing.

Yeah, it’ll be fine. We both basically know the boundaries now anyway, don’t we?

“I’ll get a cab now,” I eventually respond, ignoring the fizzing of excitement that bubbles in the pit of my stomach at the mere idea of seeing him again. “See you in a moment.”

I try and gear myself up for the whole journey to Remy’s home. I know I need to be strong and keep a distance from him, however tempting he is. But nothing can prepare me for the moment I lay eyes upon him. My heart skips a few beats and I immediately become weak in the knees. Damn it, this is

why I can't ever control myself around him. The urge is just too much.

But knowing this isn't enough to stop me from taking his invite and heading inside. The inside of Remy's penthouse suite is mind blowing. I'm instantly impressed with how cool the view is, and how much space he has, especially for New York City.

"So, you got the acting job, right?" he starts as he pours us both a celebratory glass of champagne. Drinking and lowering our inhibitions probably isn't the best plan we've ever had, but I also think we might need it to take the edge off a bit. "That's great news. I'm so happy for you. Especially if it's the sort of job you want."

"The script is so cool, Remy. I'm really excited."

"Well then, I need to go through the invitations I have to industry events to see which ones are interesting enough to have the press there. Then you can be on my arm."

He really is a godsend, isn't he? "I'd love that. Thank you."

"But there is a little twist," he says with a regretful stare. "And that involves my mother." Oh boy, the woman who hates me. "She's insisting that she comes to have dinner with us here, at our home, so she can judge how we're living for Wyatt's sake, and check us out."

I don't want to do this, but I also know I can't refuse. Making his mother happy is one of the terms I basically agreed to when we started all of this. I can't turn my back on that

now, while things are going well for me. So, I nod along in agreement, hoping it won't be as bad.

“Okay, but that means I'm going to have to bring a bunch of my stuff here...”

“Right, yes,” Remy agrees. “And I will purchase some stuff that could belong to you as well. Anything to make it seem like we really have been in a long-term relationship.”

Nerves zigzag in the pit of my stomach. I don't like this at all. To help me feel better, Remy wraps his arms around me in a hug. Again, this is an immediate mistake because the chemical reaction sparks flames immediately. I dart my eyes up towards him, trying to silently remind the both of us that we're being careful here, right? We have to be careful...

Oh shit. His eyes are hooded over, desire has claimed him in the same way it has me. If we aren't smart here and we don't step away from one another then we'll lose the battle of wills once more. I just need to step back... one step... that's all I need...

But I don't do that. My feet don't edge backwards like they should. Instead, I find myself rising onto my tip toes and taking his mouth with my own before I can do the right thing.

Almost instantly, deep passion grips me, and the kissing intensifies. All rational thought goes flying out the window the moment we connect. This is why I was hesitant, why I knew I shouldn't have come here, because we simply cannot be alone. The moment I can feel a stirring in his pants, my hand follows. Eagerly, without fear of the repercussions of this, even though

I know it can't be good, I tug his zipper open and pull him free. Wrapping my fingers around his steel length pools heat in my panties, and I crave him even more, which is when a new and thrilling idea comes to me. Remy has shown me new and exciting sensations, I want to push that further.

So with my eyes still firmly fixed on his, I slip downwards to my knees. Remy is clearly lost in heavenly sensations. He can only groan with bliss as he realizes what's happening. What I'm doing. He seems to lose the ability to speak as hot streams of my air blow along him, causing his cock to twitch with need.

Smiling, I place a kiss on his tip, tasting him ever so slightly. His whole body bucks as I do, the sound that comes flying out of his mouth is so exciting. I can't resist running kisses up and down his length, but it's clear his tip is where he likes it the most. I love holding on to this brand-new piece of information of him deep in my heart. It's thrilling.

I don't kiss him again though, instead I part my lips wide and take him deep in my mouth, swirling my tongue around him as I bury this man deep in the wet heat, to the back of my throat.

"Fuck, Zoe," he cries out as he knots his fingers up in my hair, tugging ever so lightly when it feels good. "Oh God, your mouth... it's fucking incredible..."

I enjoy dragging my lips up and down his length, tasting every damn inch of him. There's so much of him. His cock fills my mouth, stretching my lips around him. But that

doesn't stop me from making broad strokes with my tongue all over him, embracing his sweet, salty taste.

The louder Remy moans and the more his body bucks and shakes, the more I pick up the pace. I can't take my eyes off of him because it's so utterly intoxicating to watch him crumble and fall apart while I have this much power over him.

"I need you," Remy suddenly growls as he tucks his hands underneath my armpits. "Now."

Before I even know what's happening, he has me lifted to my feet and we're kissing frantically once more. I can't get his clothing off fast enough because this time I need to see every inch of his body, and he's stripping me down rapidly as well. There really is no thought here, neither of us are thinking straight, we're just acting on impulse, and I fucking love it. I can't get enough.

By the time we're both naked, and my hands are all over his rock-hard chest, Remy has me pressed up against the wall behind me. It's cold enough to make me squeal, but not enough to cool down the heat steaming through my body at the speed of light.

I want him, again, I need him, I have to have him inside me *now*.

Remy lifts me off the ground, so I can wrap myself around him again in that gorgeously familiar manner. I adore having him between my thighs more than anything else in the world. Especially as he slips deep within me, setting all my nerves on

edge once more. God damn it, I don't think I'll ever get used to the feel of this man fucking me wildly.

Remy uses the wall behind me to thrust deeply within me, to brush over my clit, and to send me soaring into space all over again. The pleasure comes thick and fast, knocking both of us off kilter, each thrust making us scream louder than the last.

At the very last moment, he kisses me, connecting us as we both tumble headfirst into glorious pleasure. I honestly do feel our bond tighten a little, and my feelings as well. They're swelling dangerously, my heart pumps just for him, and I can't stop them. I can't protect myself when I just keep falling. There's no way this won't implode and end up in endless trouble.

But still, I kiss him back and I hold on to him for as long as I can. I guess because I'm a fool.

CHAPTER 10

Remy

I can't stop pacing around my whole apartment, because the nerves for tonight are damn near overwhelming. I need tonight to go well, just to take one of the horrible worries off my shoulders. If Mom can just *see* that Zoe and I are together, and she can just accept our engagement, then I can concentrate on everything else swirling rapidly around me.

The press have accepted it. The stories showing Zoe and I all look great. The internet is mostly positive as well, but I have learned over time never to expect too much of it. There are *always* going to be people who have horrible things to say. Some people want to be nasty about me and my age, about me using my billions to get myself a younger woman who's much too beautiful for me. Others are nasty about Zoe, calling her a gold digger and worse... but the majority is good, and the public really seems to believe in the engagement.

It's only my mom now, so today is absolutely massive. It *needs* to work out for us.

It *does* look like Zoe lives here though. I think we've done a good job of that. There's clothing in my wardrobe, toiletries in

the bathroom, photos on the wall... we've made it look great, but this is my hawk-eyed mother. If there is something to find, then she will find it.

"It's going to be fine," Zoe calls across the room to me. "Don't worry. We've got this."

She should be the one panicking actually, but somehow tonight she's remained calm and in control. I guess because we've talked this through until the bitter freaking end, covering absolutely everything that we need to, and how to cope if things go wrong. I shouldn't be panicking that it won't seem like a real relationship when the chemistry is oh so real, and we keep accidentally basically ending up in bed together. But I still am. I can't help myself.

Maybe I should be the one playing with Wyatt, because Zoe is having a great time with him. She doesn't have the weight of the world on her shoulders like I do. This really does seem to be because of my son as well, and not just because our "relationship" is working out well for her.

"You're right," I reply, even though Zoe isn't listening any longer. She's back to the game, smiling and laughing with my son. "We can get through this. We have to."

I stare out the window once more, taking in my view of the city, trying to focus on the bigger picture here rather than just the strain of this damn dinner. I'm honestly starting to wish that I'd just cancelled it, or not allowed my mother to talk me into it in the first place. She did this to manipulate me, and I let her get away with it just because I know she wants what's

best for me and for Wyatt. When am I going to learn that she can't always win?

The knocking at the door alerts me to the fact that Mom is here. I meet Zoe's eyes, spotting a spark of fear there. We share that! But it's too late for me to back out now, so with a deep sigh I head for the door and open it, unlocking what's bound to be a crazy can of worms.

She can't still distrust Zoe, I try my hardest to convince myself. Look at her, playing with Wyatt and making him smile. Why would Mom cause any more issues here?

Actually, that's a question I don't need answering. Not yet. I'm sure I'm about to find out. I unlock the door and plaster a smile on my face to greet my mother...

"Mom?" I dart my eyes between her and a guest. What the fuck is happening *now*?

"Oh, yes, you see I brought a guest with me," Mom laughs, clearly extremely happy with herself. "Because it's been a long time since we've all been together. I thought it might be nice to have your best friend with us as well. You don't mind, do you?"

I have no choice but to shake my head as her and Freddie step inside my home, even though I'm overwhelmed with horror. Not because I don't want Freddie here, but because his presence does complicate things. There's no escaping that. I know Zoe will freak out as well.

How the hell are we going to make everything look real enough to convince my mother, and fake so Freddie doesn't realize there's something actually happening here. Now, Zoe and I aren't just trying to hide something that accidentally happened years ago, which may possibly have been forgiven if we ever got found out because it was forever ago. Now we have to try and hide us now. We have to disguise the fact that we can't keep our freaking hands off of one another.

Mom has done this on purpose. She knows exactly what she's doing. This is her ploy to try and make Zoe crack, so I guess we have to double down and play this even better. Determination surges through me because it's almost become a stupid game of chess. I won't let Mom beat me. Not when it comes to my own life.

I *know* that she's helped me out and made life a lot easier since Lisa passed away, but there are limits, and this bull shit has really pushed me to the freaking edge. My fists curl up angrily by my side as I realize that this is a battlefield now. I need to get Freddie alone at some point so I can make sure that he's on my side. I'm sure he will be, since he knows what's happening here, but I can't help worrying how far my mother has spread her manipulation.

"I'm going to get drinks," Zoe declares, much too brightly. "Remy, do you want to help me?"

Anxiously, I follow her into the kitchen where I feel the same energy burning off of her too. She mouths words at me, which I don't pick up on until I get near enough.

“What are we going to do?” she whispers quietly as we make drinks almost on autopilot. It actually does look like we’ve been living together for a while because we’re in sync. “Freddie changes everything. He’s mad at me already, he hasn’t been the same since the photos...”

I rest my hand reassuringly on top of hers, to try and calm her down. “Freddie knows what we’re doing and why. He’s on our side here, don’t forget that.”

She nods, but I don’t sense certainty. If Zoe isn’t sure that Freddie is on our side, then what the hell are we going to do? How can I turn Freddie back around to us?

“I’ll get him in a moment,” I whisper as she grabs hold of a couple of drinks to being back in with us. “I’ll talk to him, don’t worry. It’ll be fine.”

The atmosphere is colder now, this new turn of events has done just what I’m sure my mother thought it would. She wants to see the cracks between Zoe and I. She wants us to fall apart so she can be proven right. And Freddie really might be the person to help with that.

I lean down to kiss Zoe, to reassure her that way, but she snatches away before our lips can connect. Damn it, of course we can’t actually kiss. Not in front of Freddie. What might have been a great little gesture in front of my mother is much more complex now.

“Come on,” she says with a pink flush staining her cheeks now. “Let’s do this.”

We find Mom fussing over Wyatt as Freddie scrolls aimlessly through his cell phone. He doesn't look like he particularly wants to be here, which has me wondering why he came. Is this *just* because of my mother, or is he still angry too? We've talked a little ever since the press photos leaked, but I guess Zoe is right. It hasn't been the same since that night. I've been all caught up in everything, but it's true, our friendship has suffered because of this plan.

Even though tonight is messed up enough, I need to try and see where Freddie and I stand as well. Great, just another stressor to pile on. Like I need that!

I tap Freddie on the shoulder and indicate for him to follow me. I know it's dangerous to leave Mom alone with Zoe, but I'm sure she'll behave a little in front of Wyatt. This is the best time for us to have a bit of a chat, a casual talk to see where things lie.

"Oh my God, Mom is a nightmare," I say with a laugh as we head out of earshot. "I'm sorry you got all dragged into this. She's determined to make this difficult for me."

Freddie's face worryingly doesn't change. "She wants me here. I thought it best I come."

"Yeah, mmmm, did she say why?" The atmosphere remains cold, and I hate it.

"Well, she wants me here because she's trying to work out what's really going on with the two of you. I guess she's more switched on than we planned, right? This might be killing her

more than the idea of you never finding anyone to settle down with.”

I don't like that *at all*. Especially because the last time we had this conversation, Freddie was joking around with me, and we were having fun. That definitely isn't the case here.

“Well, I can't end things yet. Not when it's helping Zoe's career. You've heard how well she's doing. This really is leading to her getting the sort of acting roles that she wants.”

He narrows his eyes at me suspiciously. “That's starting to sound a little like an excuse, Remy. This was supposed to benefit you, remember?”

“The press see me in a serious relationship, that's what I wanted.”

Truth be told, I'm struggling to remember *why* this all started. I know there were a number of excuses laid out in front of us when we first made the plan in the bar, but now... well now, I just want this to continue because I have an unnatural attachment to Zoe, and I can't let go of her. As dangerous as things are, I can't keep away from her no matter what.

“I think it's best that I'm here to keep an eye on Zoe anyway,” Freddie continues with his arms folded across his chest. “Because it went horribly the last time around, didn't it? Dinner with your mother. Zoe ended up having a really hard time. I want to protect her.”

Shit, now I feel even worse. But I continue to smile at my friend. “I know, and I’ll protect her too. We know how to play Mom now; we’ve been talking about it. We’ll do whatever we can to make sure that Mom believes in our relationship.”

I hate the way it feels like he can’t trust me anymore. There’s a sky-high wall around him, which I don’t know how to break down. I can’t help but worry about all those things Mom said to me about Freddie being my constant and sticking by me. How can I make it up to him?

I can’t, can I? Not when I’m being incredibly dishonest about what’s really going on with Zoe and I. I don’t deserve his trust, and that hurts most of all. Why do I have to have all of these confusing and conflicting feelings for the one person I can’t even consider romantically for real? It isn’t fair. Lisa was taken from me, and now the only feelings I have threaten everything.

What the fuck am I going to do? How will we survive this?

CHAPTER 11

Zoe

Z*oe: Megan, I'm in hell! MIL is acting crazy.*

I know she isn't my mother-in-law, but that's the shorthand Megan and I have when discussing her. Unfortunately, she's in LA at the moment on an acting job, so she can't actually help me, but I need someone to know what's going on.

Megan: Get out your best acting skills. You can charm her.

Zoe: She brought Freddie with her to dinner, to try and trip me and Remy up. Now she keeps asking me all these awkward, personal questions in front of him to make it embarrassing.

Megan: Fuck, I wish I was a fly on the wall. Haha. Freddie knows what's going on though, right? He's in on the plan, so why isn't he helping you more?

I sigh, wishing I had an answer to that one. I don't really know what's going on with my brother at the moment. He doesn't seem like himself at all, which is super weird, and is only adding to how painful this night is. I don't know if it's

worth it anymore, truly. The connections, the money, all of it... especially the romance I know shouldn't be going on...

Zoe: I'll keep you up to date. Wish me luck!

Megan: Good luck, don't let anyone make you feel small. Love ya.

Zoe: Thanks. Love you too. Can't wait until you're home xx

Now isn't the time to fill Megan in on every sordid detail as well, but I actually might have to once she returns from LA. Secrets might spread more if you ever let them out, but this one might explode within me and kill me if I don't share. I've proven endlessly to myself that I'm no good at solving my own issues, but she might know what to do.

She certainly can't do worse than me anyway, since all I seem to do is get myself in deeper trouble. I keep falling overboard and allowing myself to drown, ignoring any life rafts that are floating around me. My best friend might save me when I can't save myself.

"So, what do you think of this area, Zoe? Is this where you want to live?"

I can't take it. Another question might just finish me off. I know Barbara's words sound innocent enough, but she's always got an undertone. She's always trying to make me feel off.

"I lived in Williamsburg before," I reply honestly. "Not too far away, so I do love it."

“I thought you lived in London before. Freddie said you were acting in London...”

“I was, but then I came here to live with my friend, Megan. And that was in Williamsburg as well.” I don’t even have the energy to force a smile anymore. “We might not have lived here when we were growing up, but I always thought it was a cool part of the city.”

“Same,” Freddie jumps in. “My favorite bars that I work in are here. It really is great.”

Freddie meets my eyes for what feels like the very first time tonight. He’s looked at me, but this is the first time it seems like he’s *seen* me. He smiles warmly and I grin back. Not necessarily because he’s stood up for me—although I do like having his support—but because I want our relationship to go back to how it was before. He might have always been a little bit on the overprotective side, but we’ve always loved one another. He’s the one family member I used to find it easy to be open and honest with... until now.

That’s sad actually. Really sad because whatever this thing is between Remy and I, I don’t want it to ruin my sibling relationship with Freddie. He’s the only family that I have in New York.

“And how is work going?” Barbara continues. I’m sure she already asked this earlier on in the evening, but if she wants to interrogate me again like a police officer, then so be it. “You have been asked to do ‘pornography’...” She mouths that

word in front of Wyatt but my face steams up regardless. “Haven’t you? Is that something you’re considering?”

“It wasn’t like that. Just nudity,” I bite back. I won’t mouth anything because I don’t feel like I have anything to be ashamed of. “And that’s something I want to avoid my whole career.”

Barbara cocks a knowing eyebrow, like she can see the way my life will go before me. She sees me headed down the sort of seedy path that simply isn’t for me. I don’t think Barbara should be judging me even if that was something I wanted to do. It has nothing to do with her!

“I think this little man might be tired,” Freddie announces as he ruffles Wyatt’s hair. “Maybe I should get out of your way so you can get him to bed.” My heart sinks, if he goes, everything will get worse! “Zoe, do you think you could come with me? I was just thinking that we could go for a drink around the corner? I have some family stuff I need to talk to you about.”

“Oh... sure...” I glance towards Remy. “Is that cool? You don’t need me for a moment, do you? I think we have a lot to talk about... you know, because of our parents.”

Remy nods right away because I’m pretty sure he knows what this is. A ploy, right? I don’t think Freddie *really* wants to chat to me about our parents. They’re quite happy in England. I’m sure he wants to know what the hell is going on here. With me.

“You go, have a nice time with Freddie. I’ll see you later, okay?”

We both know I’m not coming here tonight, but I guess we still need to cover that so Barbara thinks I live here. I’m glad to go home though, because I’m drained. I need to lie in my bed and curl into a ball until I sleep this nightmare off.

Barbara looks like she’s going to stay, which doesn’t surprise me. She can chat rubbish about me without me here which I just know she’ll love. I don’t even have the energy to care how Remy’s going to handle it, I just need to be out of here. So, I leave eagerly with Freddie, finally feeling like I can breathe properly once the cool night air washes over us both.

“That was intense, wasn’t it?” I chuckle a little as we cross the street. Freddie knows where we’re headed, since we don’t really need to have a drink. Freddie’s walking me back to my place so we can talk it all through. “Remy’s mom is something else.”

“You don’t have to put up with that, Zoe,” Freddie replies firmly. “If I’d known that Barbara was going to be like that with you, I never would have suggested that you be Remy’s fake fiancée. I know she’s protective, but I don’t like seeing her that way with you.”

“It’s been helpful though,” I have to admit. “You know I have an acting role now, and that came from people seeing me in the media as Remy’s girlfriend. I guess he’s a real big shot in the rich people socialite type crowd, isn’t he? Which works out well for me.”

Freddie shoots me a look. “But you have that link now, right? You can start building on that with your own talent. I don’t think you need to keep being on Remy’s arm. I don’t think it’s helping you anymore. I don’t think it’s helping him either. It seems messy for the both of you.”

A bitter ball of bile lodges itself at the base of my throat. I don’t like this. I don’t think it’s a good idea to cut things off with Remy right now, but I honestly can’t think of any reason I can give my brother to keep things going. Freddie won’t like anything I have to say.

“Maybe you’re right,” I say instead, even though I don’t believe a single word coming out of my mouth. “I’ll speak to Remy about it when we get the chance and work out a plan.”

Freddie frowns. I’m starting to get the impression that he doesn’t want me anywhere near his friend at all. Shit, did he sense the chemistry between us? Is it possible that someone told him what’s going on? I don’t think there’s another person who’s aware of the lines being blurred, but secrets always have a strange way of getting out, don’t they? What if Freddie is waiting for me to be honest about it? There’s no way in hell I’m going to say anything, I can’t fall into that trap. I don’t want to drop myself in it if he doesn’t have a clue.

“I just don’t want you to have any stress, Zoe. I don’t want this to be an issue anymore.”

I nod along with him because I don’t have anything to say to Freddie anymore. He’s voiced his opinion now, I get it, but that doesn’t change a thing. Anyway, we’re at my home now,

and I think Freddie wants to leave. He's got that glazed over, distracted look in his eyes.

“Well, I guess I will see you soon then?” I ask him. “We should have lunch sometime.”

His eyes meet mine once more. “Yeah, for sure. I'd like that.”

We hug and he walks away, waving as he goes, but that doesn't stop my heart from sinking because I can almost feel the pain radiating off of him. I caused that. This is all my fault, for overstepping that boundary with Remy. We both knew that shouldn't have happened, but we did it anyway. We were selfish; we put our own pleasure first, and it sucks.

But I'm undeniably obsessed with Remy, and I think I might have been for my whole life. Ever since I first had my teenage crush on him. I can't just walk away from him. I just can't. Even if it's going to fuck everything up, which is a hard pill to swallow.

As I head up the steps to my apartment, my mind spins all over the place. Freddie's words sink through me. He wants me to end things for his sake really, so we can continue as we are, being the siblings that we've always been, and he gets to keep his best friend. That's exactly what I want to do because I love my brother. But this is the one thing I struggle with.

My heart leaps as my cell phone bleeps. I have a funny feeling that this might be the man at the center of this all. Much as I know I should ignore it; I can't stop myself.

***Remy:** Phew! Tonight was HARD. But Mom seems to be warming to you... x*

***Zoe:** No way! I didn't get that feeling at all. I thought she hated me even more than before.*

***Remy:** I know, she surprised me too. I think it's going well though. Hey, do you have any plans for tomorrow because I'm actually having a little party, I'd like you to come with me x*

Shit, I guess if this is a work thing or one of those socialite parties, then I have to say yes. I hope that means he's going to get me a dress again. Not because I need the fancy dresses, but because that's the way everyone else expects me to be dressed.

***Zoe:** Sounds good, let me know the details.*

***Remy:** I'll pick you up in the morning. Goodnight x*

I can almost feel him whispering "goodnight" into my ear, while lightly kissing me on the cheek. I'd love to experience that kind of love in my life. It'd be mind blowing. I can see it with Remy, but I know I can't feel it for real.

CHAPTER 12

Remy

I can't believe I didn't think of this sooner. Waiting for Zoe to meet me outside her building has a fun, joyous feeling bubbling away in the pit of my stomach. I *never* show anyone this side of my life because I've always wanted to keep it private, but I think today that can change.

Today I'm happy to reveal a bit more of me to Zoe. I think it'll help us.

Mary Lou and the children at the Congregate Care unit can't wait for the party this morning, if the texts I've been receiving this morning are anything to go by. And actually I can't wait for it as well. I don't want the kids to feel like they have to do anything for me, but I get the impression that this is for all of us. We all need a bit of time to just relax and have fun.

"Oh!" Zoe cries out in shock as she spots me leaning against my car, waiting for her. "You're dressed casually. I don't think I've ever seen you out of a suit before."

She blushes immediately, because of course she's seen me naked! But today definitely isn't about that. I'm hoping we can see one another in a different light today. I think we should

work on building a friendship, right? So we can continue on with this.

“Well we don’t need fancy clothing for this party.”

“We don’t?” She checks her outfit quickly, but jeans and a cutesy t-shirt are absolutely perfect for where we’re going. “I don’t think this is party wear...”

“No, it is, trust me.” I beam ear to ear. “Come on, let’s go.”

She doesn’t look sure, but she climbs into the car with me, eyeing me curiously as she does. “Now I’m really curious about this party. Where are we going?”

“You’ll see,” I reply mysteriously. “Come on, I think you’ll enjoy it.”

Putting all of her trust in me, Zoe nods and leans back in her seat, eager to go wherever I want to take her. I can’t stop myself from smiling at her. This is why I’m sure Mom will continue warming to Zoe, because she’s absolutely irresistible. I do think dinner with Freddie, however challenging it was at the time, worked wonders. Mom did soften just a little.

“A Congregate Care unit?” Zoe asks curiously as we pull up by the building. “Is this where the party is? This isn’t what I was expecting at all.”

“I’m full of surprises,” I declare with a little chuckle. “Are you ready to go in?”

I can tell Zoe still doesn’t know what to expect as we head inside, but as the kids run over to hug me, all calling out my name excitedly, I think she’s starting to see that this is a place I

come all the time, because I'm not just business through and through. There is more to me. I didn't grow up as deprived as these children, I had a fairly comfortable life, but I also didn't have the sort of money that I do now. I always wanted to use my earnings to make a difference.

It's surprisingly cool to share this with someone. I like it a lot.

"Alice, Rebecca, Ben, this is a friend of mine. This is Zoe." The children wave to her and invite her inside. "And this is Mary Lou, the woman who runs this organization."

Because there's much less pressure here, I step back and let the introductions happen organically. Considering Zoe wasn't prepared for this at all, she's taking it all in her stride perfectly. I'm impressed with how well she's fitting in. We might be having issues with the other people in our lives, but not the wonderful people at the Congregate Care unit.

I love this. I'm so glad we're all here together.

"We have a cake for you!" Alice yells to me. "It's chocolate cake."

"Ooh really?" I chuckle at her twinkling eyes. "I *love* chocolate cake. How did you know that one is my favorite? You are so clever."

"It's my favorite too! Come on. Come and see what we have done for you."

Alice drags me into the other room and shows me the food display that they have thrown together for me. It's actually

really sweet, and a ball of emotion floods me. I wasn't expecting this to make me feel so many things all at once.

“Oh, Alice, this is lovely. I especially love the sign.”

Thank you, Remy! We love you!

That's seriously touching. Like I said to Mary Lou, I don't need any thanks, but it feels nice, nonetheless. I press my hands to my chest for a moment, just soaking this in. The kids don't have to do this, but the fact that they want to is just so lovely.

“Is that pretty lady your girlfriend?” Alice pipes up. “She's nice.”

“Zoe? She is really nice. I'm glad you like her.”

She nods eagerly. “Do you think Zoe will come and play games with us?”

“Why don't you go and ask her?” I offer. “I bet she will. She's a lot of fun. But she won't beat me if we're running. You know I'm the fastest runner here.”

“I beat you last time!” Alice throws her hands on her hips defiantly. “*I'm* the fastest one here. We are having a race today, so you'll see.”

This immediately descends into a play time like none other. I don't think I've seen Alice and the other children laugh as much as this in a very long time. They are drawn to Zoe, in a similar way they are drawn to me. She has a magnetic pull which draws people towards her because of her sweetness, her kindness, and that smile of hers which just lights everyone else

up around her. I couldn't think of a better guest to bring to my party than Zoe. She's the sort of person I always want by my side.

Zoe: Thank you for bringing me here today. I'm having the best time xx

I smile at her across the room, loving the text message that just flashed across my screen.

Remy: Thank you so much for coming! You've made this day so much more special x

Zoe: I didn't know you did this. I didn't know you helped out at a place like this xx

Remy: There are some things I like to keep to myself. The children here have a lot going on in their lives already. They don't need the sort of press attention I would bring x

I watch her process this, taking it in deep before she responds. I kinda like having this secret little chat, just for us. In the midst of everything that's all blurred, in all the fakeness, her words feel real, and I love having them on my phone to look at whenever I want.

Zoe: You're a good man, Remy. You might not have always been portrayed that way in the media, but you are. You have a good heart xx

Shit, I don't think anyone has ever said anything like this to me before. I don't think anyone has really *seen* me like Zoe seems to. This is what Mom doesn't see when she's lashing out at Zoe. This is what she doesn't understand. This is also

why it's so complicated, because of Freddie. Because he will hate me for allowing my feelings to overcome me like this.

Remy: You say that, but I think the kids like you more than me! x

Zoe: Well, I am very charming... I can understand why xx

Remy: You certainly are. That's why I'm so glad that you're my 'girlfriend' x

Zoe: Same! This has been more fun than any other acting job xx

The smile spreads across my face as I read her words over and over again. A cheekiness blasts through my body, making it really challenging to hold myself together here.

Remy: I don't think you're acting all the time though... x

Zoe: Hmm, you might be right about that. There have definitely been some very real moments along the way. Dangerously real... xx

Remy: Is today going to end up being dangerously real? x

My heart thunders as I wait for her to respond. This is naughty, this is cheeky, and I love it. I like texting this way with Zoe. I don't think I've had a connection quite like this before.

I can't stop myself from going on along with this further, to take the cheekiness even further. I know we can't go *too* far because of where we are, but we can have a little fun.

Zoe: I don't see why not... xx

It's hard for us to keep our eyes off of one another as we enjoy the rest of the party. I can sense a sizzling of electricity burning between us, which I'm surprised everyone else doesn't pick up on. But they are all so focused on having a good time and enjoying our bit of fun together.

I almost don't want this day to come to an end because I'm having so much fun. This makes me want to bring Zoe with me every single time I come and visit the children.

Eventually though, we have to go. It's time for us to get out of here, which is a shame but also means I might be able to sneak some alone time with Zoe.

***Remy:** Are you coming back to my place now? x*

I know I could wait until we're in the car to ask this question, but the texting has been fun. I love watching the way Zoe's face lights up when she spots a message from me. Her natural beauty really shines free, making my heart sing.

***Zoe:** I was hoping you'd ask... xx*

***Remy:** I can't wait until we're all alone. I can't even begin to tell you what I'm going to do to you x*

My heart thunders with excitement. It might be pounding so hard that everyone can hear it now, but I still don't care. I reach out and take Zoe's hand, holding onto her as we say goodbye to everyone, and we leave the building. The sizzle of electricity absolutely burns through us as we exit the building to get to the car.

I know I should hold back a little longer, but I've been behaving all day long, so as soon as I can, I cup my fingers underneath her chin, and I tug her lips towards mine. Kissing Zoe just for *us* and not to act like we're a couple for the public eye is intoxicating. I like it so much, way more than I should. I hold her face in my hands for a few moments, pressing my lips to hers, and enjoying every single moment of this.

There's a guillotine hanging over our heads, about to end this when the time comes, because this can't last forever, that's impossible. So, we have to embrace this moment while we can. I have to kiss her as much as I can, while I can.

A bolt of lightning shoots between me and Zoe, pushing us apart way before we're ready for it. Although it isn't actually lightning, that's just how it feels in the moment, because it's a shocking bright light which causes the pair of us to jump and to stare at one another in horror.

But if it isn't lightning, then what is it?

"What the hell is going on?" I murmur as my eyes flicker around, trying to find the source of what just happened. "What was that?"

As soon as I finally find the source of the lights, of the lightning, my heart sinks. Not today, not like this, no way. This is supposed to be a secret, just for me. I don't want the whole world to know. What the hell am I going to do now?

CHAPTER 13

Zoe

This has been one of the best days of my life. Seriously, seeing Remy like this, in his element has been wonderful. He's a more vulnerable, open version of himself here, and I can't get enough. Kissing him by his car before we leave the Congregate Care unit is the perfect way to end the most special date I've ever been on... until the flashing of cameras wrecks everything for us.

"Why the fuck are the press here?" Remy snaps angrily. He stiffens up like a new tension has completely flowed through him and ruined the atmosphere completely. "What the hell is going on? How did they find me? What are they doing?"

I know this is something he wants to keep to himself, but this reaction still knocks me sideways. I part my lips, about to ask Remy what he wants me to do, but he turns away from me and starts yelling at the photographers, letting some of his rage shine free.

Shit, this isn't good. I know Remy's upset, but I know this is a bad look. I really don't think he's going to want any of this

in the media tomorrow. Rapidly, I step closer to him, and I rest my hand on his arm in an attempt to get us out of here.

“Remy, we need to go,” I say softly, trying my hardest to get through to him without creating a scene. “We have to get out of here before this gets ugly.”

He shakes me off like I’m nothing. There’s an icy coldness which over comes him, reminding me of the man I had to deal with in the beginning of all of this. He was cold then and I didn’t like the way he acted. It seems like he’s become that way again.

“You have no right to interfere with my life,” he yells over my head at the man who’s still snapping photos of him. Remy definitely isn’t going to look good in the morning. “This isn’t just about me. At a place like this, there are vulnerable people. You shouldn’t be here.”

“Remy, please...” Even though he’s upset me, I continue to try because we haven’t gone through all of this for nothing. Just for him to act like a crazy person. Now that we’re linked, everything that he does reflects on me as well. He *has* to think of me with his actions.

“Get in the car, Zoe,” he barks at me, dismissing me completely. “This doesn’t involve you. Let me handle this.”

Holy shit. I can’t believe he just spoke to me like that. Am I losing my mind here? Did he *really* just act like that? I don’t know what his intentions are, but he can’t boss me around like that. No fucking way, I won’t stand for that shit. I can’t.

If only I was within walking distance. I'd leave right now. Unfortunately, Remy brought me here, so I don't have any choice but to get in the car to get a ride.

Remy continues on with his yelling for a while. I'm not going to keep trying to talk sense into him. I don't intend to keep fucking around when he doesn't want me around. Fuck that, I don't intend to be there while he makes a fool of himself. So, I climb into the car, but not because he told me to, because I'm over it. I'm done with him. Never again, no way.

It seems to take a lifetime, but soon he joins me in the car, muttering more complaints under his breath. All the sizzling heat that's been burning between us all day long is still burning hot. But it isn't desire anymore; it's anger. We're drowning in rage.

"Take me home," I snap, because there's no *way* I want to go to his house now. "I don't think I want to be around you for a while after that. That was insane."

"*Me?* I was insane?" he shoots back, still way too angry to acknowledge that he's done anything wrong. A part of me knows I shouldn't try and have any kind of conversation with him while he's in this mood, but I can't help myself. I need to be heard. He didn't listen to me when he was in the middle of attacking the press, even though I was trying my hardest to look out for him. I can't stand him ignoring my emotions again. "Are you kidding me? I have to protect those kids."

"I know you're trying to protect them, I get that. But the way you reacted wasn't good. You know what the press is

going to say about you now, and none of it will be positive. I tried to pull you back from that, so you didn't make a fool of yourself, but you were an asshole."

He purses his lips together, trying to keep his words inside. I know I might have overstepped a little, by calling him an asshole, but he really was in that moment. I'm not the sort of person who's going to sit back and say nothing. I won't be walked all over.

"The press need to know that they can't interfere with every aspect of my life," he returns with a measured tone. "They can't get in the middle of my charity work. I only want them around when I create an opportunity, otherwise it isn't fair."

"I don't think it works like that, Remy. I don't think you get to be in control of everything."

I don't care how much he doesn't like this, how much he doesn't want to hear it, he has to. Just because Remy doesn't respond, doesn't mean I regret what I say. Doesn't mean I shouldn't have said it. If he wants to be in a shitty mood, then so be it. As long as he gets me home, I don't care. This wonderful day has been turned on its head in an instant.

Neither of us even bother to say goodbye as I get out of the car. This argument hasn't even really escalated into anything, but it's created more than enough tension, so we don't have to speak. It doesn't feel like it's the end of everything as he drives away, but something has shifted. Something has fundamentally changed and shifted between us, which is really sad.

I run inside because I can't hold back my emotions anymore. The tears are absolutely streaming down my face because I'm heartbroken. I feel shattered inside. It's actually a relief as I run headfirst into Megan. Thank God my friend is here, I need someone to talk to.

"Oh God, Zoe, what the hell happened? Are you okay?"

"No, I'm not." I sniff hard and shake my head. "I'm really not okay."

She takes me to the couch, and we sit together, with her arms around me, enveloping me in her warmth. Because she's being so kind to me, I let way too much of the truth to shine free.

"It's Remy, Megan. It's messy. I didn't mean for it to get messy, but it has..."

"Uh oh." Her tone turns stern as she picks up on what I'm trying to say here. "By messy do you mean the act you put on for the media isn't an act anymore? Because it was starting to look a little too real to me, but I didn't think that would actually happen. What with Freddie and everything..."

The mention of my brother causes me to howl with pain. I have avoided thinking about Freddie as much as I can because it's bad enough as it is. I don't know what he will say about all of this. I don't want him to ever find out, but I can't imagine it remaining a secret forever.

"So, what exactly has been happening?" Meghan demands. "Because you haven't said everything. I need to know

specifics? I need to know what's happening so I can give you the advice you need. Because it could be anything, you know?"

I suck in a couple of deep breaths before I finally spill the beans about it all. "This has happened before," I admit. "Six years ago, before I went to London. Remy and I ended up in bed together after I had a crush on him for years. But it was obviously never going to be a *thing* then. I didn't need to panic about anyone finding out because it was never going to become anything."

"Shit, I didn't know that. I never would have encouraged things if I knew..."

"I shouldn't have gone along with it. You don't need to panic, this is my fault." I sigh heavily. "Then the fake relationship just got blurry right away. We couldn't seem to stop ourselves from hooking up all the time. But what I didn't realize is that my heart has been on the line the whole time. I've been developing feelings the entire time, and now..."

"Oh God, have you told him?" Megan gasps in panic. "What did he say?"

"No, I didn't tell him. I don't think I need to. We just argued about other stuff, and it hit me..."

My heart breaks all over again. Because our amazing date ended in such a shitty way, and I have a horrible feeling that he might not come back for me. It didn't feel like goodbye when I sent him away, but it does now. Now I think that was *it* for us. That actually was the ending moment.

“We argued and now I think he’s gone for good. I think that’s the end of it. I think it’s over. He just kinda drove off without saying anything, and now... now it’s all lost.”

Not just Remy, but Wyatt too. His mother might be pleased since she clearly doesn’t like me, but I have enjoyed getting to know Wyatt. He’s a really good kid. I’ll miss him.

Megan doesn’t say anything for a beat too long, but I can almost see the cogs ticking around in my best friend’s brain as she tries to process what’s been going on with me. Maybe I should have kept her in the mix the whole time. I wouldn’t be feeling so alone now.

“Maybe that’s for the best,” she finally tells me softly. “Because it would get messy with Freddie, wouldn’t it? You know he would hate to see you and Remy become real. Especially since he kinda pushed you together with the whole fake fiancée plot. So, for it to come crashing down without him finding out the truth... it might be a blessing in disguise.”

I try to make an agreeable sound because she’s probably right. While I don’t feel this way right now, I’m sure this is for the best. Even if it crushes me.

“And to think...” Megan continues in a teasing tone. “You were worried about your morals not so long ago. Worried about being nude in a movie. Turns out you’re not so unsure about getting naked anymore, am I right? That went flying out the window.”

I know she isn’t saying that to hurt me, she’s just joking and trying to lighten the atmosphere, but those words dig deep like

daggers. It's actually painful to be stabbed in such a way when I'm already bleeding out on the floor. I've messed everything up, haven't I? Absolutely everything. What the hell is wrong with me?

I've screwed up my career more than I thought possible. Getting mixed up with Remy might have been the biggest mistake I've ever made. I haven't even gotten my feet in the bottom rung of the New York City ladder yet, and I might already be falling. Tumbling with no way to catch myself, all because I'm really out of control.

Oh God, what am I going to do?

CHAPTER 14

Remy

I look at the long list of missed calls on my phone, sighing heavily to myself because there's no way I intend to return any of those calls. I don't want to speak to anyone right now. I can't. Seeing the shitstorm I've created in the media because of my outrage at the Congregate Care unit is unbearable. I'm in the middle of having some terrible things thrown at me, and I hate it.

The worst thing is that Zoe tried to warn me. I can see it now that I've calmed down. She was trying to stop me from throwing a fit, and I ignored her. I bypassed everything she said, dismissing it like crazy because I was in a rage, thinking only of Alice and the other kids. Now I can see that I really was an asshole. The way that I behaved was just terrible.

But I can't fix it because I don't know how. I'm stuck in the mud, unable to move because I've buried myself deep and I can't wiggle my way free. What a fucking mess. With the press being so intrusive and really trying to dig into parts of my life where I don't want them, I'm not quite sure how to make them go the hell away. I don't know how to deal with it.

I'm only well known in this area because I'm a wealthy businessman who has dated some semi famous people and brought attention my way. I can't even begin to imagine what it must be like for those who are very famous; this must be their life all the time. It would be unbearable.

"Daddy, the movie!" Wyatt calls out as the credits begin to roll. "I wanna watch it again."

I don't spend enough time with my son just vegging out like this, doing nothing because my head is almost always in business mode. But the last few days, I've been avoiding the office and allowing things to run on their own, so I can be here with him.

I might be avoiding the world, but it's giving me one benefit. Being with Wyatt. I think he's having a good time as well. I'm sure he's missing my mom because he usually spends a lot of time with her, but for now everything is good. Mostly.

The only person I can't help but notice who hasn't reached out to me is Zoe. Unsurprisingly so, because of how I behaved with her last. But it hurts nonetheless. I suppose I could be the one to make the first move, but I don't know what to say. I don't know how to make it right.

This, to me, feels more like a face-to-face conversation, and I don't want to leave the comfort of my home yet. Mostly because I have the sense that there's more I need to tell her as well. More I've been locking away inside and trying my best to pretend isn't there.

It's no longer as fake as it should be between Zoe and me. I don't know if it ever has been. I mean, we both knew that it'd be hard since there was already a flash of desire between us six years ago, but I didn't expect it to be impossible. I didn't think we knew we didn't stand a chance.

Fuck, she's been stealing pieces of my heart. I barely even knew that it was happening, but she's been capturing me with her beauty and her sweetness. She's been making me fall for her, and now I don't know what to do. I really don't want to lose my friendship with Freddie either. We've been there for one another through thick and thin, for all our lives.

God damn it, why have I put myself in such a weird position?

I flick the movie back on for Wyatt, because what else are we going to do? If we don't have something to watch, we'll go stir crazy in these four walls.

Knock, knock... Knock, knock, knock... Knock, knock...

I dart my eyes towards the door as someone bangs on it. My pulse immediately begins to pound because I panic with the assumption that it's the press. They've tracked me down and now want to harass me some more. There's no way I'm letting them near Wyatt, but since whoever it is keeps on knocking, I have to go and deal with this shit and bring it to an end now.

"Stay here," I mutter to my son. "I'll just be a minute. Wait right where you are, okay?"

Wyatt's already engrossed in the movie, so I head for the door, bracing myself for an argument. I don't want to do any more yelling, because I don't want to bring any more issues to the Congregate Care unit, or to myself, but it isn't going to be easy to reel myself in.

I really hope that Mary Lou isn't out there, hating me, wishing I knew how to keep my God damn mouth shut. I haven't had a chance to speak to her ever since that day, and I am not going to until the heat is off my back so I don't cause her issues.

"Mom?" I'm stunned as I swing open the door and there she is, narrowing her eyes at me suspiciously. "I told you Wyatt and I aren't very well at the moment..."

"I don't believe you." She pushes past me, inviting herself inside. "I want to know what's really going on. You're avoiding me because of all this media stuff, right?"

There's no point in lying because she already knows, so I nod. "Yeah, I'm just not enjoying the intrusion at the moment, so I'm keeping out of the way."

"Hmm, right. And Zoe? Where is she? Is she not here with you? I'm surprised. I thought that things were going really well with you. I expected to see her taking care of you."

Oh God, why the hell would she want Zoe here just to berate her? I'm *not* in the mood for Mom to go on and on about my fake fiancée today of all days. "She's not here. She has her own stuff."

“Hmm, right. I see.” Mom nods silently, but her disapproval speaks volumes. “She’s acting?”

“Yes.” I don’t know what she’s doing. I know she’s been lucky enough to get an acting job off the back of our press stuff, so hopefully that’s where she is. “She’s got work, so we’re here.”

“You have work as well. But you’re hiding away here, avoiding the world.”

“We’re not doing so good, I already told you that,” I insist, continuing along on the same path. “So Wyatt and I are just taking some time to recover, that’s all. Nothing to stress about.”

“Well, I miss my grandson, so I wanted to come and see him. It’s been too long.”

I can only step back when I spot Wyatt running into his grandmother’s arms. He sits comfortably on her lap while they watch the movie together. I guess I can’t hide away from the real world forever. She was always going to come for me, wasn’t she?

“What about Freddie?” Mom turns to ask me. “Does he know that you’re having a hard time? He’s always a good friend to you when things are happening. Why isn’t he here?”

“I think I’m going to make us some coffee,” I declare, choosing to ignore the questions that are clearly designed to get a rise out of me. “Do you want anything else, Mom?”

She shakes her head, but that look in her eyes catches me off guard. She's not done. We're definitely going to have some questions to deal with right now. Urgh, doesn't she know that this is why I didn't want to see her? This is why I have been ignoring her calls. I appreciate everything that she does for me, but I don't want to deal with her criticisms right now.

I check my messages once more as I wait for the coffee pot to boil, naturally finding my way to Zoe's name, because really she's the only person I'm desperate to hear from. It hits me I haven't paid her yet, so I do that, then send her a text to let her know.

I don't know if I'll get a reply after what happened, but I wait for a few moments regardless, just staring at the screen. I'm willing something to come through, because that might be the start of us reconnecting again. If things can't go back to the way they were—which I guess that ship has sailed now—then I would at least like things to end on positive terms.

But no, I don't get anything back. My phone is painfully silent for the first time in days. It's almost like it's taunting me, reminding me that she hates me. I'm sure she could actually be working, that might be why she's not responding, but it feels deep. It stings deep. *Fuck.*

Eventually I have to accept that she's not going to talk to me anymore. I stuff the phone back in my pocket and I take the mugs of coffee in to face my mother and her questions.

“So, you were photographed at the unit?” Mom asks me, trying to get to the root of the problem. “And you got annoyed

by that? Really upset, so you caused a scene?”

“I was trying to protect the children,” I inform her sternly. “Those kids don’t need photographers around them, creating drama. They don’t need nosy people making them feel bad or unsafe in their space. I don’t want me to have a negative impact on that.”

“I know, I see that. But you didn’t need to act like a crazy person, did you?”

“Mom, I don’t need to hear that from you as well. You don’t think I’ve heard that from every single person that has come after me. I *know* I did wrong. I’m just trying not to make it worse.”

“So, staying inside is the answer to that?”

“I don’t know what the answer is.” I offer Mom a one-shouldered shrug. “That’s why I’m just going with avoidance. It seems like the easiest path right now.”

Mom tuts and shakes her head. Clearly she’s disappointed in me. Again. Well, she might as well join the queue. Everyone is disappointed in me right now. Even me.

“Wallowing won’t get you anywhere,” she says a little dejectedly. “I don’t know how to get that through to you, but you need to take action. You need to handle this. I have seen you sink into depression before, and I won’t let it happen again.”

“This isn’t the same as when Lisa died, Mom. It’s nothing like that.” I shake my head as I speak because I don’t know

what she's saying this for.

“Then why do you have that same look on your face?”

Those words come at me like a smack in the face. Because I suppose I am grieving a little as well. I'm grieving the end of my connection to Zoe without even realizing it. I've been heartbroken this whole time, and the shit with the media has just been a good cover up of my emotions.

I sink back in my seat, realizing what I'm going to have to deal with now. I'm going to have to actually handle this break up and process it, without Freddie's help this time around because of course I can't talk to him about it. He'll rip my head off.

Maybe I should have listened to Mom in the first place. She seemed to know that everything would implode way before I did. She saw everything falling apart before me. She might have been wrong about why it happened, because she doesn't know the truth.

I might have to start listening to her in the future. She seems way smarter than me.

CHAPTER 15

Zoe

“I did not know that you were going to come along, to make me feel this way,” I gasp out, as my fellow actor in this scene, Chris, edges closer to me with an intensity in his eyes. “I could not have predicted how things were going to turn out. This has been a big surprise for me.”

“And what would you have done differently, had you known?”

I’m just about to launch into my monologue, which I have committed to memory and I know really well, when the director yells “cut.” We have to stop right as we’re about to get started.

“I’m just not feeling the chemistry between you guys,” the director clucks. “I don’t know how we’re going to get it out of you both. Something isn’t quite clicking. Take five.”

Stepping away from Chris and breaking the intensity of the tension between us makes my head spin. I’ve been giving it my all this morning, through to the afternoon, and I think Chris is the same. We’re kicking ass, and I’m sure there’s a

sense of chemistry between us. I don't know how we're going to make this work out to please the director.

“This sucks, doesn't it?” Chris laughs as he follows me to the snacks table. I honestly wanted a moment alone, so I can adjust to doing this scene again. But Chris is a talker, and that seems to make him happy, so I'll chat with him for a while. “What can we do? How can we make this better? We haven't even gotten to the kiss moment yet. Do you think he will make us do that endlessly as well? I have a feeling our lips will be sore.”

Since I've never been a main role in a movie, I haven't had to do a kiss scene before. I'm not the main role in this one either, but my scene gets steamy to help move the plot along. I've been nervous about acting out a kiss with Chris, but now that sensation is even worse.

We're definitely going to be forced to do it over and over again.

“Urgh, I don't know.” I roll my eyes, trying to act all blasé about it because I'm too scared to show my nerves. I don't want anyone to see that I'm vulnerable at all. “I think we're going to have to get through this crazy ass speech first of all.”

Chris leans on the wall beside me and eyes me curiously. I can sense a new air burning around us, which is a little weird. I don't know what he expects me to say and do here. I simply watch him curiously as I wait for whatever is about to unfold, to come.

“So, I was thinking that maybe before the kiss scene, we should do whatever it takes to make this right. We should try and build our connection, so it feels more real.”

“What do you mean?” I ask as my pulse kicks off at rapid speed once more.

“I mean, we should hang out more. Like, spend some serious time together. Maybe a date?”

“You... you want to go on a date? To practice kissing? Is that what you mean?”

I try to keep the sheer horror out of my voice, but I don't think I do it well. He looks a little hurt by the immediate snap of my expression. I don't want to hurt him, but this is wild.

“I don't know. I mean...” He sighs heavily. “I was just thinking that it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world for us to see where this chemistry can really take us. I mean, that's a big part of the entertainment industry, isn't it? Actors hooking up and dating. A lot of that is to feel out the intensity of the chemistry, to make the piece so much better.”

“I... I can't...” I shake my head, but I can't find the right words to shut this shit down completely. “I don't know if that's a good idea at all. I don't think we should...”

“Why not?” Chris hardens. “You aren't some prissy bitch, are you? I know you've dated that old guy. The billionaire. Is it because I don't have enough money for you?”

Whoa, where the hell did that come from? I don't know much about Chris, but he's seemed like a nice enough guy up

until this point. What just shifted in him? I step back in shock.

“I don’t know what you mean, but I appreciate you not talking about my private life here.”

Chris smirks, but it’s more like a snarl. “So, I’m not good enough for you. That’s what it is? You just like old guys? You like older men with money? You don’t want an actor even though I might be wealthy one day? You don’t want to give me a chance?”

“I’m not sure you’re presenting yourself in the best way, Chris,” I shoot back, trying my hardest to be calm but I don’t know if I’m managing it too well. “I don’t think this is a good plan. I think you should just stop talking to me. We need to work together, so don’t make me hate you.”

He’s about to snap and say something else, but the director calls us over to speak with him as well. I don’t know where this is going to go, but I much prefer it to talk to Chris alone. With a bit of luck, the director saw what was happening and he’s about to yell. He’s good at shouting, so let’s have him yelling at someone who deserves it.

“We’re adding in a new scene,” the director barks. “I think we need to up the ante on this one. It’s supposed to be steamy and sexy, so we want to take it further.”

“Further?” What the hell does he mean by that? I agreed to the scene as it was. And that was before I just had a *delightful* conversation with Chris. “How much further?”

“I think this scene will look a lot better with you already taking one another’s clothes off. I think we need passion there, we need it to shine through with actions.”

“Clothing off? No, I don’t want to do that. I don’t want nudity.”

Chris scoffs nastily. It’s hard not for me to get all wound up by that, but I have to keep calm and collected. Under control, so I can make myself understood.

“You can’t start coming at me with nonsense, Zoe. We need to get this scene done,” the director yells wearily. “It’s not working, and we need to make it work. It has to work for the rest of the plot, so please stop answering back and just get on with it. We’ll rehearse it first, I’ll direct how I want the scene to look, and then we can get on with it. I want it done today. I have a schedule.”

I want to continue on yelling, to argue, but Megan’s “joke” floods my mind, reminding me that I have already fucked up, so why not just keep on going?

“And to think, you were worried about your morals, not so long ago. Worried about being nude in a movie. Turns out you’re not so unsure about getting naked anymore, am I right?”

I haven’t forgotten those words, and I’m not sure I ever will. Megan probably has, it was just something she threw out as she tried to make me laugh, but I’m holding on to them. Because I have lost my moral compass. Sleeping with Remy

skewed everything, and now I've lost that job I have to find a way to make my money other ways, with other work.

I know Remy's paid me, and I'm okay rent wise for the time being, but that won't last forever, so I need to stake my claim in the acting world so I can get paying work afterwards.

"You don't have the gall for it?" Chris cries out in amusement. "Since you're a boring bitch, it might be a good idea for them to get someone else in any way. Someone much hotter..."

My fists curl up by my sides. I don't want to be beaten down by this asshole. He's shown a misogynistic and unpleasant side to himself, which shows me he needs to be taken down a peg or two. I can do that while I'm here, can't I? Shut this asshole down once and for all.

"Fine, whatever," I shoot back through gritted teeth. "Let's do this."

We get back into position and start trying to act out the lines with the new actions that the director wants for us. It starts with Chris yanking my straps down, almost pulling my breasts free. Discomfort floods my veins because I *hate* Chris, so this is going to take up all the acting skills I have. But I also don't like my body being revealed without my consent...

No, I suppose I did consent to it, but I didn't want to, so I don't know how that works. I hate it anyway; this is really winding me up. I can't be sexy like this. It feels utterly horrible.

“I need that top further down,” the director cries out. “This isn’t sexy enough. Zoe you need to stop trying to cover yourself up. Let him see you, you want Chris to really see you. This is the first time you’re finally getting your hands on one another after all this time.”

I can’t stop myself from being all tense. Pointing it out isn’t going to help, and I’m sure the director knows that. He’s trying to make this worse for me now. He’s trying to upset me. It’s almost like he’s on Chris’s side, and they both want to break me.

I never had to deal with anything like this in London. I never got sent on jobs that made me feel like shit. I never had to deal with actors who got aggressive with me because I didn’t want to go on a date with them. I didn’t have to have my boundaries shattered.

“No, I don’t want this...” All of a sudden, it gets way too much for me. I don’t know what it is that tips me over the edge, but I snap backwards, absolutely needing to create distance between me and Chris. The director, too. I can’t be near any of them. The heat is too much, I’ve become like a pressure cooker about to explode. This is for everyone’s safety. “I don’t think I can.”

“Zoe, I thought that we were past this.” Both the director and Chris roll their eyes at me. “I thought we were going to stop causing trouble, and just get on with it now.”

“I didn’t think you had it in you,” Chris laughs while making a lewd gesture with his hands, making me even more

certain that I don't want him anywhere near my body. Ever. "You're boring. We need someone way sexier to play this role. You're wooden. Too stiff. Maybe that's what old guys enjoy, but that doesn't work in the real world."

"Fuck you." I can't hold myself back any longer. He's pushed me way too far now. I can't stand here and tolerate this. Maybe I planned to take him down, but you can't beat a man like this. "Fuck you, both of you. I didn't agree to this, and I don't want it."

They call out after me as I spin on my heels and run, reminding me that by risking this job, I risk way too much, but that doesn't stop me. My life was supposed to be so much better in New York, I was looking forward to having a great time in my home city, but nothing is working out.

It doesn't matter what I do, I seem to keep attracting trouble. What the hell will happen next?

CHAPTER 16

Remy

*R*ing, ring... Ring, ring... Ring, ring...

Since I don't recognize the number calling me, I feel compelled to answer. There's only so much I can hide away from. If it's business, then I need to be ready for it. Just in case.

"Hello?" I answer in my most professional tone. "Who's calling?"

"Is that Remy?" a vaguely familiar voice asks. "It's Bill, the director of *Wolf Street*."

The project Zoe is working on? Shit, I sit up a little straighter now that I know who this is and what it might be about. "Oh, Bill, hi, is everything alright?"

"Your fiancée just fucked me, Remy!" he snaps angrily. "She's walked off the set leaving me with no actress for this role. I don't know what got in her knickers."

"What happened? I can't imagine Zoe doing that. She was so excited for the job!"

I narrow my eyes, furrowing my brows in confusion. I know I haven't been in her life so much recently because of everything that's happened, but that doesn't mean I don't know her. She was thrilled to get that role, and to finally have a decent job in New York City.

"I changed things up a little bit, and I think Chris upset her. The guy she was acting opposite. He said he asked her out on a date, and she started being a bitch."

A tight knot of jealousy forms in my chest. I don't have any right to feel that way, Zoe is more than capable of dating whoever she wants, but that doesn't make this any easier to hear. I don't want her going out with someone else, I don't want some other man making her laugh and having a hold over her heart. I want to be the one sharing those emotions with her. But I can't. I messed up and now I can't make things work out. I can't get things back, and because of my best friend, I shouldn't even try. I have to just suffer in this pain and jealousy.

"So, she left?" I ask Bill tautly, now starting to resent him for whatever him and his asshole actors did to upset Zoe. "She walked out and went where?"

"I thought she'd come to you, which is why I'm calling. She isn't answering any of my calls, but I need her back right now. I don't have the time to find someone else."

"She isn't with me, Bill, but for a professional actress to walk out on you, leaving you in the lurch like that, you must

have done something bad. You must have pushed her boundaries.”

“She needs to do a little bit of nudity, that’s all. Not too much to ask for someone in her position. Zoe certainly isn’t famous enough to start making demands.”

I huff with irritation. “Everyone is allowed to have boundaries, Bill, and you need to learn to respect that, do you hear me? I know Zoe didn’t agree to nudity when she signed up for the movie, so you need to be more careful when it comes to pushing people like that.”

“The scene needed nudity, Remy. Are you going to help me or not?”

I shake my head, knowing the answer before I say it aloud. “No, I’m not going to help you. If you fucked things up with my fiancée, and if you can’t hire actors who can keep it in their pants, then you should expect more drama like this in the future.”

Bill mutters something about me under his breath, but I don’t give a shit. I end the call in an instant and I immediately call Zoe. I haven’t had any reason to reach out to her like this, especially since she didn’t respond to my text message, but now I do. Now I need to check that she’s okay.

Unfortunately, it quickly becomes obvious that she isn’t about to answer my call either. I wait impatiently as it flicks on to her voicemail so I can at least give her a message.

“Zoe, hi, sorry to contact you like this. I just had a call from Bill about a disaster on the movie set. I didn’t get many details, but I just want to check that you’re okay.”

There’s so much more I want to say, so I hang up fast before I can. Let’s not make this worse.

But it doesn’t feel like I’ve done enough. I still need to make sure that Zoe is okay. I haven’t talked to Freddie for a while, because I’ve been too nervous, but again I have a reason to chat to him. Maybe I can gauge where his head is at with regards to me as well.

“Remy, what’s wrong?” he asks coldly as soon as he picks up. I have to admit, this takes me back a bit. I don’t remember a time when Freddie has ever talked to me like this before.

“It’s Zoe.” Even saying her name feels a bit like a betrayal. I hope Freddie doesn’t pick up on that. “She’s run off a movie set while she’s supposed to be filming, and everyone is trying to find her. I just wanted to see if she was with you, or with your family.”

“She’s probably at home with Megan. I wouldn’t worry about it.”

I wasn’t expecting this from Freddie. I thought he’d snap into action and do whatever he needed to, to take care of his sister. I’m surprised. I think I need to explain a little more so he gets it.

“From what I can gather., the director was an asshole and her costar hit on her. It must have upset Zoe because she ran

out and hasn't been back. That doesn't seem like her, does it?"

"So?" Still, he's blasé. "She can do what she wants. I don't think *we* need to get in the middle of her life, do we? There's no reason for us to get in her way."

In her way? I have a funny feeling he's referring to me. What does he know? This is making me really anxious. I don't know what he's worked out, or more worryingly what he might have been told. It doesn't sound like Zoe is with him right now, but she might have said something earlier on. Who the hell knows? I grip the phone closer to my ear.

"I just wanted to check in on her, Freddie, to make sure she's okay. That isn't like her. You know as well as I do how hard she's been working on getting an acting career over here. So for her to run out on this job is just too much. I'm very worried about her."

"Hmm, right." I hate the strangled disbelieving tone in his voice. "Well, I don't know what's going on with my sister. She seems to be keeping a lot from me, so who knows? Maybe she just didn't want to do the job. It might not have anything to do with the guys working there. Do you think you might be a little bit jealous, Remy? Since you're here 'fiancé'?"

Shit. He's worked everything out. I risk everything if I spill the beans now, don't I? Even if I attempt denial, I will cause a real mess. I've tried so hard to convince Freddie all that was fake. I didn't want him to see through the ruse, but it wasn't the easiest when I was also trying to convince my mom that things were real. Urgh, it's all been such a mess.

“Not jealous, just worried, that’s all. I want to know what’s going on.”

“Well, I don’t have anything to tell you, Remy. So that’s that. It’s done and over with.”

“Right, well I will see if I can find her,” I reply numbly. I don’t know *what* is happening with my best friend anymore. It seems like he’s freezing me out. “Thank you, Freddie.”

He hangs up the phone before I can even say goodbye to him. As if I needed any more evidence that I’ve totally fucked everything up. Shit, I never wanted to lose Freddie. I hate that Mom warned me about this and I didn’t hear it. I couldn’t hear it. How am I going to get things back on track?

I try and call Zoe again, just because I don’t know what else to do. Again, I click through to her voicemail, which makes my heart sink. God damn it, what the hell is going on? What happened to her? I can only imagine the scene at the movie set. Something bad must have happened for Zoe to walk out like that. It wouldn’t have been something small, which makes me very anxious for her. I wish I’d been there for her to help her through it all.

Not that she wants me around. The more I think about how I behaved on the day that we visited the Congregate Care unit, the more embarrassed I become. I mean, I really barked at her, didn’t I? Despite the fact that she wasn’t the person I was annoyed at. I keep thinking about her face, and how upset she was, how much I broke her. No wonder she isn’t texting me back...



Time has passed agonizingly slowly. It seems like every second has felt closer to an hour with still no word from anyone who can help me out. I honestly feel like I'm going a little stir crazy. If I had any idea where to go, I'd be pounding the sidewalk, trying to find her.

"Come on, Zoe. Please let me know where you are," I plead, but of course to no one. I even wish I knew how to contact Megan, Zoe's roommate, so I could get some info. Although again, not knowing what Megan knows, makes it very awkward for me.

This is why people shouldn't keep secrets. Why boundaries are put in place and lines shouldn't be crossed. I'm starting to see the error of my ways.

Bleep, bleep. The next time my phone makes a sound, I practically jump on it in my desperation to see a message from the one person I want to hear from.

"Oh my God." I gasp as I see her name on my screen. It's Zoe! I can't believe it. I can't click it open fast enough to see what she's written back to me.

Zoe: Thank you for all your calls. Sorry I didn't answer. I'm fine.

I read and reread the words what feels like a million times, trying my best to analyze them in my mind. She's "fine," what does that mean? Where is she? Who's she with? Can I even

ask those questions anymore? My fingers hover over my phone but I don't quite know what to say back.

Remy: What happened? Are you okay? I've been worried.

I don't know if she's about to respond, but I wait regardless. I have more hope now though than when I messaged her before. I feel like she might actually respond since she started the conversation. That's why I can't stop myself from looking.

Zoe: It was a nightmare. The actor I was in a scene with was disgusting and the director tried to force me into nudity. I don't know if I made the right decision running away though.

Remy: No one should try and make you do something you don't want to. I think walking away is the best thing you could have done. I'm just glad you're okay.

I had nothing to do with this, yet I like I'm to blame nonetheless. If I hadn't pushed her away, then I could have been there to protect her. I could have been there to make sure no one treated her like shit. I would have smacked her costar in the face and the director too. The way a boyfriend would behave, I suppose...

CHAPTER 17

Zoe

My heart thunders against my rib cage as I lie on my bed, staring up at the ceiling, waiting for my phone to vibrate again. I wasn't going to text Remy. I've been trying my hardest to keep the hell away from him, but his constant reaching out to me made me yearn for him once more.

Because he is a good man, and he's the only person that has made me feel like he does. I know I shouldn't keep on with this, knowing how fucked up it all is, but I just can't help myself.

I've told Megan that I just want to be left alone after the shitshow of a day I've had, so I know no one is going to disturb me as I slip back into the little fantasy world I know I shouldn't have created with Remy. Just to take my mind off of everything...

Zoe: Thank you for taking my side. It wasn't an easy decision.

I can't believe he instantly agreed with me. I thought he was going to call me a fool for walking away from the one acting job I've worked on here. But I couldn't go near Chris again,

and certainly not with any nudity. I'd rather never act again than have that pig see any of me. I know acting can make people uncomfortable, but that was too far for me.

Remy: I wish I'd said sorry to you earlier. I was an ass the other day, and I do apologize.

Wow. Reading those words as I'm hiding away under the covers, trying to avoid the rest of the world allows me to smile a little. It's nice to know he's been thinking about that day as much as I have, and worrying about how it severed us. I don't know where that leaves us though.

Zoe: It's okay, it was a stressful situation. I get what you were trying to do.

Remy: That doesn't excuse anything. I miss you.

My pulse races even faster as heat spreads through my body. He misses me? I guess I've been trying so hard not to think about him, that I haven't wondered about how much he misses me too. I shouldn't... we both shouldn't... but I have loved the feel of his arms around me, and his body pressed up against mine. I have missed the pleasure only he can give me.

Zoe: I miss you too. More than you know...

Will he read between the lines and sense what I'm getting at here? A delighted thrill tears down my spine as I try to imagine where he is, reading these messages from me. I hope he's in bed as well, remembering all the fun that we've had together.

Remy: I miss kissing you. And not for the cameras. For us.

Shit, he gets it. Lightning bolts of heat consume me. I have to squeeze my thighs together to stop the pulsating between my thighs from getting the better of me.

Zoe: I know it was naughty, but I like everything we did that was just for us.

Remy: I bet you did... because you're a bad girl x

Uh oh. Now I'm pretty sure my whole body is on fire. I can't remain still under the sheets. I keep squirming around in my excitement. God damn it, I *so* wish he was here, but I can't invite him over and risk anyone finding out what's happening. Not even Megan. I don't want her to make any more jokes or judgments about me.

Zoe: I'm not being bad right now. I'm just lying in bed being really, really good...

Remy: Ooh, I can't imagine that. Miss Sweet and Innocent, right? I like the sound of that. I wish I was there with you, licking your neck and kissing your lips...

Oh God, now the heat is really surging through my body. It's like a trickling sensation, floating through my veins, filling me with exciting space dust.

Zoe: If you were here, my fingers would be all over you, stroking you lightly, up and down your chest, while ever so slightly brushing the waistband of your underwear.

Remy: My hands would be all up in your hair, tugging your lips closer to mine to kiss you.

***Zoe:** With your lips on mine, I would finally allow my hand to slip a little lower.*

***Remy:** My tongue would be in your mouth, as the passion gets the better of me.*

The pulsing between my thighs is starting to become overwhelming. I lay flat on my back as I try my hardest to catch my breath while the texting session intensifies. I was *not* expecting things to go this way, that's for sure. I just thought we'd have a little chat and clear the air. I certainly didn't expect things to end like this.

***Zoe:** I would wrap my fingers around you, stroking your rock hard length...*

***Remy:** My lips would slip down your body until they find your nipples, where I would taste your body, moaning with bliss because your body always tastes freaking amazing.*

***Zoe:** I would slowly edge my lips downwards until finally I can taste you too. Having you between my lips, filling up my mouth always makes my heart race faster...*

***Remy:** Fuck, being in your mouth is one of my favorite places to be. I can't get enough of your tongue as it tastes me, as it works its way around me.*

Fuck, my whole body is on fire. I can't stop myself from sliding my own fingers down my body, just to feel where I'm absolutely thumping with bliss from him. I know he isn't here, but with these texts flying between us, it almost feels like he is. I can envision the weight of his body on top of me, pressing

against me, rolling into me. I freaking love the sensation of him grinding against me, making me see stars. I can't breathe him in enough.

Zoe: I climb on top of you, twisting around so I can lower myself down on to your face.

Remy: Oh fuck, I can't imagine anything sexier than you sitting on my face... I could bury my tongue a lot deeper inside of you, to really taste you.

My fingers are now in my panties, and I'm slowly edging towards my clit. I'm throbbing now, aching for him, needing him to actually have his tongue deep within me. I haven't forgotten what it feels like to have him tasting me, all of me. Circling my clit and making me scream.

Zoe: I want you, I need you. Fuck, this is too much, Remy, You're too much...

Remy: I pick up the pace, devouring you with my mouth. I need to fuck you too, but I'm trying to hold off because I love the sensation of being in your throat.

Zoe: I can feel myself getting closer to the edge. I can't stop myself, I'm out of control.

Remy: Shit, I need you now. I can't hold back any longer. I will have to spin you around so I can kiss you while finally you lower your hips, and you take me in deep.

I let out a little groan in real life, because I really am starting to drive myself towards the peak of desire. It's hard to keep on texting when I'm shaking all over, but I need him to

know what's going on with me, and what I'm fantasizing over here.

Zoe: I bury you deep inside my wet heat, crying out with bliss as you thrust deep inside of me.

Remy: I can't contain myself, the feel of your tight, wet pussy always sends me wild.

He has to be touching himself as well, doesn't he? I can almost feel it happening, even though we're miles apart. My hand on him, his hands all over me, we might as well be in the same room. I don't know how we've managed to achieve this through texting, but it feels great.

Zoe: Fuck me harder, Remy. I need you, fuck me faster, I need all of you.

My phone bleeps a couple of times. I know he's close to the edge too, but I've lost all control over myself now. The toe-curling pleasure ricochets through my whole body. I have to twist around to bite down on my pillow so my crying out with the intensity of the orgasm doesn't grab Megan's attention. I need to be alone as the waves surge through me over and over again. At one point, I become convinced the pleasure is never going to end because I can't get Remy off my mind.

Fuck, I don't think I'm ever going to be able to get over him, no matter what I do. Not when he has so much power over my body, even from such a distance. It's wild but it's *him*. He's special.

My body bucks and writhes like crazy as the pleasure zigzags through me for what feels like forever. I can't even reach out to grab my cell phone once more until I'm sinking into the glorious post orgasmic bliss. It quickly becomes obvious that he really was touching himself as well from the messages, and we fell together. Just like we often do while we're together. Our bodies seem to be incredibly in sync, in a really special way. Which only makes me believe more that there's a deep connection there. We're meant to be together.

I know that isn't the case because it wouldn't be so difficult if we were meant to be together. But that doesn't mean I can't help feeling like he's the one for me. That would be freaking typical of my life for my one true love to be someone I can't have. Freddie has already made it very clear that he would lose his freaking mind if anything actually happened between me and Remy, which is a sign that we will both lose Freddie if we carry on.

I don't want to lose my brother because he's the only family I have in New York City. I know Remy doesn't want to lose Freddie either because they have been friends forever. I think their friendship means more to them than either of them realize.

They'll realize it if we cause an implosion though, when they lose one another. I can't be the source of that pain for any of the people that I love.

I hold the phone for a few moments, scanning my brain desperately, trying my hardest to find the right words to say.

Remy and I can't just leave it there. We have to say something else, right? We need to talk it through. But I can't work out what's for the best.

We talked, we discussed general things, we tipped over the edge into sexy talk, but what now? I mean, we can't arrange to meet up again, can we? I don't think that's a good idea when I think our ploy for his mother and the media is over and done with, right? There's no logical reason for us to meet up. It would be just for us, which is dangerous territory.

Zoe: Remy, I...

I start to type, but I have no idea where I'm going with this sentence, so I delete it. But I don't shut the screen down. I still want to reach out to him. Actually, I want him to message me first so I can figure out what the right tone is.

But I guess he doesn't know what to say either. He doesn't text me and eventually, I slowly drift off to sleep, still with my phone in my hand, waiting for him, just like I assume he's waiting for me too. Both of us waiting for the other one to speak. If we keep up like this, neither of us will ever speak to one another again...

CHAPTER 18

Remy

Today is a brand-new day. A day where I'm not going to sink deeper into the depression that has been circling through my veins for the last few days. My text exchange with Zoe last night, even though it didn't exactly end in any kind of way, has given me the lift that I need.

Life has been shit without her, and even though I know I don't have much chance of seeing her again, it feels good to know that she's missing me too.

So, today I have a lot of plans. Plans that I'm looking forward to actioning. I'm going to drop Wyatt off with my mother, because I know that they are desperate to see one another again, and then I'm headed into the office. Just to keep an eye on things, to make sure everything is going well since I haven't been there. Then once I've been sure that the office is all fine, I'm going to see Mary Lou, to check that her and the kids are okay. I haven't been back to the Congregate Care unit since the day the press found me there, and I was thinking I wouldn't do it again, to keep everyone safe. But now I think that's silly. Alice and the other kids love me coming there, and

I want to keep helping them out. I don't want the fucking media to put me off.

So, a meeting with Mary Lou is essential. I need to see what she thinks I should do.

It actually feels good to be up and about, moving and functioning again. Sitting around and doing nothing doesn't suit me. It never has, and it never will. I have that spark of excitement in my blood again, and I can feel it pumping through my veins.

“Are you looking forward to going to see Grandma today?”

Wyatt nods eagerly. “I like her snacks and her big TV too.”

I let out a little laugh, but guilt flows through me at the same time. Much as it's been nice for me to spend time with Wyatt, I have selfishly disrupted his routine by keeping him at home. I don't think that's something I should ever do again, no matter what is going on with me.

It isn't exactly a regular thing for me though, to hide away from the world. I don't normally get hit by something which knocks me off kilter like that. It's only been a couple of times when I'm struck by grief and intense heartbreak. I think that's understandable, but I'll still be better.

“Come on then.” I smile at Wyatt. “Let's get in the car, shall we?”

We drive to my mom's house, where we excitedly climb out, ready to see her once more. I texted Mom this morning,

and she was happy to have Wyatt, so I have to admit it's a bit of a surprise that she isn't at the door, ready to meet us.

Without worrying too much, I click the door open, and we head inside. Wyatt races to the living room, to put cartoons on the giant TV he loves so much. Chuckling, I aim for the kitchen, because I'm pretty sure that's where Mom will be, brewing coffee or something...

"Whoa." But as soon as I lay my eyes on my mother, my heart stops beating. What the hell has happened to her? "Mom, you look sick. Why didn't you tell me you were sick?"

She's pale, almost green looking, which of course has me worried. I don't know why she agreed to have Wyatt today when she's clearly struggling so much. This now has me right on edge. Obviously, I can't leave Wyatt with her when she's ill, but that's okay. My plans aren't as important as my mother if she's having a rough time.

"I'm okay." She waves her hand dismissively, but I don't buy it. "I'm good, I'm glad to have Wyatt today. I've missed my grandson. It's been too long since we had a day together."

I take a seat opposite her and narrow my eyes curiously in her direction. My mother doesn't get sick very much, so to see her in this manner is actually kind of hard. My chest feels tight. I don't know how to approach this because I don't know if she will respond well. She doesn't like to talk about any kind of weakness within her. I'll have to be really careful.

"Mom, I don't think I'm going to go in to work today," I say thoughtfully instead. "I would rather spend the day with the

pair of you, if you don't mind."

She stares at me furiously, but her anger isn't shining through too much because she really is too ill. That breaks my heart way more than it should do because I blame myself. If I hadn't been hiding away from the world, then I would have been able to deal with this earlier.

"I don't want you here. I want to have a day alone with Wyatt. You've kept us away from one another for way too long. It's my time to hang out with him now."

She rises to her feet, but only for a second before she falls back down in the seat once more. She really doesn't have enough strength in her body to hold herself up, so I don't know how she's going to look after Wyatt. Three-year-old kids need a lot of attention and activity. She knows that.

"Okay, well I'll go to work in a bit then," I reply. "I need a coffee first."

She won't meet my eyes, so I decide to try and rile her up a little, to see if I can get her to respond to me. I need her to admit that she's not doing so well so I can actually get some help for her. This is silly; she's being stubborn for absolutely no reason.

"So, once I've been to work, I'm going to talk to Mary Lou."

"Who's that?" Mom asks without her usual nosiness. "Mary Lou? I don't know her, do I?"

“She works for the Congregate Care unit, and I want to check in to see if she and the kids are alright. I haven’t seen them since the incident with the press.”

She nods slowly, not really meeting my eyes even now. I guess she doesn’t want to berate me for my behavior anymore. I have something else I can talk to her about though, which will wind her up. I’m sure as soon as I say *her* name, it’ll spark flames of rage.

“I’ve been talking to Zoe as well. She’s acting a lot at the moment.” Again, Mom says nothing. But she does look a little paler. “I think we might be getting married sooner than we originally thought. We can’t wait until we’re husband and wife, you know?”

She’s growing greener by the moment. I stop pushing her because I’m worried now. I lean in a little closer, trying to see what’s going on. Mom’s eyes are starting to look glazed over. I don’t know what she thinks is going to happen here, but I’m in no way leaving her. Not a chance in hell. Thank God I’m here actually. I don’t like to think what would have happened if I hadn’t come in.

“I’m getting you some water,” I declare as I scrape my chair back. “You need to drink something, Mom. I don’t know what game you’re playing, but you’re not doing well.”

I actually need to get someone else to watch Wyatt for the day, because I have a feeling that I’m going to be looking out for Mom. I don’t know if I should actually take her to the doctor. But who? Wyatt isn’t close to anyone really. He

doesn't have another adult in his life that he can trust. It doesn't matter how much I try to rack my brain, no one comes up. I don't even know if I could contact Freddie right now because he's being weird with me...

Oh! But all of a sudden, I remember Zoe. I know things are strange between us at the moment as well, and I have no idea what's going on there, but I do know that Wyatt loves her. He thinks she's awesome and she seems to respond well to him as well.

Without even giving it a second thought, I fire off a text to her.

Remy: Hey, I know this is a bit random, but if you aren't busy today, do you mind coming to my mother's house to watch Wyatt for a little bit? Mom is sick and I need to care for her x

It doesn't take Zoe long to text back, which is a relief. Especially when I see her words.

Zoe: Of course, I will be there as quick as I can. Don't worry x

She's great, isn't she? I don't think I have ever met anyone with a big heart like hers. She's already made a challenging time that much easier, just by being there for me. It shows me that I don't have to get through life with everyone at arm's length, like I have been doing.

"Here is your water, Mom." I hand it to her... or I try to at first, but she's too weak to take it. All of a sudden, the stress

has gotten too much for her. So I lift the glass to her mouth and I help her drink it. “Come on, Mom. I need you to drink this. Please.”

Eventually, she drinks a bit of the water, but rises to her feet in an attempt to show me that she’s just fine. It really doesn’t work though, because her jelly legs give way. She can’t stand up straight. I grip hold of her and try my hardest to keep her upright. Something is going wrong though, really wrong, I can see by the way her eyes roll back in to her head.

“Mom?” I gasp out as she slowly becomes dead weight. “Mom, come with me. Sit down. Maybe I can even get you to lie down, because I think you need some rest...”

Nope, she’s slipping down. I can’t keep her upright any longer. I lie her down gently, realizing that she has definitely fainted now. I don’t know what’s going on, but I do need an ambulance. Zoe is on her way, she’s here to care for Wyatt, so I’m sure she won’t be annoyed if I have to take Mom to the hospital. No, Wyatt and she will be good, I’m sure of it.

“Mom, I’m calling an ambulance,” I tell her, even though I’m sure she can’t hear me. I think she’s knocked out and not listening to me. Her body has given up in a way that terrifies me. “I’ll get the paramedics here. Someone will be here in a moment. You’re going to be fine.”

My hand is shaking though as I dial 911. I can’t take my eyes off Mom the whole time as I explain to the operator what’s going on. She gives me some tips and stays talking to me until I can hear sirens blaring out and an ambulance

heading towards us, allowing me to feel a little bit safer. I don't know how I would have reacted if she wasn't so kind to me.

Zoe turns up not much later, with a concerned look on her face. Rapidly, I explain to her what's going on, and of course she tells me to care for my mother, because she's got such a good heart. I thank her gratefully before I climb into the ambulance with Mom, so I can be there for her the whole way. Not that I know what's going on, not that I can do much for her.

I hate being useless and standing to the side, but for now that's all I can do.

CHAPTER 19

Zoe

My heart sinks as I watch the ambulance take Remy and his mother away because I don't know what's happening here. Barbara didn't look good as she was taken away by the medical professionals. She must have passed out because she looked so pale. It's heartbreaking. I don't know what I can do to help, but I hope this is enough.

But I don't mind being here with Wyatt, because a hospital isn't a place for a child this small. He should be cared for and looked after. I want to distract him, to make sure he isn't worried about his dad and grandmother. But what can I do? I'm not experienced enough for this. I like Wyatt and we get on well, but there's a lot of pressure on my shoulders.

“What do you want to do?” I ask Wyatt in a much too bright a tone. He shrugs, not giving me much to work with. He looks a little shellshocked if anything. “Do you want something to eat?”

“I'm not hungry,” he whispers. “Will that ambulance be back?”

Oh God, what am I going to tell him? I'm not equipped for this. "Daddy and Grandma will be back soon, but me and you are going to hang out for the day."

The TV is playing in the background, but he doesn't seem to be interested in that now. He's just sort of forlornly looking out to the street where the ambulance has gone. I *need* to do something to help out, but what? I have no idea how to make this situation better.

Who can I call? Who can help me here? I don't think Freddie wants to chat at the moment. He's been cold and distant ever since I started fake dating Remy, and I think he's pulling further away from me by the moment. Plus, he might be upset that Remy contacted me, not him. I can't call Megan either because she's on her way to the airport for another job in LA. It's just me, I can't think of anyone else I know in New York City well enough to help with Wyatt...

Mary Lou. I don't know why she pops into my mind. It isn't someone I know too well, but she definitely knows how to deal with kids. She might also know Wyatt because of her friendship with Remy. I don't know if she'll be happy for me to just turn up without Remy, but that feels like the right thing to do here. I don't want Wyatt to be bored here.

"Do you want to go on a trip?" I ask Wyatt a little awkwardly. "I was thinking we could go to the Congregate Care unit. There are a lot of children there you could play with..."

That makes his eyes light up a little. "Kids I can play with?"

I nod eagerly. “Yes, that’s right. There are some lovely children there. You’ll like them.”

Thank goodness. Wyatt finally looks a little relaxed which allows me to feel relief. I really hope that this works out.

Within minnutes we are driving to the unit. I try and keep the conversation flowing as we drive, because the silence is killer. I can’t sit in it, and I don’t think Wyatt’s keen either. He must be stewing in his emotions right now, and it’s really sad to witness. I can’t even reach out to Remy to see if everything is alright, because he must be having a hard enough time as it is.

“Is this the place?” Wyatt asks as we arrive, while sitting up a little straighter in his seat. “I haven’t ever been inside before. Am I allowed?”

I nod nervously, curious now. What if there’s a reason Wyatt hasn’t been here before? I really hope I’m not about to step on some toes here. “It’ll be fine. Let’s go inside.”

I hold his hand and lead Wyatt in through the doors, to find Mary Lou right inside. She blinks at me a couple of times before she finally realizes who I am.

“Oh my God, Zoe, you came back. Are you with Remy? I haven’t seen him since the incident with the press the other day. I’ve been a bit worried about him....”

“It’s just me and Wyatt. Do you mind if we spend some time here? Remy is at the hospital with his mother. She isn’t doing too well today. I thought we’d come here for company.”

Mary Lou senses that there is something going on with me, so she nods encouragingly. I show Wyatt into the room where all the children are playing, and it isn't long before Alice and some of the others have gathered around him and they're playing games.

"So, how is Remy?" May Lou asks me as she hands me a much-needed mug of tea. I honestly didn't know how much I needed a hot drink until this very moment. "And his mother?"

"I don't really know," I admit. "Remy didn't give me much information. He just asked me to sit with Wyatt until he comes back... but Wyatt was struggling, so I thought it might be nice for him to be around other children. I haven't been in New York for long, so I don't have many friends." I dart my eyes towards Mary Lou. "I hope it's okay that we're here."

"Oh of course," she insists. "You're always welcome here, I hope you know that. We're always your friends. And it's good to get to know Wyatt. He's so sweet."

I smile as I watch him play, grateful that we've found a little space where he can think about something else. He's already looking a whole lot better and lighter now that we're here.

"He is an adorable boy," I agree. "I'm glad to see him smiling again."

"It's good that Remy had you to call on." Mary Lou rubs my shoulder comfortingly. "I've never known him to allow anyone into his life like he has you. And you're a lovely couple."

I smile thinly. Since I don't know what's happening with the façade, I figure it's better to say nothing right now. "Yeah, thank you, that's really kind of you to say."

"Remy really is a great guy, isn't he?" she continues, not sensing my inner turmoil at all. "I have always thought that about him. The work he's done here is phenomenal, and the difference that he's made in the lives of the children here is great. We wouldn't have half of what we do here if it wasn't for him. That's why we had to have the party for him the other day, to show our appreciation as much as we can. I don't know how we can thank him enough."

My heart throbs a little for Remy, I can't shake him out of my heart. Remembering him here, and the amazing day we had before everything fell apart, makes me ache all over. I fold my arms protectively across my chest, but I can't save myself from what's inside.

"I don't think you need to thank Remy," I tell Mary Lou honestly. "I think he does it because he really likes seeing the kids smile. I get the impression that he likes making a positive difference in the world as well, which it seems like he really does here."

"You're lucky to have him... but then I think Remy is lucky to have you too."

I help Mary Lou throughout the day, to make up for us being here with her. We chat easily as we make lunch for the kids, and I get involved in the games with the kids to give Mary Lou a break. All of this makes time go by really fast, but

it does nothing to shake off the nagging sensation in my heart. I can avoid Remy as much as I want, but it isn't going to make me feel any better. I'm not going to be able to let go of us because it was the best relationship I've ever had.

I like Remy. I have definitely been falling for him way more than I should have but making *us* real comes with way too many unfortunate complications. Barbara is always going to dislike me, and I don't think I'll ever be able to get through to her. I don't think she'll ever see me as good enough for her son. We can try, but I can't see it happening.

And then there's Freddie. My brother, and all the drama there. I can only see that ending in pain and agony, with everyone getting hurt along the way. I can almost feel the pain in my brother's heart already and nothing has even happened yet. The explosion hasn't occurred.

There's no way getting around that. There's no way for me and Remy to ever be. This really is a nightmare, isn't it? We're going to go around in circles forever, I can just see it. That breaks my heart and makes me wonder if I would be better off in London. I never planned to go back when I left. I was coming back to New York City to make it big and to have my career.

Maybe not London, maybe I really do need to try LA. I'm not keen on the idea, I never have been that keen on Hollywood, but I can always visit with Megan and see if I can make it work. Because if I stay here, then I will always be broken over Remy. Since I had a crush on him when I was

younger, and I've never fully recovered from that, it seems like I will always feel this way. I'm never going to be okay, that's just the way it is.

"It's been a blessing having you here today," Mary Lou finally tells me with a soft smile playing on her face. "Thank you for coming. You should come here more often and hang out. Or maybe we should even spend time outside of here. Go out for drinks and have fun."

I smile at her gratefully. Much as I adore Megan and I love having her in my life, and I'm grateful that she's my roommate, I would love to have to more friends. And I like Mary Lou as well, what I've seen of her. So, I'm really keen for this to progress.

"Yeah, I would like that a lot. I'll give you my number before I leave. We can maybe go for cocktails or something. A girl's night out."

Speaking about my phone makes me pull it out, but I still don't have a message from Remy. It's really worrying. I truly hope his mom is okay. I don't dare ask though. All I have to do right now is make sure that Wyatt is good, and well looked after. He seems like he's having the best time at the moment, which is awesome. I'm proud that we've managed to get through this day.

Not only have I gotten through this day, but it seems like I've made an amazing friend as well. If I *do* end up staying in New York City, then I hope we can have a friendship. But who knows what I'm going to do. I have no idea right now. It all

feels up in the air. New York hasn't been *anything* like I thought it would. If I'd known how it would end up, then maybe I would have stayed in London. Maybe I would have made a different plan in life.

Unfortunately, I can't change that now. I'm here, and somehow I need to make the best of it.

CHAPTER 20

Remy

Relief floods through me the moment Mom opens her eyes and finally blinks enough to adjust to the room around her. Thank goodness she's here and she's okay. That was troubling, I hated all of that; it was way too much. I didn't want to admit it, even to myself, but I was scared that I lost her then. The way she looked, so pale and sickly, was terrifying.

It made me realize how much I rely on my mom, and how much I respect her. I can't let go of her. I just can't, and now I need to make her know how much I love her.

"Oh God, Mom," I gasp as I squeeze her hand a little tighter. "You scared me then."

"What happened?" she whispers, the weakness shining through in her tone. "Am I okay?"

"You fainted, Mom, so I called an ambulance. We're at the hospital right now. The doctors have looked over you and you've put way too much stress on your body. Exhaustion, dehydration... you aren't looking after yourself, Mom. You need to do that better."

“I didn’t realize. I didn’t know I was feeling that bad. I thought it was a cold.”

I hug Mom as best as I can since she’s in the hospital bed, just silently vowing to myself that I will care for her more. She’s done so much looking after Wyatt, especially after Lisa passed away. Now that I’m out of the fog of sadness, it’s time for me to repay her. I have to start looking after her a lot more. That much is extremely obvious from this.

“Where’s Wyatt?” Of course, my son is the first person in her mind, because he’s her most important person. “Is he okay? Oh goodness, where is he?”

I swallow hard. I don’t want her to overreact here and freak out, but I want to be honest. “I called Zoe and she’s with him. They’re fine, you don’t need to worry.”

I don’t know if that’s true because I haven’t checked in, but the fact that Zoe hasn’t reached out to me either I’ll take as a good sign. She knows how important Wyatt is to me, and I’m sure she would reach out to me the moment she needed to.

“With Zoe?” Mom tries to push herself up into a sitting position, but she’s not quite got the strength as yet. It takes her a couple of moments, and I give her a hand even though I know she’s probably about to unleash on me. “So, things are still happening with Zoe? I wasn’t sure. You’ve been a little quiet and closed off recently. I didn’t know if something was going on.”

“Yeah, I know, it’s been a bit of a bump in the road, I’ll be honest...”

Mom's eyes glaze over, and I can see sadness filling her. That makes me incredibly anxious because the last thing I need is to pile anything else on her. "Is that because of me?"

"No, Mom, don't worry, it's not because of you. It's because of me..."

"I know I haven't been very nice to her, Remy. I haven't been very nice to both of you. I've been thinking about everything a lot over the last few days. I've had more time to myself so I can reflect on my behavior. I know I haven't been great."

A thick lump of emotion forms in the base of my throat. "It doesn't matter..."

"No, Remy, it does." She nods determinedly. "It's just because you and Wyatt have been through so much in your life, and I've been worried about you. I worry about you both so much, and everything I said came from a place of panic. I just want the best for you both, and I immediately panicked that Zoe didn't feel the same way. I didn't know if she could love you and treat you right. I couldn't see you go through another heartbreak."

My eyes hit the floor. She's been trying to keep me safe from more pain. But then I'm the one who brought this pain to myself. I'm the one who caused all of this.

"I appreciate you caring about me, Mom. Really, I don't know how I can express it to you, to make you understand how much I love having you in my life and looking out for me."

“But it’s been too much, hasn’t it?” Mom replies sadly. “I’ve been too much for you. I knew it. I could tell. I thought that’s why you were keeping away from me.”

“No, I would never keep away from you. I’ve been reflecting as well. And I just want you to know that Zoe is a good person. A great person actually, one of the best.”

“I need to give her a chance and be more open with her,” Mom nods understandingly. “Because I haven’t even given her a chance. I’ve barely even talked to her. I certainly haven’t listened. But that doesn’t mean I’ve missed everything. I do see how happy she makes you, and I’ve also noticed how much Wyatt likes her. So, if there really is happiness there...”

“There is, Mom. But I don’t know if it’ll work anyway. Even if she makes me the happiest man alive, I don’t know if it can ever work. I don’t know if the obstacles are too much.”

“Well, I’m not going to be an obstacle anymore,” Mom insists, but this isn’t enough.

“What about Freddie? We all know he isn’t going to be happy if we actually get married. It’s already causing issues in our friendship, and like you said to me, he has been there for me through thick and thin. I don’t want to lose him now.”

Mom has nothing to say here, because she knows it’s going to be problematic when it comes to Freddie, because this is his much younger sister. There’s no escaping it, it’s going to cause an argument, but if I think about my happy ever after, Zoe is in it.

“Freddie loves you,” Mom finally declares. “He will understand. It might take some time, but he will get there. Once he accepts, like I have, how happy you make one another.”

“We do make each other happy, Mom. When we’re not thinking about the external pressures.”

Now she’s the one who squeezes my hand to reassure me. The color is now burning in her cheeks, and she’s looking so much better, which just makes this a little easier. Knowing Mom will pull through this scary health moment helps.

“Life is too short to always be worrying about external pressures,” Mom reminds me. “You can’t waste your whole existence worrying about other people. If you and Zoe are good together, and you’re sure that it’s going to last for your whole life, then you need to go for it. Jump in with both feet and stop panicking about anything and everything else. If she’s right for you, then so be it. I want to be a part of your family as it grows, and I’m sure Freddie will too.”

“Yeah. You’re right, Mom. I really do appreciate that.”

“Make it right, okay? Just do whatever it takes to make things right.”

She lies back down and eventually drifts back off to sleep, which I’m sure she needs, so I sit back and watch her for a while as I process everything. Mom is right. If we’re going to be together, I really do need to jump in with both feet. We’ve both been scuttling around the edges, never quite getting further than dipping our toes in because we’ve been worried.

But now, I need to decide if I'm going to back off completely, or really go for it.

I want to jump in with both feet. I want to give Zoe my all, but I still have fear. It's causing icy cold panic to fizzle through my veins. I don't think I *can* jump in with both feet while I'm so scared. I might end up losing Zoe forever if I drown in this fear.

What the hell am I going to do? I'm definitely at a crossroads in my life, and I need to pick which path I want to go down. Do I cut Zoe off and continue down the path I've always been walking, with Wyatt by my side and my mom helping me out along the way. My friendship with Freddie as it always been, or do I turn everything on its head to see where it takes me?

I've always been okay with taking risks in business because I know the payoff will be great and worth it. But I don't think I've ever done the same with my personal life. This is the first time I've ever had that risk and I need to decide what to do with it, sooner rather than later.



Ring, ring... Ring, ring... Ring, ring...

I pace up and down the waiting room as I wait for Zoe to pick up the phone. I need to finally check in with her because I have answers when it comes to Mom.

"Hello?" As she finally picks up, I can see why she's taken so long. There is so much noise in the background. Where the

hell is she? “Remy, is everything okay?”

“Mom is fine now. She’s being discharged soon so we’ll be coming home.”

“Oh okay, that’s great news. I’m glad to hear that your mom is okay. That was terrifying. Wyatt and I are currently at the Congregate Care unit with Mary Lou because Wyatt was worried, and I needed something to distract him. He’s had a great time with the other kids.”

This strikes me hard. I don’t know why I haven’t thought about this before. I’ve been so desperate to keep my charity work private that I haven’t even brought Wyatt into it. But he could make some really good friends there. Some lifelong friends, and I want that for him.

“That’s great.” I’m impressed with Zoe’s instincts. “Thank you so much for that. I’m glad to hear that he’s had a great time with you and the other children at the unit. That’s awesome.”

“I will just help Mary Lou tidy up and then we will meet you back at your place.”

“That sounds great. Thank you, Zoe.”

We both stay on the phone for a beat too long, neither of us saying anything, but both of us are feeling the intensity of this moment. I can sense that Zoe is at the same place as me, at the edge of the crossroads, not quite sure which way to turn. We need to decide individually, and together as well which way we’re going to move forward.

Tonight, we need to talk. When I go to see her after I have looked after my mother, we need to discuss it all. Openly and honestly, in ways that we haven't before. It's scary, but we can't keep going the way that we have been. It isn't working for anyone.

"Right, well I will be back soon, okay," I finally say because we also can't sit in silence forever.

"Yes, of course. I hope you get your mom back alright and everything is okay."

I hold onto my chest as I hang up the phone, knowing where my heart is. My heart has always been with Zoe. It's just my head that isn't sure. My head isn't sure what's the best thing for us.

But for now, I need to focus on Mom, because this can be the one place where I begin my promise to be better for her. To look after her more. She needs my full attention as I take her home, and make sure that she's well. Everything else can come afterwards.

CHAPTER 21

Zoe

Luckily, I know where Remy keeps his spare key hidden, because it takes Remy quite a long time to come back from the hospital, and from his mother's house as well. I don't mind, because it's been so nice to hang out with Wyatt, especially coming back from the Congregate Care unit with so many stories about the games he's played and the new friends he's made.

We've enjoying cooking and eating dinner together, watching a bit of a movie, and also bedtime. I read Wyatt a few books, probably a lot more than he usually has, but I think I've done okay. I mean, I haven't been around him enough to know exactly what his routine is, so I don't know if everything has worked out according to what Wyatt is used to, but I think I've done well.

I hope so anyway. I have to admit I'm a little nervous for Remy to come home, just in case, but I keep telling myself that he's going to be happy no matter what I do.

He was pensive on the phone. I don't know what he was thinking but it felt intense and powerful. I have a feeling that

we're going to have to have a real chat sometime soon to work out what is going on between us. I know we definitely can't carry on as we are, all unsure and never quite making any steps in any direction. We aren't together, but we also aren't apart. I think that's the only way I can think of it, and it's messy and complicated. We both need something easier.

If we end things, I will really consider moving away, just because seeing him and talking to him face to face again today has been a stark reminder that I can't be around him. It's just too painful. I can't keep seeing him and knowing that he isn't mine.

But who the hell knows what will happen? I guess all I can do is perch on the edge of the couch, waiting for him to finally come home. That's actually harder with Wyatt sleeping away in bed because now I'm the one who needs a distraction. I need something to help me cope.

I have some terrible reality TV love experiment show playing on the TV, but I can't get sucked into it at all. My mind is constantly wandering, and every single time I hear a car I leap up and stare out the window like a paranoid woman. I can't stop myself from freaking out.

God damn it, I just need him here now. The anticipation is absolutely killing me. It's twisting up in my guts and edging up anxiety through my whole body. The moment he's here and looking me in the eyes, I guess I'll know which way it's going. Then I won't have this intense nervous energy burning through my body. Then I'll be able to breathe a lot easier. I hope.

Finally, his car comes. The next noise I hear is the car I'm looking out for. Spotting Remy doesn't allow me to calm down though, and I start shaking all over. I just *know* that this is going to be the end here. He's going to cut me off completely and my life will change forever. I switch the TV off. I can't stand the noise any longer, and I can't sit on the couch either. I'm a mess.

By the time he clicks the door open, I'm sure I've lost the color in my face. Now I'm about to make Remy worry that I'm about to be sick like his mother. Oh God...

"Zoe, thank you so much!" He extends his arms wide and invites me in for a hug, allowing everything else to just melt away. I don't know how he's managed it. How he's made everything feel so much better with just the mere sight of him. "I have no idea how I can thank you for what you did today. You took such great care of Wyatt. I'm so grateful."

I hug him tight and slide my eyes closed, trying not to let any tears fall. He has me all emotional now, and I'm not quite sure how to handle it. I don't know what I should say or do.

"I have to tell you something as well, Zoe, because I've been holding back for too long."

My heart stops beating as I take a step back. Is this it? Are we diving headfirst into ending things already? Shit, I don't know if I'm ready for that. I don't know if I can cope. I want to say things, to halt this moment, but I can't. I'm struck with silence. All I can do is stare at him.

“Zoe, we’ve been dancing around this for way too long. We’ve been in this weird place forever, and we haven’t made any kind of decision either way. For many reasons, I think we both know why. I mean, it was supposed to be a mutually beneficial agreement with you as my fiancée, to make me look good for the press and to my mom as well. All while getting you noticed by the press. It’s been hard to work out which way things can go for us.”

I want to bring up his mother, and Freddie as well, because they are family, and they are going to be affected by what we do. But I can’t say anything. I can’t get the words out. I can’t seem to make any sound. I’m just stuck here waiting to see what comes next.

“But all the time, I’ve been falling in love with you. I haven’t been able to stop myself from falling in love with you, because you’re absolutely perfect for me. I know it. Imperfect because of the world around us, but when we cut that out, you’re perfect for me.”

“I love you too,” I whisper, actually feeling a whole lot freer now that words are out there in the open. I honestly didn’t know if I would ever get the chance to say them out loud, so this is wonderful. I don’t think I’ve ever been happier than I am in this moment. “I have been in love with you, Remy. The whole time. Maybe even for the last six years...”

He chuckles, remembering that amazing night we shared, which is where this all came from. “Wow, now that really is

something special, isn't it? Me and you... it's been brewing forever."

I know it's different for Remy in a lot of ways, because when I was in London he had a whole other love story with Lisa, where Wyatt was created. And that was beautiful in its own way. But he's always been there in my heart, and I'm glad we can finally make this work.

It's scary. We do have those outside factors to consider, but like Remy said, if we cut all of that out and we only focus on us, then there is a lot of love there. There are a lot of emotions there, more intense than I have ever felt before, so we should just explore that. Even if it doesn't gel well with other people. Sometimes we just need to think about *us*.

So, as he leans down to kiss me, I allow everything else to finally go out of my head. It seems like Remy isn't ending things with me. I don't need to move away and change up my life completely, but that doesn't make this any less scary. Being open and vulnerable, jumping into this with both feet, and leaving my heart well and truly on the line knowing it could get broken, is utterly terrifying. But it's definitely what the both of us want.

As he cups my cheeks in his hands, I lean up on to my tiptoes and kiss him back. Because I need to taste those lips, I ache to taste him, to have him close to me once more. The electrical sparkles flurry all the way through my body as I press myself up against him, and I know that this is *right*. This is where I need to be. Scary as it is, this is perfect.

“I love you,” I murmur again because I love saying those words. Now that they are out there, I don’t think I’ll be able to stop saying them. “I really do, Remy.”

“Mmm, I know, I love you too.” Hearing those words is almost as exciting as saying them. Maybe even more so. “You’re the most beautiful woman in the world.”

When he takes my hand, I follow him to the bedroom with my eyes fixed on his the whole time. Now mixed in with the intensity of his desire is love too. Maybe that’s always been there, and we’ve been just trying to suppress it this whole time. But now it’s free, now it’s amazing.

We tumble on the bed together, still kissing, intertwined with one another, kissing sweetly as we take one another’s clothing off. This is just as passionate as the other times we’ve been together, but there’s less of a sense of urgency. It’s deeper and much more romantic. We can take the time to really explore one another, and to kiss and taste each other. My hands are all over him, just as his are on me, and we’re touching one another in the perfect way because we *know* one another now.

Our “fake” relationship has taught us all we need to know.

The kissing deepens as a now naked Remy rolls on top of me. The sensation of his lips crashing against mine and devouring me in lust really makes my heart pound like crazy. I spread my thighs a little for him, wrapping them around his back to drive him deep inside of me. I need him, all of him, and I need him right now. I can’t stand being teased and

played with today, not now that we've finally confessed our feelings to one another.

There is definitely a deeper bond and connection here, and it's insane. I can feel it wrapping around us, enveloping us in a deep warmth that I can't get enough of it.

"Oh fuck," Remy groans in agony and ecstasy as he slides within me. "No wonder I love you."

I feel the same way. No wonder I love him. How was I not supposed to fall in love with him when he's absolutely perfect for me? How could I not love Remy? He's *everything*.

The more our bodies thrust against one another, and we fill up the room with sounds of bliss, the more the pressure of pleasure builds, the less control I have over myself.

I call out his name over and over again, like I'm yelling out a prayer. Each thrust is deeper and more intense than the last. He hits all the right spots all the time. My nails dig deep into his back as the orgasm of love finally claims me hard and swallows me up whole. I'm probably piercing skin, but Remy doesn't notice that because he's lost in the intensity of the sensations as well.

Eventually as we collapse on the bed in a sweaty, intense heap together. I let out a little laugh. Things are about to get way more complicated from here on out, no doubt about it, but it feels good because somehow, Remy and I have finally managed to get on the same page, we're on the same team. I guess we're about to give this a go and to see where it will take us.

For the first time in a very long time, I have some hope. I have a feeling that we're going to make this work. I lace my fingers through his and hold him close. I can't let him go, and now I might not have to.

CHAPTER 22

Remy

“Are you ready for this?” I ask Zoe as I hold her hand tightly in mine. “I don’t know if I am, but we have to do this, don’t we? This is the only way.”

She sucks in a deep breath and holds it in for a moment. “Yeah, I think so. I don’t know how it’s going to go, but I’m ready to give it a try. I’m just glad that we don’t need to face your mother with this as well, although I’m not convinced everything will be perfect the next time we see one another. I’m trusting you that she said she’s willing to accept me, but still...”

I let out a little laugh. I know from the bottom of my heart that everything actually will go well once we all meet up again. I’m going to arrange a dinner or something once all the dust has settled to give my mother a chance to do better. I have a lot of hope that she will.

“That will be fine, I can promise you that much, but this... maybe not so much.”

We both stiffen and look at the house in front of us. Freddie’s place. It’s time to face him head on and see where he

stands with this. Since we've been through so much together already, I'm sure we can handle this as well. I hope anyway...

"At least I'm not filming that dumb movie anymore," she says with a sigh. "I think I would rather be here than having to get naked in that film. I'm *never* going to do that. I don't care if it does cost me jobs. I set that boundary for myself, and I want to stick to it."

I smile proudly at her. Because she's decided what she wants to do and she's standing up for herself. She will have a much better career if she can feel proud of herself the whole time. It makes me happy to see the woman that she's becoming as she blossoms into herself. As she becomes who she's really meant to be. I can't wait until the moment she moves in with me and we become official. I'm looking forward to the second we can really be *us*.

"Come on, let's do this. Let's rip off the Band-Aid."

There's an intense nervous energy burning between us. It's palpable and honestly leaving me with a bit of a dry mouth. I haven't ever had to say anything this bad to Freddie. I've never betrayed him, but this is the first time I've ever had anything worth risking everything for.

It's Zoe who knocks on the door first, but she steps back and hides a little behind me. She slides her hand away from me, but then reaches out and grabs me again. I don't think poor Zoe knows how to handle this, but together I think we can do it... I hope. I have to just be strong, that's all.

Freddie glowers the moment he opens the door, and he sees us together. He almost goes to shut the door on us before Zoe steps forward and refuses to let him.

“Freddie, things can’t carry on like this anymore. I think you know that as well as I do. We need to talk. We need to hash this out and make everything okay...”

“Why?” He offers his sister a sharp one shouldered shrug. “I know what the truth is. You guys are pretending to be together for the press, right? To boost your career or whatever. You don’t need to explain anything to me, I was there the moment we concocted the plan.”

“Freddie, just let us in so we can talk about this properly.”

I can see that Freddie isn’t interested in this, but Zoe is strong and determined. She isn’t about to let him back down on this one. She narrows her eyes at him with her hand on the door, holding it open until finally he steps aside and lets us in.

I don’t know if I would have had the same courage. Seeing the mood he’s in might have put me off. I could have quite easily convinced myself to come back at a time when he’s feeling better. But then again, I don’t know if he will ever calm down, so I suppose it’s now or never.

“What is it you want to chat about?” Freddie asks coldly with his arms folded defiantly across his chest. His rage is rolling off of his shoulders in powerful waves.

“We need to talk about what’s happened, Freddie, and where things have changed. You’re my brother, and I don’t

like this distance between us. It's painful."

"Why do you think this has happened, Zoe? Do you think I want this? I've been so lonely," Freddie argues. "I've lost both of you in one fell swoop and I don't even know why. I'm not sure what's happened with you guys. I just feel like I'm not in the loop anymore."

I sigh heavily because I feel guilty. So guilty because we have pushed Freddie out of the picture. We've been so wrapped up in one another that we haven't thought about him.

"I'm sorry," I finally pipe up. "I didn't mean for that to happen. It's all been a bit complex."

Freddie sucks in a sharp breath. "What the hell do you mean by 'complex'? This is really winding me up. I'm imagining the worst here, thinking that you guys are together for real or something, and I don't understand. The less you tell me, the more I freak out."

Oh fuck. Zoe and I exchange a look. He just described our relationship as "the worst." There's no way this is going to go well. But we've come this far, so I know we have to tell him.

"We are together," Zoe blurts out, before I can think of a much softer way to say this. "We have been together the whole time, Freddie, and I know you aren't going to like this, but we are. We've fallen in love, and we can't stop that. We can't make this right."

Freddie's cheeks shine so brightly red I can almost smell his rage. I brace myself, knowing that I'm about to get a well-

deserved smack in the face. I won't fight back, because Freddie deserves this punch if it makes him feel better, but I'm not looking forward to it.

"I can't believe you guys betrayed me like this," he snaps with his hands balled up into fists. "I can't believe you are together. That makes me feel sick. Sick to my stomach. The age difference... it's too much. There's no way you should be together. Remy, that's my *sister*."

"I know," I respond as I rise to my feet. Because it's time. "Which I hope you know means I wouldn't be here now if this wasn't important to me. If it wasn't real."

Freddie shakes his head determinedly. "Of all the women in the world. Why Zoe?"

"I can't help who I have fallen in love with. And she loves me too."

"This is my fault." He slumps on to his couch and lets his head fall into his hands. "This is all my fault. I never should have suggested this stupid plan. The fake fiancée thing... that was my plan because I never thought like anything like this would happen."

"No, Freddie, this isn't your fault." Zoe goes over to him, and she wraps her arms around him. He doesn't respond, but he doesn't push her off either. "This would have happened no matter what. We would have fallen for one another anyway because we can't keep away from one another. We can't stop ourselves from falling in love. It's just one of those things. I

know you don't like it, but I'm hoping one day you can see that we make one another happy."

"Happy?" He darts his eyes between us both. "You're happy together in this weird relationship? That doesn't make any sense to me. I don't understand how you can make one another happy. Are you even considering Wyatt in all of this? He might not like it."

"He loves Zoe," I tell him honestly. "They get on really well. Trust me, Freddie, I am thinking about Wyatt all the time, you know how important he is to me. He's at the center of everything."

We find ourselves at a bit of a standstill. I can see that Freddie isn't happy, and I didn't expect him to be, but I want him to understand just how important this is to us. This isn't something that we have entered into lightly. It has taken us a roller coaster to get to where we are. We've been to hell and back, and now we *know* that this is worth the fight. Zoe is worth everything.

I truly don't want to lose Freddie here. I love him too much for that, but I've had to make a decision and I have to say that I chose Zoe knowing what I'm risking.

"I don't know what you want me to say," Freddie finally admits. "I can't accept this, you know."

"But you love me," Zoe interjects. "And you love Remy as well. There's nothing that can get in the way of that." She smiles at Freddie, but I don't see him giving her the same expression back. "I know this might not make a lot of sense at

the moment, but over time... you'll see. You don't need to lose either of us here. This doesn't need to get messier."

"I don't know if I can handle this though," Freddie admits. "I don't know if I can see you guys together. In my heart, I don't know if this is something I can embrace."

"So, spend time with us separately, and see where this goes. Spend time with Remy like you always have done. Talk about safe subjects and see where it goes. Same for us as well."

Freddie sighs heavily. "I love you both, so I suppose I don't have any choice in the matter. It isn't like I want to keep being on my own. I want to have you both back. But this is hard. This is really hard for me. I don't think either of you appreciate how hard."

"We do," I insist. "We get it. But we also don't want to keep secrets anymore."

I know this is going to take us a very long time, and I'm sure both Zoe and Freddie understand that as well. But at least we aren't yelling at one another. I'm taking that as a win. He isn't going to punch me now, I don't think, but I'm not sure if our friendship will ever be the same.

"I think it might be best if you both leave me alone now," Freddie says sadly. "I need some time to process this. I will reach out to both of you when I'm ready to talk."

A heaviness washes over me as we leave. Even though that went so much better than I was expecting it to, it's still

heartbreaking to be kicked out like that. To know that I have no idea when I will get to see Freddie again.

“Do you think Freddie will ever reach out to us?” I ask Zoe as we leave.

“Oh yeah, for sure.” She nods confidently. “We just need to give him time. Things will be back to normal soon enough. It’ll be fine, I promise you that much.”

I decide to trust her and hope for the best, because everything is going so well other than Freddie at the moment. Better than I ever could have hoped for. It seems like the obstacles that were in our way are smaller than we both thought, which is just further proof that we’re meant to be together. That we can make it work forever. That our love is enough.

CHAPTER 23

Zoe

Six Months Later...

“**T**hat’s great, Zoe,” the director, Melissa, calls out to me. “We’re done for the day now.”

I thank Melissa, reminding her again that she’s my favorite director of all time, the best person I’ve ever worked with. She laughs and waves me away, letting me go at the exact time we planned to leave for the day. This couldn’t be more different than the last awful job I’ve worked on, which only makes it that much better. Everyone is respectful and nice, communication is massive, and I feel like I’m doing something good here.

I didn’t think that I would ever be lucky enough to get a major role in an indie movie, especially after what happened with my boundaries, when I insisted I wouldn’t get naked or work with Chris again, but it’s all worked out for me. I feel great about it.

“Hey, girl!” Megan cries out to me as she meets me at the door. “Come on, it’s cocktail time.”

I link my arm through Megan's, glad to see her again. It's been a while since we last hung out since she's based in LA now, her Hollywood dreams all starting to come true, whereas I'm happy here in New York City, but that hasn't prevented us from being the best of friends. Mary Lou too, who's meeting us at the bar for us to have a few drinks.

"I just saw your mother-in-law," Megan laughs as we walk. "I can't believe she used to be so hard. Sometimes I forget about the way she was with you in the beginning because she's so soft and sweet now. It seems like she's always been that way."

I chuckle and roll my eyes. "I know, she's the best, but when she despises you, it's so hard. She has so many walls up, it's basically impossible to break them down. I didn't think I would ever do it. I can't believe we've gotten to the place we are now."

We arrive at the bar in giddy high spirits, almost drunk off of life. It's so exciting to be here, having a laugh. I don't even know what cocktails Megan is ordering for us all, but I don't mind. I'm willing to drink anything she puts in front of us.

"How was your day?" I ask Mary Lou the moment Megan heads to the bar. "Are the kids good?"

"Oh yeah, they are great, and they were very excited when Remy brought Wyatt in for a play. They all had so much fun. But I am glad for a drink tonight."

I miss hanging out at the unit, but for now I need to focus on the movie. Remy, Wyatt and I will have all the time in the

world to play with Alice and the others soon enough. I have to concentrate on helping my acting dreams to come true. That's thrilling too.

"How long do you have filming?" Mary Lou asks me. "I'm really excited to go to a film premiere for the first time in my life. It's going to be so glamorous."

"Oh, I don't know about that, but it'll definitely be fun. Especially with us three there!"

Megan returns with the drinks, and she tells us all her wild Hollywood stories for a while. It's funny actually, imagining that being her life. She's my high school best friend who now rubs shoulders with A-list celebrities. It's great, and I'm glad that she has that. I know it makes her happy. Knowing that she's having a good time makes it easier when I miss her.

"Is that your phone?" Megan nods towards my bag. "I swear I just heard it."

"Yeah, me too," Mary Lou jumps in. "I think you just got a text message."

Are they being weird? I don't know, but I do eye them curiously as I pull out my phone. They are right though. Someone has reached out to me.

Remy: Do you remember where we shared our first alcoholic drink together?

Huh? Now I'm even more confused. Everyone is acting weird. I message back, but it's still odd.

Zoe: The bar at Freddie's birthday party, right?

Remy: Go there. To the table, to the chair you were sitting in.

“What is going on?” I ask my friends. “Look at what Remy just sent to me.”

My friends exchange a look, which only amps up my suspicion further. If something really is going on here, then they know all about it.

“I think we should follow the instructions. Just in case,” Megan declares as she grabs her handbag. “We’re almost finished with the cocktails anyway.”

“Really?” I ask, but Mary Lou nods as well. “Okay then, let’s go.”

We head to the bar, but much to my surprise, Remy isn’t there. Megan and Mary Lou don’t say anything, they simply head for the seat like they know what’s happening here.

There is *definitely* something happening. I guess all I can do is go along with it.

“So, what’s happening? Do we just sit here and wait? Or is there...” My phone beeps again with another message from Remy, right as Mary Lou finds a bunch of bright red roses sitting on the chair for me. “Oh okay, so this is some kind of game, right?”

Remy: Roses are red, violets are blue... do you remember where I first publicly kissed you?

“Okay, so it looks like we’re headed to another bar. Come with me.”

I can't stop myself from smiling as I hold onto the roses. Remy does a lot of sweet, romantic things for me, but this still feels like a surprise. Like I'm the luckiest woman alive. I can hardly contain my excitement as we head to the sidewalk where we first kissed for the paparazzi. I don't know what to expect here, but my heart is pounding and I can hardly catch my breath...

"Barbara!" I cry out excitedly. "Wyatt, you're here! It's so good to see you both. Oh my God!"

Wyatt steps forwards and hands me a small gift. Inside is the first edition of a book I was talking about a few weeks ago... a conversation I wasn't even sure Remy was listening to.

"This is so sweet." Tears flood my eyes. But they are happy tears. I'm overwhelmed with joy. "I don't know *what* is going on here, but this is adorable."

***Remy:** I love you. I hope you know that by now. But do you remember where I first said that to you? Because it's a beautiful moment that I have never forgotten.*

"It seems like we're going to Remy's house now. Are you all coming with me?"

Barbara looks over the moon that I have invited her. I can tell that she holds onto a lot of guilt for what happened in the past, even though I'm not concerned anymore. I wonder if she thinks I don't want her to be involved in everything in my life, but I do. I adore her.

I link my arm through Barbara's as we walk, and it isn't long before she gets caught up in my giddy excitement. I *know* that I'm the last person to know what's going on here. Everyone else has been involved in the planning of this cute little treasure hunt, where I'm getting gifts at every stop, but that doesn't stop me from enjoying every moment of it. I don't even need to know what's going on, I'm happy to go along for the ride, to see where it takes me.

This might even be a little more fun than the cocktail night I had planned.

"Oh my God," I gasp as soon as we get to Remy's home, because there's someone else who needs to join us. Someone who I wasn't sure would fully want to. "Freddie?"

It's been strained with us, it hasn't been perfect, but I do feel like things have been getting better every single day. Freddie has slowly been opening up to me and Remy more and more, becoming increasingly accepting of us. But I'm still amazed that he's here, being a part of whatever this is.

I can't stop myself. I'm getting all choked up and emotional as it is. I race forwards and fling myself into my brother's arms, hugging him tight, thanking him over and over.

"It's good to see you too, Zoe," he chuckles, but I can hear the emotion too. "You look great."

"What on earth is going on?" I chuckle as I pull back to wipe the tears from my eyes. "I have no idea what's happening here. I'm just going with the motions."

“Well, I have this for you, to add to the fun of the day.”

I spin around and lift up my hair so he can clip the diamond necklace around my neck. It hangs perfectly, looking so beautiful I could cry some more. Does Remy know what he’s doing to me?

“I think it’s time to go inside now. Into the living room.”

I nod at my brother, sensing acceptance at long last, which is all me and Remy have really wanted for him, before I head into Remy’s home—*my* home these days, even though it’s hard for me to get used to that—to find my man.

What I’m not expecting is to see him in the middle of the room, on one knee, with a ring box opened in his hands. A glittering ring, nothing like the first one he gave me, grabs my focus.

“I know we’ve kind of been here before,” Remy laughs. “But this is different. Very different. This is me laying my heart on the line to let you know just how I feel about you.”

“Oh wow.” I clap my hands to my mouth in shock. “Is this really happening?”

Remy nods as he continues. “Yes, and Zoe, I want you to know how much I love you. Not that words can really express it. Nothing can ever do my feelings for you justice. But I want to try.” Now he’s getting choked up too, which only makes me more emotional. “Zoe, I didn’t know how much I needed you, until you came into my life. Until you swept me off my feet

and reminded me what love can be. How powerful happiness is and what it means to me.”

“Oh wow, Remy...” I can hardly breathe because of his beautiful words.

“I want us to be together forever, Zoe. I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you, because you are just perfect. I want to spend the rest of my life dedicated to you, to make you happy for the rest of your life. Will you make me the happiest man alive? Will you marry me?”

“Yes,” I can’t get the word out fast enough. “Yes, of course I will marry you, Remy. I would love nothing more than to be your wife.”

He slides the ring onto my finger before he leaps to his feet to kiss me. That’s when our family and friends come to join us in the living room, cheering wildly and excitedly. That’s actually a reminder that they’re still here, celebrating this beautiful moment with us.

They hug us, embracing us in turn, but it’s when Freddie hugs me that I get the most choked up. Finally, he sees, he understands that this is right. Finally, he’s on our side, which means everything has finally come together. It took some time, but we’re here now, and that’s all that matters.

Love has won out in the end. Which is a great sign that the rest of our life is going to be beautiful. Our happy ever after... how beautiful...

Epilogue

Zoe

One Year Later...

“Oh my goodness, Zoe,” Mom exclaims as soon as she catches sight of me in my beautiful princess white gown. “You look absolutely stunning. Look at you.”

I try not to catch the tears that are now spilling down her face because I’ve just had my hair and makeup done, and I don’t want to ruin how I look today. This is the most special day ever, and I need to look beautiful for it. I want Remy to be blown away by me today.

Well, he’s blown away by me every single day, he always says that to me, but today is our wedding day. I can’t wait to see his face when he finally lays eyes on me.

“Thank you, Mom. Are you and Dad enjoying yourself?”

I want my parents to have the best time too, because they have come all the way from England for this special day, to reconnect with Remy and to get to know Wyatt as well. Especially since he’s officially my son now too. Obviously,

Lisa will always be his mother and we will always let Wyatt know as much. But I have adopted Wyatt, so he's safe in my company, and so we can continue to live as mother and son because I'm here for him.

It was a great process to go through. I'm so happy that we're here, and that we made it. I really do love Wyatt as my own, as much as I love Remy too. We have a great little family now, and I'm glad that's about to become even more official.

"Dad is playing with Wyatt. He's hanging out with the bridesmaids as well, charming them in his own special way. Barbara too, I think. She seems to really like him."

I let out a laugh because that is just what my father is like. Charming to the very end. "That's good to know. I'm glad he's having a good time."

"You know, I have to ask you..." Mom leans in a little closer and whispers to me. "About Mary Lou and Freddie. Do I spot a little spark there?"

"Do you?" I gasp in shock, because I haven't spotted that at all. "Wow, I don't know... but actually I hope so. I think they could be really good for one another."

"They look good, and I'm sure there's chemistry. I'll keep an eye out today."

Hmm, now that is really exciting. I will be trying my hardest to keep my eye out as well because if there is something going on here, then I want to know all about it. I

want to be there to support them both. It would be amazing to see Freddie happy, and Mary Lou as well.

“Anyway, we better get you ready, hadn’t we?” Mom chuckles. “Because your husband-to-be is out there already with his little best man at the end of the aisle.”

Freddie is obviously Remy’s best man, but Wyatt is too. Having a big role in this wedding has made him very excited about it all. I think he’s keen for us all to be a family as well.

“Yes, let’s go down there so I can gather up my bridesmaids... before they take full advantage of the free bar, and the ceremony becomes a comedy sketch!”

We chose this resort to get married at because we wanted to be able to have everyone in our lives celebrate this amazing day with us. It’s glamorous and well decorated, with lovely food and drinks for everyone. I really do think this is going to be the best day of my life. Fun for us all.

Mom takes my arm, and we head down the stairs to the room which has been set up specially for us. Mom sends Megan and Mary Lou out to keep me calm while she gets everyone in place. It isn’t long before the lovely music starts playing.

“It’s time,” Mary Lou whispers excitedly. “Let’s do this.”

I nod, wondering if now is the moment I should ask her about my brother. Quickly though, I decide not to. We can talk about it at the reception if the moment arises...

For now, I need to concentrate on putting one foot in front of the other, to get down that aisle to meet my husband to be so we can finally say those vows. That's what I'm most thrilled about. Expressing aloud what I feel about him.

"Oh wow," he gasps the moment he sees turns around to see me. "My goodness..."

I can see the intensity of the love shining in his eyes which makes me laugh a little with the giddy excitement of the day. I can hardly wait to meet him there, and it seems like Remy feels the same way. His has his arms outstretched to get me as soon as he can.

"You look unbelievable, Zoe," he gushes excitedly. "Wow, I'm the luckiest man alive."

"You don't look too bad. That suit looks amazing on you."

He leans down and rests his forehead on mine, just looking at me in my favorite way. I do adore it when we can stare into one another's eyes like this, blocking the rest of the world out. It envelops us in a little bubble which is truly just for us.

But then the wedding begins, and the officiant starts speaking the official words, making both Remy and I smile. It's like we have coat hangers between our lips because we're grinning like crazy from ear to ear. I truly feel an intense love between us, and an unbreakable bond like nothing I have ever felt before. Knowing that I can have this for the rest of my life is overwhelming.

“...and now it’s time for you to say your vows, if you are ready...”

I jump in first, because I’m absolutely bursting at the seams to say what I need to. I have been holding these words in for such a long time, that I can’t contain myself any longer. The words have almost been falling out of my mouth as I stand here looking at Remy. It’s too tempting to reveal all right away. So now I’m glad that I can finally do it at the exact right moment.

“Remy, I love you,” I say confidently, watching his expression shine even brighter. “And I have been looking forward to being your wife for a very long time. It’s all I’ve ever wanted, and I’m so happy that we’re here making it happen. Our love has been a wild ride, bringing us to this point, where we can finally look towards our happy ever after... which is what I want to talk to you about now. The future.” I take his hands and bring them close to me, before lightly resting them on my belly. Confusion flashes across his face, I can tell he’s struggling with what I’m saying. He hasn’t yet picked up on the meaning to my words. Mind you, he’s never been amazing with hints. I think it’s best for me to spill the beans. “Remy, I’m pregnant. We’re having a baby.”

As soon as this clicks into place, he lights up like a Christmas tree. “What? We’re having a baby? Are you for real? That’s so exciting. I can’t believe it!”

He laughs joyfully, before crashing his lips to mine. I think he’s forgotten that this is our wedding, and he’s supposed to

wait until he's told to kiss the bride. But I knew that would happen, because this is Remy, and he's out of hand.

"I can't believe this," he cries out joyfully. "I'm so happy. We're having a baby. Are you for real? This isn't some crazy prank, is it? No, of course it isn't. You wouldn't do that. We're going to be parents. I can't believe how exciting this is."

We've discussed having children, but we haven't had time to actively try. I haven't been looking at my ovulation chart or anything like that, but it's happened anyway, and we're both really happy about it. I want to make our family bigger, and I know that Remy does too.

As he lifts me from my feet and he spins me around, causing everyone to cheer so loudly I can hardly hear what he's saying, I feel a lightning bolt of happiness shoot through me. This really is exactly where I was supposed to end up, here with him.

"Oh my God, Zoe, they make my wedding vows seem silly," Remy finally laughs. "But I do want to tell you how much I love you, and how I can't wait to grow old with you. Our child... children too. Because we are going to be a kick ass family. I'm sure of it. I know I had more to say than that, but it's all gone out my mind. You'll have to forgive me. I'll tell you every single day instead. I'll make sure you know how much I love you always."

I think the officiant is then forced to tell Remy to kiss his bride because my husband has his lips on mine anyway. He's kissing me with love and passion, with sweetness and desire,

and with the sort of love that I know I'll get to experience for the rest of my life.

“My goodness, I love you,” Remy murmurs against my mouth. “This is the best day of my life. I already knew that it was going to be, but you've made it even better.”

A tear of joy leaks down his cheeks as he embraces me hard. I really get the sense that this is the first day of the rest of my life. This is the start of my happy ever after. I knew when I first met Remy that he was going to be important to me. My crush on him was intense and powerful. I could have predicted then that it would end up this way.

Of course, I've had doubts along the way. Many times I didn't think we could make it. But we're meant to be together, and nothing can stop that. Thank goodness we both realized that before it was too late because I don't think I could live without this love now, and I certainly wouldn't want to.

This is where I'm meant to be, and who I'm meant to be with. What could be better than that?

Silver Fox Billionaire

Sneak Peek

Prologue: Angelica

“It’s time to break up with Angie, Marc.”

Those words... they stun me to the core, shatter my heart into a million pieces. Who on earth would want my boyfriend of a whole year to end things with me? We’re the real deal, meant to be, and I just *know* that we’re going to be together forever.

How can someone be against that? How can someone hate true love? Marc Thompson and I are just *perfect*. The sooner everyone accepts that, the better.

It’s hard to hear everything being said because Marc’s house is *loud* tonight. His birthday party is also a little like a graduation party, because high school is done now, and soon everyone here will be going separate ways in their lives, to

different colleges. Even Marc and I are going to be on opposite ends of the country, but there's no need to *break up*. That's so extreme and unnecessary. We've planned how we're going to make it work, so what is *this*?

"I know you love her, but trust me, when you get to college everything will change," the unwelcome voice continues. "I've been through it, and I'm trying not to let you make the same mistakes as me. A breakup now will be horrible, but splitting up with your high school girlfriend when you're in college is so much worse."

"But I really don't like the sound of that, Haz..."

My blood runs ice cold. Haz. Fucking Haz. I have never gotten a good vibe from Marc's older brother, who I'm pretty sure is thirty years old now, but *this* is on another level.

Why does he hate me so much? Why is this asshole trying to ruin my life? I'm just taking a trip to the bathroom—I'm not even supposed to be listening to this chat—but now I can't stop. I grip onto the doorframe so hard my knuckles turn white. My heart has started thundering painfully in my chest. Its pounding is noisy against my rib cage. I fear it might break free at any given moment. I suck in and hold my breath, though, because I *need* to keep on hearing everything. If this really is the end, then I need to know.

"I think you know I'm right," Haz continues, trying to twist Marc's mind around further.

I hope my boyfriend is strong enough to ignore his brother and to put me first, but I also know Marc looks up to Haz like

he's the best thing ever. This is *so* frustrating.

“You know that you need to be sensible and to put yourself first for a change. She's a nice girl, I get it, but at the same time if it's meant to be then you will find your way back to one another.”

No. I shake my head anxiously as the world starts to spin way too quickly. *No, no, no.*

I know we're meant to be together, but I don't want that to be something that happens way in the future. I want it to happen right now. I want Marc and I to remain together, and to make it work. I love him. I *love* him so much. I won't be able to cope without Marc—college will be a nightmare. He's my safe place, my home, I need him.

“I *do* love her, though, Haz. I don't want to lose her. That feels really rough...”

My chest warms up, but I'm not quite ready to put a smile on my face just yet. Marc's words might be strong, but the force in his voice isn't quite as powerful. Does he feel the same way about me? I've always thought so, but now I'm not sure at all. Now nothing makes sense.

“Buddy, you're going to lose one another anyway. Trust me. I know some of the strongest high school relationships couldn't even last a week at college. Then it all gets complicated and the breakup is really hard. All because no one knew how to let go. Doing it here, while you're face to face actually gives you a chance to do the mature thing and to talk it through properly.”

“This isn’t how I wanted tonight to end.” I hate the crack in Marc’s voice. Why the hell is he so weak? “This isn’t how I wanted any of this to end.”

“I know, but I’ll be here for you. No matter what.”

The room is spinning. Now I really do need the bathroom. I race through the hallway until I reach the room I so desperately need. I shove everyone out of the way, and finally lock myself away from the world. Away from Haz. That manipulative piece of shit. Oh my God, I despise him. I hate his guts.

As I’m trying to catch my breath, I hear people yelling at me. I guess there was a queue and I jumped it, but that isn’t at the forefront of my mind. I’m gasping, trying my absolute hardest to gather myself together before I become a useless puddle on the floor.

“I can’t let this happen,” I whisper to myself. “I can’t. I need to fight, I have to...”

But hearing Marc agree with Haz, and knowing just how much Marc respects his brother makes me want to weep. I grip onto my stomach, trying my hardest to keep the vomit inside. I have this horrible feeling that if I start crying, I’ll never stop.

I haven’t even *considered* life without Marc. My college plans have always included him. I thought that we would call and text, do video dates and even visit one another. That was all going to be part of my life. If he breaks up with me then I don’t know *what* I will do.

I fall to my knees as the true reality of this hits me hard, and my palms smack against the vinyl flooring. I don't even recognize the animalistic sounds coming out of me as I cry, sobbing as if I'd just lost everything. My chest hurts, my head aches, my whole body constricts with agony.

I can't do this. There's no way I can do this. I have to change Marc's mind...

I honestly don't know how long I remain crying in the bathroom, but I do know that by the time the tears subside, my face is red, raw, and full of agony. I *really* don't want to leave the bathroom now. I can't stand the idea of facing anyone, but I also can't remain here all night. Especially when I know there's a queue outside. People want to use the bathroom, too.

Embarrassed and devastated, I sidle out of the bathroom, refusing to meet any eyes. I run down the hallway, needing to get outside. The heat of the house, plus the noise, makes me feel like the walls are closing in on me. It isn't until the cool air of the night hits me that I finally stop running. That's when I pause, and I slide my eyes closed and let the night wash over me. It's cool and crisp but does nothing to calm down the racing heat through my body.

What am I going to do now? I wonder as I stare up at the stars. *What's next for me?*

A part of me just wants to walk off, to make my way home. I don't live too far from here, so I could do it, but my limbs don't move. I'm sure that if I leave now, I really will lose Marc. I'll never get a chance to see him again. Haz has

whispered nasty lies in his ears, making sure that we are *done* forever. I still don't know why *he* cares. Asshole.

No, I need to do this. I need to talk to my boyfriend. I have to let him know that I love him and remind him how much he loves me. Only I can convince him. I mean, we've been through *so* much already; we can get through this. If I can get him to look at the photos of the beach trip we took, when we were so happy and promised one another that we would love each other forever, then he won't want things to end.

He can't want this to end, surely. That doesn't make any sense at all.

I can also remind him how we suffered the drama of Tessa wanting to break us up so she could be with him. We were *so* strong then. That was hard because Tessa is popular and beautiful—she would have looked great on Marc's arm. But we remained strong. We kept our heads up high and we were better for it. So, he can't let Haz get under his skin now.

Fuck Haz. He might not know any of that. He might not have seen the photographs of us being all happy and in love. He just might not have a clue, but Marc does. If Haz can talk in his ear, so can I. If this is a battle, then *I* will be the one who wins.

“Angie, there you are.” A hand rests on my shoulder, snapping my eyes open, bringing reality back into my world once more. “I've been looking for you.”

I smile widely at Marc, but he doesn't return my grin. I guess he can see the redness in my cheeks and eyes, burning

from the tears. “I’ve been looking for you, too.”

“Do you want to go inside to talk?”

I shake my head. I don’t know why, but I feel like I can explain myself better out here in the fresh night air.

“Okay, that’s fine, we can chat here.”

There’s a bench in Marc’s garden where we have spent a lot of time during our relationship, just chatting and having a good time. I didn’t know it would be the place where I also need to fight for my life. But fight I will. I’ll fight to the bitter end. This relationship is worth it. Being with Marc is the only thing that makes me happy, I can’t let go of this love.

“So, I think we need to talk about us.” I hate the way he says this. “Don’t you?”

“About how happy we are?” I insist, maybe a little bitterly. “About how we’ve had such an amazing year-long relationship that will definitely survive college? Because if you really think about it, and maybe take a look through the photographs of us... remember that day at the beach. I keep thinking about that day on the beach where we were so happy...”

My words trail off as I watch Marc’s expression falter. Oh God, he doesn’t want to hear it, does he? Haz has already worked his nasty magic. That won’t stop me from fighting, but it’s definitely going to make it a lot harder. I have to give it my all.

“I just think that we should end things on a positive note,” he says quietly, with sadness dripping off his tongue. “While

we can have a nice goodbye, because we really have had the best relationship, and I don't want it all to end on bad terms."

I shake my head emphatically. "You don't need to feel that way. You don't need to end this. We don't need to end things here. We can still be together, that's always been the plan, hasn't it? We will make it work. We'll use technology to keep in touch and visit all the time."

Why isn't he listening to me? Why does he have that weird blank expression on his face? I *really* need to dig down deep so I can fight from the bottom of my heart. I suck in a deep breath, knowing that I will stick at this all night long if that's what it takes.

I won't let Marc leave me.

I won't let Haz win.

Chapter 1: Angelica

Eight years later...

I sigh heavily as I step back into the house I left a long time ago, never thinking I would return to stay. But when everything falls apart, I suppose I should just be grateful that my parents still have a room for me, and I can come back home. This beats being homeless... just. I've gone back and forth a few times but decided that this is the best after all.

It doesn't help that my bedroom is still exactly the same as I left it. It's like walking back in time to being a high school kid once more. I sigh heavily and toss my bags on the bed before I walk around the room. I take a look at all the photos lining the wall. All the memories that I pretty much forgot the moment I left for college come flooding back.

"Aww, me and Tina," I mutter to myself as I see her photo. We had a great friendship in school. It was always amazing. I guess our communication slipped a little when we both went off to college because she went up to Alaska and was way too far away for me to visit. But we *did* stay in touch a little, and I do know she's back in town now, which is particularly

interesting now that I'm here, too. "Tina, I've missed you a lot, girl."

I actually might contact her. I mean, if I have to be back in Cape May then I at least want to enjoy my time here. I don't have her cell phone number anymore, but she is still on my contacts list. I am connected to her on social media so, why not? She might even want to hear from me again. We could go out and have a good time, paint the town red like we used to...

Oh! But then another picture captures my attention, and it makes my heart sink. I *know* everyone has embarrassing high school relationship stories—we all shared in our humiliation in college—but facing it right here and now rushes shame over me. Thinking of that particular person always does that to me.

"Oh Marc," I mutter to myself with a little chuckle, just to try and get over the feeling of embarrassment. "What a mess, huh? I really did beg you to stay with me, didn't I?"

When I look back, I cringe like hell because I refused to let it go. Marc basically spent a whole summer telling me that it was over, and I wouldn't hear it. I was an emotional wreck. I was just immature enough to make something inevitable much harder than it needed to be.

I don't know *what* happened to Marc once I left for college. I blocked him from my life right before I left town because I needed a fresh start, and I haven't ever looked for him on social media since. So I don't know if he's here, but I really hope not. It's almost been a decade, but I don't know if I will be able to look him in the eye again.

No, it's just too humiliating. God, I can't believe how childish I was. I can't believe how much of a big deal I made of everything. What a terrible summer that was...

"Angelica," Mom calls up the stairs, making me jump. I spent the last year living alone in a studio apartment, so I'm going to have some adjusting to do to get used to living with people again. "Dinner is ready. Are you ready to eat or do you want me to warm it up later?"

"Yeah, coming," I call back, but I don't move right away. I really do feel a bit like a teen again, already rebelling against my mother's commands. "I'll eat now, thanks."

But eventually my stomach gets the better of me. It's rumbling and desperate for a home-cooked meal. I have to admit I haven't exactly eaten well while I've been away. But that isn't going to be enough to make me feel happy about being back. I had to sacrifice my freedom to be back home, and my sanity as well. All because the publishing startup company that I got a graduate job with after college fell apart, leaving me with nothing. It didn't pay well, and self-help books definitely aren't therapy, which is the area I'm trained to work in, but it gave me a space to be in the world. It gave me a home and a place where I felt like *me*.

The collapse of the business sent me into an immediate panic. I tried *everything* to restart my life. I even tried to see it as an opportunity to get me in to the real world, but nothing panned out for me, and my meager savings didn't last long. I

guess it's just typical that a Cape May company hired me right away, bringing me right back home. Tragically meant to be.

I really do feel like I've taken many steps back in life. My shoulder slump at that thought.

Mom and Dad are clearly pleased to have me back. They jumped at the chance to bring me home. I have to admit, I haven't been the best at visiting, but I was just so freaking busy. Life always had me on the go, it seemed. Ignoring my family wasn't something I meant to do.

They are *definitely* going to drive me up the wall a bit with their looming over me now that I'm here. I make up my mind to reach out to Tina because I need to get out of here as soon as I can. Being back in the role of daughter is great but it's already getting just a little bit stifling.

I do love my parents, of course I do, but having them all up in my personal space will be a lot. Especially with my life up in the air. Everything is a mess and I really need to find a way to get my whole existence back together. Somehow.

"Wow, Tina, you're right. The Tavern *is* really busy on a Friday night," I laugh as I call out over the sound of the music. "I am *loving* this vibe. It's so cool."

Sure, it's nothing like the city bars I've become accustomed to but Cape May actually does have a lot more to offer than I remembered it having when I was a kid.

"It *is* great, isn't it?" Tina lifts her cocktail up to clink it against mine. "I love it here. It's just one of the reasons why

I'm glad I never really left. I know I did college, but as soon as I could get out of ice-cold Alaska, I was back here."

"Tell me everything." I would much rather listen to Tina and learn about her life than worry about my own. Ugh, I need a break from my brain for a while and from the drama of my existence. "What happened in Alaska? How was college? What's happening here?"

"Well, as you know, at the time I wanted to get as far away from Cape May as possible..."

"You definitely achieved that," I reply wryly as I take a much-needed swig of my drink. "The only other thing you could have done was left the country completely."

"I know." She rolls her eyes. "But Alaska was far enough away, and for a while I loved it. I *really* loved it. It was fun, a bit of a party school which was great for me, and good for studying. But eventually the homesickness started to creep in, and I just kept missing home. Funny for someone who couldn't get away quick enough."

"Wow, yeah, I have to admit I really am shocked that you're here. Glad though," I reassure her quickly. "I would *hate* being back even more if you weren't here, too."

Tina grins ear to ear. "Girl, I'm glad to have you here as well. The town hasn't been the same without you. Everything is going to get so much better now. I mean, I already love my job at City Hall, but now I get to have more of a social life! Dating is fun, but nothing is better than girl time. Especially with someone I have so many memories with."

We clink our glasses together once more, laughing loudly. This side of feeling like a teenager once more is nostalgic and fun. Being back with Tina makes me feel a whole lot lighter. The heaviness weighing down on me that has been there ever since the publishing company collapsed isn't quite so powerful anymore. Tina has helped to remind me that not everything is as serious as it feels. As teens we were always full of hope and looking towards what we could do with life, and that doesn't have to change now.

We're still young, only twenty-six years old, and the future is still our oyster. Maybe all of this will be for the best, I mean at least I get to be a therapist for real now, right? That's something!

Tina and I drink maybe a little too much, but who cares? I'm giddy and excitable for the first time in a very long time, and I've been laughing so hard that my sides hurt. Other people have been filtering in and out of the bar as they head out to other places to party, but we remain right where we are, catching up and having a good time.

"...so, then Patrick tried to deny that he was even using dating apps," Tina exclaims. "And I think his fiancée actually believed him, which is just so crazy."

"Wow, so the guys here are just as terrible as those I've left behind," I declare with a grimace. "That's good to know. My dating life has been one failure after another since I left for college. I haven't met anyone who isn't into love bombing and ghosting, or just totally crazy..."

“Guys are bad everywhere.” Tina makes a dismissive gesture with her hand. “I think that’s true wherever you go in the world. You just need to try and find the good ones.”

I can’t help but wonder what it feels like to find a good guy. The closest I’ve felt too settled and content with someone is Marc, but that doesn’t really mean anything because it was just a childish crush. I have no idea what love feels like, but I can’t wait to find out...

“Oof!” The crowd gets a little rowdy and someone knocks into the back of me. I try to grab my drink before it tips over completely and spills everywhere, but it’s too late. It makes a mess, much to my dismay. “Oh shit, sorry about that. Some idiot can’t handle his drink.”

I turn to face the man attached to the voice, and before I can snap at him for being clumsy and causing this mess, my words stop dead in my throat. Who the hell is *this*? He’s gorgeous. I don’t think this is just the beer goggles—he is a real hottie. Tall, dark, with chiseled cheekbones and broad shoulders that are to die for. He’s one of those men that are so handsome they actually leave me speechless. I haven’t met many of them before, but wow. He is *it*.

“I will get someone over here to mop you up, and buy you a new drink as well,” he says in a chocolatey smooth voice which sends a shudder down my spine. God damn it, even his words are intoxicating and sexy as hell. “Both of you. Looks like you were drinking cocktails, right? I will make sure you get another. In fact, I will take care of your tab all night long.”

Tina shoots me a look, showing me that she's just as impressed by this hunk as I am. She probably knows him, too, since everyone knows everyone around here. I'm especially impressed because he's about to take care of our bill for the night. That's a great way to make it up to me...

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About Amber Green

Amber Green's books are sure to keep you on the edge of your seat, with twists and turns you never see coming! If she isn't writing a new novel, she's delving into someone's birth chart as an astrologer. She loves to explore complicated relationships and push the boundaries of what love is supposed to look like. Whether it's a silver fox filthy rich billionaire and his young assistant, a grumpy producer and the girl next door, or two estranged soulmates trying to make it work, her stories will surely make you swoon. Amber's books are all about passion, heat, and heart - so get ready for a wild ride!



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