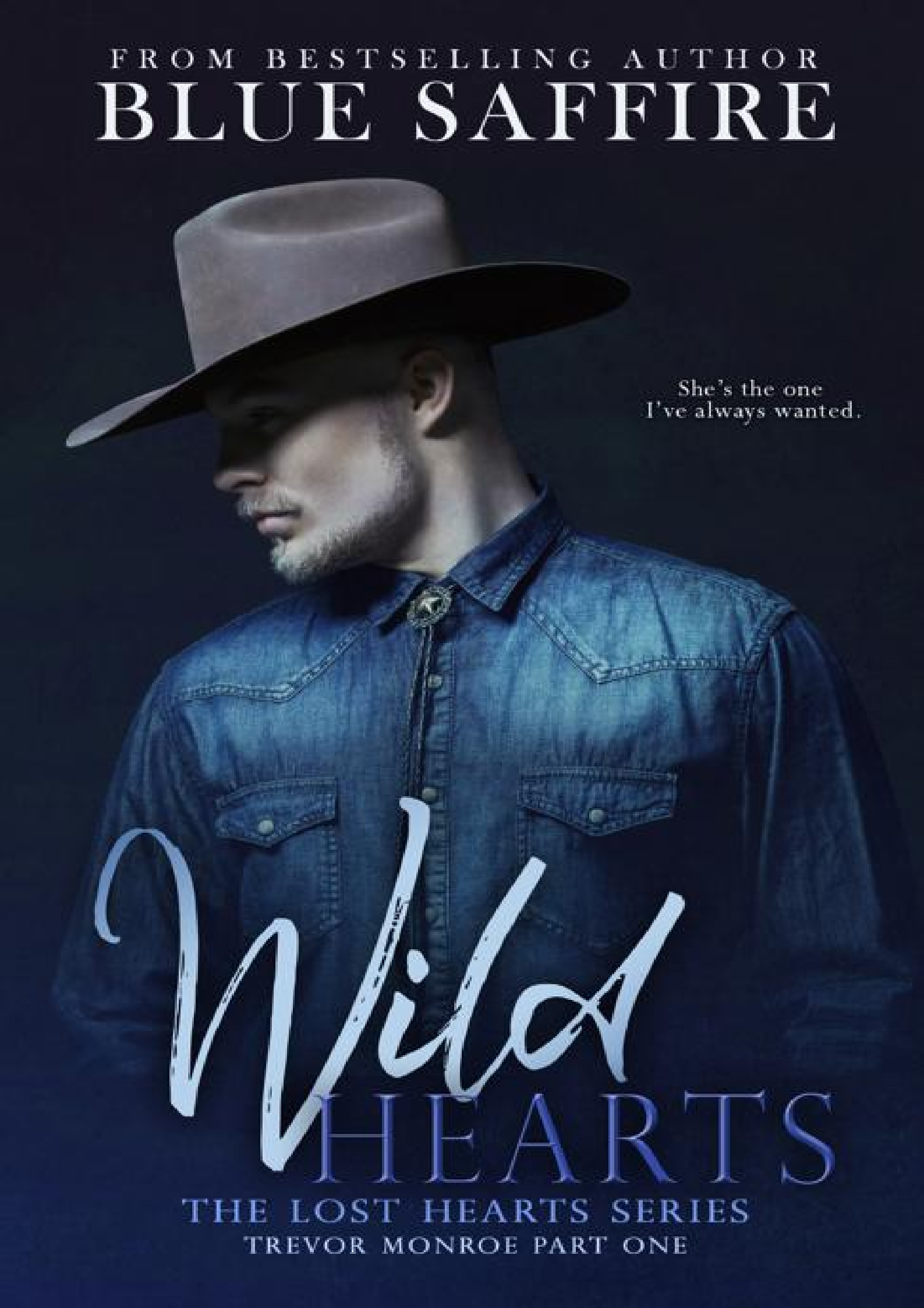


FROM BESTSELLING AUTHOR
BLUE SAFFIRE

She's the one
I've always wanted.

A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a brown cowboy hat and a blue denim shirt, is shown in profile against a dark background. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his features and the texture of his clothing.

Wild
HEARTS

THE LOST HEARTS SERIES
TREVOR MONROE PART ONE

WILD HEARTS

TREVOR MONROE PART 1



BLUE SAFFIRE

PERCEPTIVE
ILLUSIONS

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**PERCEPTIVE ILLUSIONS
PUBLISHING, INC.**

Wild Hearts

Lost Hearts

Trevor Monroe Part 1

Blue Saffire

Perceptive Illusions Publishing, Inc.

Bay Shore, New York

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WORDS FROM BLUE

It's not always what it seems. Sometimes, taking a moment to breathe clears your perspective. Silence brings clarity.

—BLUE SAFFIRE

PREFACE

Home

Lynn

It's like I can't breathe. I made a vow to stay away from the place where my heart lives. Placing one foot in Texas has the power to shred me open.

I would bleed out. Without question, I know I would. However, I have to go. This time I have to go home.

“Are you all right?” my manager asks.

I look up from my phone into the face of Matthew. I have to squint through my tears to see him. I dart my tongue out to wet my lips. Suddenly, the air conditioning in my dressing room sends a chill through me.

Matthew stares back with concern in his green eyes. This man has become such a good friend. One of my best friends. Not everyone in the business gets that lucky. He's been there when I needed him to be throughout the years. He has had my back through everything while I've made my mark on the world.

“No... no... I.” Tears begin to roll down my cheeks as it hits me. With the shake of my head, the truth slips free. “No, I don't think I am.”

“Talk to me. What's going on?”

“I have to go home. It... it's my father. Daddy needs me,” I choke out.

“Is Moses okay? Wasn’t that just last month he came to New York?” he says.

“Mama says he had a stroke. She says it wasn’t as bad as it could have been, but I know she’s lying. I have to go home,” I reply.

“No problem. Elise and I will get to work on canceling tour dates. Do you know how long you’ll want to take?”

I shake my head and purse my lips to trap the sobs in my throat. I don’t know what’s gutting me more. The reason I have to go home or the past that awaits me when I arrive.

Matthew perches on the side of the vanity in my dressing room. Searching my face with his green gaze. I note the moment he sees through me.

“You know, I’ve never questioned why you refuse to go home to visit your parents. You always have them flown out to New York or Nashville for the holidays, no matter if you’re working or not.

“At least two members of your team and best friends are all from Texas and still visit or have a home there, but you”—he shakes his head—“you won’t even entertain visiting. I find it interesting that a Texas-born girl refuses to book a show in the state.

“Hell, Texas is one big state. If this is another Walter situation, I should know about it,” he finishes.

“It’s nothing like that,” I murmur.

“Then what is it?”

He gives me a pointed stare. Waiting for me to come clean the way he always does when he knows I’m holding something back. When I don’t respond, he continues.

“I love you, baby girl. Like my very own little sister, but it’s time for you to tell me what’s going on in Texas that has undone you completely.”

I close my eyes while the tears flow. “My biggest regrets are in Texas. The reasons my songs come from my heart, but I can’t give the label the happy stuff they’ve been asking for...

the reason I can't commit to a decent relationship. That man lives in Texas. The one who broke my heart... that's who's in Texas," I breathe through trembling lips.

"I'm thinking this trip is long overdue. Go home, show him you made it big and he's the one who should have regrets," Matthew replies.

I snort and shove a hand into the front of my hair. "Nope, he has a family now, a wife and kids. I don't matter."

Matthew's brows shoot up. "Why in the hell would you be hung up on someone you don't matter to?"

"It... it wasn't always that way. So much happened that summer... that year after." I pause to blink in confusion as I get my thoughts together. "I made mistakes, my daddy got in the middle and... and I guess I made the wrong choice and then... and then... I... I always felt like I missed something. Then... then... it was over."

"Lynn, baby girl, any man willing to turn his back on you is out of his damn mind. You light up a room without so much as trying," he says and folds his arms over his broad chest.

A weak smile is all I can offer him. He and his Melody had a forever love. The kind I once thought I had. After losing her, he has made it his mission to see to it that everyone else finds love and happiness. I just don't think that will ever be in the cards for me.

"We're just... it's complicated. Always has been."

"Wait, this sounds a lot deeper than what you're letting on." He takes another pause while tapping his phone against his chin, staring off into space. A moment later, his fingers are flying across the device in his hands. "Okay, I just had Elise clear your schedule. Now you and I are going to have a long chat. I want details."

I don't have the words to speak just yet; the pain is still rolling through me. I'm crumbling from the inside out. I haven't spoken of this topic in years. I only allow myself to go there for the music.

Breathe, Cakes. Just breathe.

CHAPTER 1



*N*ot Letting Go

Donna

TREVOR HAS another think coming if he thinks this is over. I'm in this for the long haul, honey. That was the plan from the moment I laid eyes on him.

He didn't see it coming then; he doesn't see it now. I put in too much hard work to let it all fall apart now. I owe twenty-year-old debts from securing my husband.

I'm nobody's fool. That's exactly why I had my lawyer set up these mandatory group sessions for Trevor. I plan to get my husband back. Or at least I'm not giving up without a fight.

I'd say I got the short end of the stick. Brad's the one with the real money. Too bad he's ten years younger than me. That bitch he married doesn't deserve him. She reminds me of the bitch who ruined my family.

Brad will learn like Daddy did. Those black bitches are good for nothing. In the end, he came running back to Mama.

Too bad she didn't learn her lesson. He knocked her up with Collen, my little brother and left her again. Leaving her with a baby as she wasted away. She died with nothing.

Nope, Mama had nothing, and his Black bitch wife had it all. I was smart though. I saw Trevor and made sure I'd always have no matter what I had to do. I did him a favor if you ask me.

I won't end up like Mama. Waiting and wasting away for a man who doesn't show up until there's no time left. I deserve better and no one is going to get in the middle of that.

I narrow my eyes and slide farther down in my seat. I'm in the Mercedes I bought with Trevor's money before he tried to cut me off. I don't want him to see me.

I want to make sure he's going to these group sessions with my own two eyes. I've talked to that quack doctor who runs them on the phone a few times. I didn't know she was Black until this morning.

Well, there's nothing I can do about that now. My lawyer said she's the best and has helped a number of his clients reconcile. I highly doubt that, but I plan to find out.

I told him I'd double his hourly rate if he got Trevor into this group. I smile to myself. I've been stashing money away for years.

Besides, the blow job I gave my dear esquire didn't hurt any. I have Bernstein wrapped around my little finger. I'll get whatever I want from my legal representation.

He should've thought about his actions first. I'll end him with the click of that same little finger. It would be a shame for his wife and the rest of his firm to get a hold of that video.

I've always used my talents to get what I want. Right now, I want my husband back. I always get what I want.

Always.

"Look at him," I murmur to myself as Trevor hops his almost six-five frame out of his pickup truck.

I lick my lips. Trevor's body was made for sin. He may not have his brother's money, but neither brother got cheated on looks or those chiseled bodies.

Where Brad's body says NFL football star. Trevor's hard body screams hardworking man. All man. Lord, honey, Texas makes its boys right.

Trevor's sexy, tapered and trimmed beard and mustache gives him a sensual, debonair, ruggedness. It's delicious

against his sun-kissed tan. Working construction all these years has kept that body in top condition.

Whew, and the dimples. The dimples are a family trait that's jaw-dropping when they turn those smiles on you. Or should I say panty-melting?

It has been far too long since I took that long cock of his for a ride. His jeans are hugging that firm ass just right. The crisp white button-down fits his muscled arms and chest perfectly.

Um, he's brooding today. His brooding days are when you're most likely to catch him in a Stetson, like the gray one he has on now. His golden locks are just long enough to brush his shoulders in the back and his jawline in the front.

I love it when he keeps it long. I don't much care for his shorter cuts. Every so often, the mood strikes him to shave it down. I hate it.

I miss my husband. I'll have to get him to give in to me sooner rather than later. I'm too old to trap him with any more babies, especially with those twins running in his family.

That last one almost ruined me for good. Those Monroes make some huge babies. I'm going to have to try something different this time. I'll work this out soon enough.



TREVOR

I DON'T FUCKING WANT to be here. I want a damn divorce. I want to move on with my children and my life. However, Donna is hell-bent on dragging this bullshit out. I swear on everything that's holy; if I were a lesser man, I'd wrap my hands around her neck.

Val, the wife of my brother's business partner, has offered a few times to make Donna disappear. I shudder every time. Something in her eyes tells me she means it.

I haven't missed the same look in her husband Uri's eyes. It's something that's kept me from joking about taking her up on her offer. My soon-to-be ex-wife is a bitch, but Donna's still the mother of my children.

As little as she seems to care about our kids, I know they still love their trifling mama. It's one of the reasons all this bullshit is dragging on my nerves. My babies deserve a hell of a lot better.

Honest to God, my babies are the only reason I'm here. Damn court order or not, I have no intention of reconciling and continuing this marriage. I'm here to prove that shit is absolutely impossible. The sooner I get that done, the better.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. You're all here for different reasons, but the fundamental reason is the same. Each of you would like to have your life feel like your own again." Dr. Winsor's brown eyes fall on me.

"The best way to get to that point is to find where it all went wrong. That being said, gentleman, who's going to break the ice? Give us your name, then tell us how you think you arrived here."

I don't hesitate to jump on in. My kids need some stability and they deserve a better life. If I'm honest with myself, so do I. Enough is enough.

"My name is Trevor Monroe," I say loud and clear.

"Welcome, Trevor," Dr. Winsor says with a warm smile. "Thank you for being the first to step up. Everyone, let's welcome Trevor."

Solemn murmurs come from the men around me. My gaze travels around them all. A few have lovesick written across their faces, others reveal sorrow. For them there's someone on the other end of this they want to get right for. That's not the case for me.

"I'm here because I married a bitch. I want a damn divorce. My money is paying for some flashy, scumbag city lawyer that's pulling all types of bullshit to prevent this

divorce, but it's happening. Sooner or later, it's happening," I growl as my chest heaves, my Texan accent heavy.

"Um, wow. Take a deep breath, Trevor," Dr. Winsor says softly. "I understand you have hard feelings about your situation. I'm sure they're valid. However, there has to be a starting point. Tell us about you. Where did it all start? How did you come to marry your wife? Where did that decision birth from?"

I clench my fists in anger and nod my head. "Yes, ma'am."

As she suggests, I inhale a deep breath. I have to do it once more to calm myself a bit. I think, seriously think. My heart breaks as I open the gate to memories I sealed shut a long, long time ago. My vision blurs, my eyes start to burn, and I close them.

Names I haven't said in years whisper in my mind. The course of my life was changed by those two names. The two who crushed me. That's exactly where this all started. I'm not a fool, so I won't deny that.

If it weren't for what happened to Brooke, there never would have been a Donna. At least not as a wife. Everything would have been different.

My best friend, Brooke, saw right through me. She set me straight and sent me after what I wanted, but by then, everything had changed.

Memories of Brooke and the name I still, to this day, can't bear to breathe out loud assault me. That gate swings wide open and delivers a punch to the gut. Like hot molasses, my lips loosen and it all spills forward.

"I was twenty and had so many dreams. We all did. They were my friends.

"The girls everyone had to be around. They each had their own magnetism about them. They pulled you in until you needed to be near them." My country drawl is heavy with emotion.

As the words flow, I'm taken back to the time when my life went totally wrong. A time I'll never get to change or go

back to. It was the one time I risked dreaming for more.

Yup, I know exactly when this train wreck started.

CHAPTER 2



Then

Trevor

Twenty years ago...

I KEEP my eyes closed and let the hot Texas sun beat down on me. It's damn good to be home. I'll be the first to admit my junior year in college burned me out.

The familiar faces and sweet Texas girls I grew up calling my friends are something I've been longing for. This is real. This is where my heart lives.

"Why, look at you. Did you go turn into a man on me, Trevor Monroe?" A smile comes to my lips as I open my eyes.

I find none other than Brooke Galveston taking a seat beside me on the dock I've been perched on, away from the crowd.

"Darlin', I've been a man." I snort. "If you weren't so busy with your nose in them books, you would have noticed."

"Whatever, Trevor," she says with her Southern belle accent that warms my heart.

This right here is what I've been missing. Our easy banter and the peace that comes with knowing a friend so well. At school, the girls are nothing like Brooke. I can have a conversation with her without having cleavage thrown in my face or hearing damn silly giggles ring out for no blasted reason.

It all seems unavoidable since I play football for the school's team. Over the last two years, dreams of going away to college and my love of the game have faded away. I'm a simple country boy and I miss my simpler life.

Brooke bumps my shoulder with hers and looks up at me with those big brown eyes, searching my face. "Hey, what's up? Why do you look so down?"

"Just thinking." I shrug my shoulders.

"Just thinking about that cupcake you stole?"

My cheeks heat. I'm sure they've turned pink. I knew where to find the treat. I'd been looking forward to those cupcakes as much as I had been wanting to see the face of the girl who made them.

"I plead the fifth."

"Yeah, you would," she laughs. "But what's really going on?"

"I'm thinking, that's all," I say.

"Hmm, shouldn't you be excited? I know I am. We're leaving in fifteen days. This will be epic," she says with a glow in her eyes and a beaming smile on her face.

"I'm excited."

"*Ha.*" She laughs. "Sure you are."

Honestly, I am excited about the trip. At least I'm excited about the chance to travel with my friends. The trip had been her idea. So, of course, she's the most excited about going to Europe. Brooke has always been a hopeless romantic and has a lovers' tour planned for everyone.

The kicker is... there won't be a single couple on the trip, but everyone loves her and wouldn't dream of saying no when she has her heart set on something. That's something you just don't do. Which is how we're heading to Europe to live one of her dreams with a few of our closest friends.

"No." A shriek from across the way fills the air.

I whip my head in the direction of the voice. I know who it belongs to before my gaze finds her. From the moment my eyes land on her, I'm sucked in. She has the prettiest brown skin and those sparkling brown eyes. Her gorgeous smile, wild reddish-brown hair, and heart-shaped face are all so captivating.

She has grown into an undeniably stunning young woman. I'm not surprised at the line of guys ready to chase her around the lake. Her beauty is like a siren's call—unable to be ignored.

"I still haven't figured out why you won't just ask her out," Brooke says, grabbing my attention from her younger sister.

"Huh?"

I turn to look into a similar brown face. Just as gorgeous as the girl on the other side of the lake. Brooke's eyes shine with mirth as the sun beams down on her. However, my heart doesn't skip a beat the same way when we lock gazes.

"Come on." Brooke rolls her eyes and groans. "Trev, you've been in love with my sister for forever."

"Wh... what are you talking about? I love you both like sisters."

"That's pure, utter bullshit, and you know it, Trevor Monroe," she accuses. "I've watched how you look at her.

"It's not at all how you look at me. It's clear that I'm only a friend. I don't think there's been a time you haven't looked out for us, but you go insane if someone tries to hurt her or if she's upset. It's way different."

"She's younger. She's the baby."

"If you say so. Two years younger isn't that big a difference. Are you forgetting how well I know you?"

My gaze falls to my hands. Damn if she isn't right. I'm crazy about Lynn or Cakes, as everyone around here knows her. I don't remember when things changed. All I do know is when I look at her, my heart races and I can't breathe.

I've spent so much time telling myself she's too young or our friendship is too important to ruin with my infatuation. Still, summer after summer, I've come home and realized these feelings aren't going anywhere. If anything, they've grown with each year as she's become more of a woman. I guess I just haven't known what to do about them.

"Can I give you some advice?" Brooke says cautiously.

"I'm all ears."

"You're not the only one. Every summer, she looks forward to you returning home. For weeks before and after, all she does is talk about you," she says and rolls her eyes. "She drives me insane. Ask her out."

Frustration fills me and those conflicting feelings rise. "She's eighteen."

"And you're twenty." She shrugs. "Everyone knows Cakes is mature for her age. I believe your stubbornness and determination will work great with her free spirit. Wild hearts, perfect for each other."

"Stubborn, who's stubborn?"

Lynn's laughter rings out, once again calling for my attention. Andrew Morris has her tossed over his shoulder while running for the lake. I clench my fists, getting ready to stand until she frees herself, stopping me from going to kick Andrew's ass. I work my jaw as she runs away.

"You," Brooke says beside me. "You're stubborn as all get-out. Go after what you want, Trev. Live, love, be happy. We only live this life once. Be as fearless in pursuing her as you are in everything else."

"What about your daddy?"

"You let me worry about him. That man needs to realize she's no baby anymore. I'll handle him. It won't be the first time. Remember me wanting to go to prom with Eric Dawson?"

"I do. That was a challenge all of its own."

“But I got it done and now I’m dating the best guy in the world. Other than you.” She bumps my arm with hers. “Must run in the family.”

I snort. She and Cliff make the perfect couple. It took some work, but she did get her daddy’s approval.

“That’s why you’re going to be the world’s best lawyer. Brooke Galveston, Esquire.”

With a smile on my face, I turn to glance in Lynn’s direction again. The last year has done right by her. I didn’t think it was possible for her to get any more gorgeous.

“Trevor, my dear, you’ve never told a lie.”

I allow her words to sink in. Would Lynn be interested in starting something with me? Have I been missing her signals?

“You’re telling me I should date your sister?” I turn back toward her to look at her face as she answers.

“I think you better before you hurt someone tonight if you don’t,” she says and rolls her lips to keep her laughter in as mirth dances in her eyes.

My thoughts race, the sun beams down on me, sweat forms under my Stetson, but it’s providing my face with shade. Truthfully, I don’t think the sweat has anything to do with the bone-melting heat out here.

Although everyone else stripped down as soon as they arrived. Most everyone jumped right into the lake. I’ve been too lost in my thoughts to come out of my clothes.

One more year and I’ll be back home. If I were to start something with Lynn, it wouldn’t be long before I’m home again. From what Brooke told me as of last week, her sister has tried to find tickets to join us on the trip to Europe. Her coming along will give us time together.

“Be honest, you don’t think this will ruin our friendship? I mean, Lynn and me? Are you sure? You guys mean the world to me.”

“You mean the world to us,” she says with a huge smile. “Only in two different ways. I’m positive, as sure as can be.

“My sister is like a firecracker. You’re always quiet and calm until someone triggers that temper. Yet, somehow, y’all temper each other.

“Doing this will take you toward what you keep saying is missing. Go after what you want.”

“If this blows up in my face, we’re going at it, Pook,” I threaten, calling her by her nickname.

“Okay, but y’all better name your firstborn after me.”

I chuckle, but my attention has again been drawn to the source of my internal turmoil. Pure heat fills my veins this time as my gaze lands on Lynn. She has taken off her oversized white T-shirt to reveal a blue-and-yellow bikini.

All the guys have gathered around, drooling as she talks animatedly with some of her friends. I shoot up on my feet before I can think about it. As if my feet have a mind of their own, I head in her direction. I have one goal in mind as I storm forward.

Mine.



LYNN

HE’S HOME. I’ve been waiting all year for him to return. I’m eighteen now and he’s going to know it if I have anything to do with it.

I have absolutely zero interest in the guys around me. They’ve all tried to paw all over me, but it’s Trev’s attention I’m after. He’s been off to himself since he got here.

I know that look. Trevor is lost in his thoughts. I’ve tried to make enough noise in hopes of catching his attention and pulling him out of them.

Brooke has a way with Trevor; she always has. They’re best friends. It’s hard to compete with that.

My sister is gorgeous and book smart. I've always felt less than when she's around, which is the reason I double my efforts after she sits beside Trevor on the dock.

"Put. Me. Down. Andrew Morris, before I tell your daddy on you," I say in frustration but laugh loudly in hopes of getting Trev's attention.

Andrew doesn't stand a chance in hell with his musky armpits and smelly breath. I'm going to be so pissed if he gets his stink on me. I wiggle in his hold and reach to pinch his side.

"Ouch, what the heck you do that for?" Andrew whines, dropping me onto my feet.

"I told you to put me down," I fuss and take off running as I call over my shoulder. "Jerk."

Sniffing at my T-shirt, I mumble to myself and roll my eyes. Of all the guys to chase after me, it would be Andrew's funky behind. I tug the shirt off in case he did imprint his funk on it.

Balling the T-shirt up, I walk over to my friends. I sigh and toss the shirt in the back of Brooke's pickup truck. That girl loves the beat-up old thing. I think it's because Daddy teaches her how to work on it.

Daddy teaches her about cars, but I stick to the horses. If singing doesn't work out, I'll help take over the ranch one day. Riding horseback all day is the second-best thing to singing and making music.

"I wish I had that kind of money to join them on that trip," Macy-Ann says.

"You and me both. I'll have to settle for riding camp," Cindy says.

I turn my focus back to my group as my friends stand around, rambling about their plans for this summer. I hadn't planned to do anything much. Okay, that's not actually true. I had planned to work on my music, maybe help Daddy with the horses.

Unfortunately, my voice coach needs surgery. She'll be out of commission until the fall. It sort of sucks, but it's also a reminder that sometimes you need to take a break.

Now, I'm scrambling to find my way on that trip with Brooke, Trevor, and the rest of their gang. Going to Europe will be so much better than staying here in Texas alone. Besides, Trev will be there.

"He's like a god," Amanda drools, pulling my attention.

I follow the gaze of all my female friends. I widen my eyes as Trevor comes into view, headed our way. With each step, he strips from his clothes, causing my lips to part and my breathing to stop. I'm entranced as he gets closer.

First, he pulls his Stetson from his head and tosses it aside. His blond locks fall forward into his forehead, covering his right eye. Next, he tugs his short-sleeved, blue-plaid button-down shirt from his pants. He shrugs it off in what seems like slow motion before tossing it over his shoulder.

I drop my gaze to where he places his hands next. He makes quick work of his huge belt buckle. His stride only breaks long enough to toe off his brown cowboy boots.

I follow every motion as he shoves his jeans down his thick, toned thighs. Once he's in motion again, my brain begins to present a logical question.

Where's he headed?

My jaw drops even farther when he takes off at a run. It looks like he's headed straight for me. I'm stuck, frozen in place.

I can't look away and it doesn't dawn on me to run. I go from gawking at my crush stripping from his clothes to watching him barrel toward me like a freaking freight train.

"Trev," I squawk as he tosses me up over his shoulder.

I don't fight to get free. Instead, I melt into his heat and savor the feel of his strong, hard body against mine. It's not until the splash of his feet hitting the water sounds that I come to my senses and start to wiggle free.

He chuckles, allowing my body to slide down the front of his. On instinct, I wrap my legs around his trim waist. Mindlessly, I place my arms around his neck. His blue eyes lock with mine.

The Monroe family has such pretty blue eyes. They're a midnight blue around the outside and bleed into a turquoise, then a light blue. Trevor's little brother and sister have the exact same eyes.

At the moment, he has me entranced by his. There's something in their depths I've never seen before. Although, I've longed to.

My belly flips and coils tightly. This is what I've been after, right? Well, why am I trembling like this? The water around us isn't too cold. It's actually quite warm, but I think it's heating up the longer we stand here, waist-deep in the lake, gazing at each other.

"Trev," I say in almost a whisper.

"Hey, darlin'," he says with that Texas drawl I hope he'll never lose.

He glides his hands up my back, causing me to shiver. His blue eyes darken and drop slowly to my lips. This has to be a dream. That would be the only way to explain this.

"Is your sister right about us?" he asks, his gaze never leaving my mouth.

"Right about us?"

"She says we should be together. She says you've been feeling the same way I've been feeling about you," he replies, lifting his eyes to mine.

"How have you been feeling about me, Trevor?" I say shakily.

Instead of speaking the words, he shows me. He captures my lips with his, nearly pulling a whimper from me. The one time I kissed a guy before was nothing like this. This kiss has me feeling him in my bones.

He starts off gently and slowly. Testing the seam of my lips with his tongue. As if sampling a taste before finally diving in. Oh God, does he dive in. When I open my mouth to him, he consumes me.

I shove my fingers into his thick, silky locks. He digs his fingers into my back, his short, blunt nails biting into my skin. His mouth tastes of salted caramel and truffles.

I smile into the kiss. I'd know that flavor anywhere. He stole one of my cupcakes.

"Trevor Paul Monroe," I break the kiss and say.

"Yeah, darlin'?" he breathes in a husky drawl.

"I made those cupcakes for us to share. How dare you go sneaking one before our tradition?" I chide with a teasing smile on my lips.

"I think we'll be making new traditions," he says with a crooked smile before pecking my lips.

My cheeks heat as reality sets in. Trev kissed me. Um, let's rewind this a bit.

"You have feelings for me?"

"Should I kiss you again?" His gaze returns to my lips.

Searching his eyes, I push my fingers through the front of his hair. I've waited for this moment for forever. Yet, I'm in shock and serious denial. I need to touch him to make sure this is real.

"Maybe not." I nod behind him toward our friends. "I mean, not if they're going to keep that up."

"Just ignore them like I am," he says. "Cakes?"

I grin at the nickname I've had all my life. "Yeah?"

"I'm gonna kiss you again."

"Oh, okay."

He takes my mouth and devours me to the chorus of increasing cheers of our friends. I tune them all out just like he

said. In this moment, it's me, Trev, and the wild pounding of my heart.

I sag in disappointment when he breaks the kiss. He releases a heavy breath, then kisses my nose. I feel like I bloom from the inside out. This is so different from every time he has kissed the top of my head in a friendly gesture.

Those were buddy kisses. Attention he gave to his best friend's sister. I was only a sidekick to their relationship. Those were moments of looking after me as a big brother. This... this is something absolutely different.

“We're getting you on that plane.”

I know he will; this is Trev. He does what he says. He's never failed me or my sister ever.

CHAPTER 3



*F*reaking Out

Lynn

I CURSE and fuss as I try to open the latch to pull the truck bed down on Brooke's truck. I'm not tall enough to reach in for the cupcakes and my bag. Trev went to get something from his truck.

"Whoa, whoa, what did my truck ever do to you?" Brooke says as she comes rushing over.

"This stupid thing is rusted shut. Why on earth do you still have this thing? It's not like we don't have money for you to get a new one," I huff.

"It shows I have character. Anyone can throw something away and get something new in its place. My truck shows I'm willing to stick to my responsibilities and commitments.

"I'm willing to do the work. Besides, it's not rusted shut. You just need to know how to show it some love to open it up. It reminds me a lot of you," she replies.

I stick my tongue out at her. My sister will find any conversation to show her wisdom. It's something we all love about her. Her words always make their mark and cause you to feel like you've gained something.

"Yeah, whatever, I need my things."

"Don't you go pouting at me over some boy," she teases.

“This isn’t about some boy.”

“Bull poop. That’s Trev’s shirt you have on. I just saw him over by his truck with a shit-eating grin on his face.

“You’re over here for those cupcakes. Like I don’t know you two plan to head to the cabin,” she says with a smile.

I run a hand over my hair and begin to hop from foot to foot. All the nerves I’ve been trying to avoid crash into me. I’m going to spend time alone with Trevor.

“He kissed me,” I breathe and release a nervous laugh.

“I saw. Don’t worry. I’ll make sure everyone knows to keep their mouths shut.”

I groan. “I didn’t even think of that. Thanks.”

“No problem. I don’t want you thinking about Daddy either. You go on and have fun.”

I wave a hand in front of my face, feeling like I might burst into tears. I think I’m going to be sick. I’ve dreamed of this day for so long, now it’s here and it feels so surreal.

“What’s wrong, honey?”

“I’m just nervous, I guess.”

“*Aww*, come here.”

She pulls me into her embrace. I hug her tightly. I don’t know how much I need this hug until she squeezes me.

My sister always knows just what I need. She pulls away and looks me in the eyes. The warm smile on her face settles my racing heart.

“Don’t be nervous, Cakes. It’s Trev. He’s always gonna put you first. Relax and allow him to take the lead. Just enjoy the time.”

I nod at her and lick my lips. “Right. Enjoy the time.” I give a nervous laugh. “It’s just Trev. We’ve had cupcakes together millions of times. I can do this.”

“Yes, you can.”

“Hey, where’s Cliff?”

She frowns a little. “He had to take a trip to Dallas with his daddy. He’ll be back later tonight.”

“Aww, I can see you miss him,” I say and reach to rub her arm.

“Oh no you don’t, big head. Don’t use me to go stalling. Here, take your cupcakes and get,” she fusses and hands me my bag and the cupcake holder.

I crack up laughing and take them both from her hands. She pulls me in for one more hug. I can’t help wishing my hands were free to return it.

“I love you,” I say as I close my eyes and take in her comforting scent.

“Not as much as I love you. Go, this is what you’ve been dreaming of. This summer is going to be the best. I can feel it.”

“Not if I’m here and you guys are in Europe,” I mutter.

“You will be on that plane if I have anything to do with it. Trust me. I’ll pay the difference if you find a seat you can’t afford.”

“Pook, no.”

“Listen here now. I said what I said. I’ve got you covered. Now stop all this stalling and go find your beau. He smells really nice today.” She wiggles her brows at me.

“Oh hush.” I lean to kiss her cheek before I take off to find Trevor.

“Here goes nothing,” I whisper to myself, clutching the cupcake holder to my chest.



TREVOR

“YEAH, she’s here. How are things going your way?” I say into the phone to my cousin Cliff.

“I didn’t think it would be so hard to pick a darn ring. There are so many options. I just want to get her the best.”

“Just breathe. She’s gonna love whatever you pick.”

“That’s just it, Trev. What if she says no? I could show up in Paris after doing all this, only for her to turn me down. She wants to see the world. Being tied to me...,” he says and trails off.

“Listen, she’s been in love with you for as long as I can remember. You showing up to surprise her, that’s going to go a long way.

“We all know you. Texas is where you belong, but I also know how much you love Pook. If she wants to take a trip, you’re going to take it with her. Look at what you’re planning for her now.”

“Yeah, I’m nervous as shit.” He scoffs. “I won’t be the cousin traveling to find all those exotic horses.”

I laugh, but I don’t tell him I’m not looking to get into the ranching business, NFL or not. He can take over the entire ranch for all I care. Instead, I try to give him some encouragement.

“Pick the ring that speaks to your heart. The one that says Pook. She’ll love it because it’s from you.

“You’ve fought hard to get her daddy’s blessing. You’re almost there. By the end of the month, you two will be planning your wedding while staring at the Eiffel Tower.”

He blows out a breath. I grab the cooler I left in the bed of my truck. I have our Frappuccinos waiting inside. We always need our frappés with our cupcakes.

I smile as the thought crosses my mind. Turning to go find Lynn with my phone still pressed to my ear, I shake my head as I realize I haven’t stopped grinning since our kiss.

“Thanks, Trev. I can always count on you.”

“I’m always here for you. You know that.”

“Yeah, I do. That’s why I’m gonna ask you to be my best man if she says yes.”

“When she says yes.”

“Yeah, when. You’re right. I got to go. Daddy is waving for my attention.”

“All right. Talk to you later.”

“Later.”

CHAPTER 4



Crushed

Lynn

“I COULDN’T BELIEVE it when Brooke said you were considering quitting football,” I say before gulping down the last of my Frappuccino.

“It’s not the same anymore,” he murmurs against my neck.

His stubble tickles my skin and I grin. This has been the best day ever. We took off for my family’s old cabin by the lake for some privacy. We’ve been munching on cupcakes while in our own world.

If you ask me, Trev didn’t want me around the other guys while I was in this bikini. As soon as we surfaced from the lake, he wrapped me in his shirt he had tossed and kept me at his side, only leaving me to take a call and grab the cooler from his truck.

“You love football,” I say thoughtfully.

He lifts his fingertips to my temple and trails my hairline. I shiver beneath his whisper-soft touch, causing a smile to tug at his lips. I had thought we were coming here to make out.

However, this has been anything but a make-out session. There have only been the soft brushes of his lips to my shoulder or a few stolen kisses here and there. I narrow my eyes as his thoughts play on his face.

Silently, I give him time to find his words while I stare at his handsome features. Tugging his shirt, which I still have on, up my bare shoulder, I then turn my face into the collar to inhale.

The scent of his cologne fills my nostrils. It engulfs me in all things Trevor. He always smells so good. He catches me and his blues light with amusement. That gorgeous smile of his turns up a notch.

“I did love it. I mean, I still do,” he says. “But I don’t know if I’m cut out to put my heart in it. Daddy would go wild if I played professionally, but that’s not me. I can see it for Brad.

“He’s only ten, but he has it, he’ll go the distance. I won’t. One more year and I’m done.”

“I can absolutely see Brad in the NFL. Does he still sleep with his football?” I laugh.

“Yeah, he does. I love that kid,” he says, his eyes going distant for a moment. “That’s the thing. I’m missing my family. This is only college. What if I enter the league?” He shakes his head.

He puckers his lips for a minute in thought, then continues. “The twins are growing up without me. They were seven when I went away for college. I thought I needed to get away. Now, I regret it. Sometimes, I feel like I’m a horrible big brother.”

“Lies, Trevor Monroe. You’re the best big brother there is.” My Texas twang rings in my own ears.

Trevor reaches out to push his shirt back down my shoulder. He leans in to kiss the patch of skin he just exposed. I feel the blush in my cheeks. I drop my head when he lifts his to look me in the eyes again.

I turn my gaze to the tray before me for a distraction. I look longingly at the last cupcake. Trevor picks it up while chuckling. He peels the paper back and places the deliciousness to my lips. I beam at him before I open up to take a bite, moaning around the gooey morsel.

These cupcakes are our favorite. I came up with the recipe by accident. The salted caramel and truffle icing makes your mouth sing. The smooth yellow cake with truffle bites is the perfect pairing for the moist treat.

“I’m hoping you don’t still see me like a big brother. That might be a little awkward.”

“I don’t think I’ve seen you as a big brother in a very, very long time,” I reply and lower my lashes.

I lean in and take another bite. He keeps his eyes on me, a thoughtful expression painted on his face. I ponder his words. I once thought he’d take football all the way. He’s always been a great player.

It’s been a dream of mine to sing at his Super Bowl game at halftime. In my head, we’d be the ultimate power couple. I’d sing and bring the crowd to their feet, and he’d score the game-winning touchdown.

“It’s funny how things can change,” I think out loud. Taking the rest of the cupcake from his fingers, I smile and hold it to his lips.

“You’re giving me the last bite?” He lifts a golden brow. “Yeah, things have changed.”

He chuckles but quickly takes a bite from the offering between my fingertips. He brushes my skin with his lips and tongue in the process. I bite back a moan and smile as I stare into his eyes.

“I’ve shared my cupcakes with you since the third grade. Nothing’s changed.” I laugh.

“That’s true, but you’ve never given me the last bite,” he replies.

“Point taken. I can fix that.” I go to pull the last of the cupcake back.

He plucks it from my hand, placing the cake between his lips, beckoning me forward with the crook of his finger. His eyes sparkle with the silent command. I lean in to bite the sweet delight hanging from his lips.

Trevor allows me to pull it into my mouth. In one swift motion, he cups the back of my neck with one hand and crushes his lips to mine. He savors me and the moist cake that dissolves on my tongue. I lift my arms to wrap them around his neck and melt into him like the dessert in my cavern.

“I’ll never see our cupcake tradition the same again,” he murmurs against my lips.

“I know.” I laugh breathlessly. “We were already obsessed with them. Now they’ve just become positively sacred to me.”

“Well, darlin’, that’s it. Let’s make a pact right here and now. No matter what happens between us, cupcakes will be our way of calling a truce. They’re officially neutral ground. Neither of us can stay mad at each other if there’s a cupcake offered,” he says.

“Are you planning to piss me off?” I tilt my head to the side and smile at him.

Trev wraps his strong arms around me and drags me to sit in his lap. He begins to stroke my thigh with his warm hand. I can’t help but smile wider when he places his forehead against mine.

“We’re not going to pretend we don’t fight like cats and dogs whenever the mood strikes,” he says.

I pout. “That’s only because you never want to admit I’m right.”

He throws his head back as he laughs. God, he’s so damn gorgeous. His blond locks and tanned skin are picture perfect. Those preteen braces gave him a perfect white smile.

When his blue eyes meet mine, they shine with everything I love about him—his honesty, openness, charm, stubbornness, and that loving, protective side. The windows to his soul are his greatest weakness. They give him away to those who know him well enough.

I’m not sure how I ever missed his feelings for me. Right now, they shine through as clear as a sunshiny Texas day. It might be because I’ve always told myself it was my imagination.

However, staring back at him, I couldn't deny it if I wanted to. I palm his jaw and brush my thumb over his light stubble.

"If that's what you say, we'll go with it."

"What if I can't get a ticket on y'all's flight?" I ask.

The question has been playing in the back of my head all day. My sister has tried. Either the tickets have been too expensive, or we miss the sale by seconds.

I mean, the prices have been twice what everyone else paid. I won't ask my parents for help. They already think I'm too young to follow my sister and her friends across the world.

I'm going with my own money. Trevor's brows crease and a frown mars his lips. The wheels are turning as he brushes a lock of hair behind my ear.

"Then I'll be here with you," he says. "Today has been the best day I've had in... it's been a while, and I still don't think I've ever had one like this. I don't want it to end."

"So our age—" My words are cut off as both our phones ring.

Suddenly, my stomach drops and this eerie feeling washes over me. Sensing a need to answer immediately, I get up and rush for my phone. Trevor stands and answers his as well.

From the moment I answer the phone, I feel like I'm going to be sick and I lose focus. The words cried on the other end shatters me into pieces. It takes a second for it all to sink in. As soon as it does, I drop to my knees.

Surely, this dream has turned into a nightmare. Surely, it has.

CHAPTER 5



Still Go

Lynn

“HE’S HERE AGAIN, Cakes. I think you should talk to him. Your sister... she... Brooke is... was.” My mama can’t even get the words out.

Brooke *was*. She no longer *is* anything to anyone, she has become a past tense. Was.

She was my sister, she was my best friend, she was Trevor’s best friend. I haven’t been able to look at him since that night. He sat beside me at her funeral, holding my hand the entire time.

However, I still couldn’t look at him. I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to look at him again. I sit up on my bed, clenching my pillow to my chest.

I don’t even bother to wipe my tears away. I give her a short nod.

“Let him in. I’ll talk to him,” I whisper.

“Good, she would want you to. You two are her... her best friends. She’d want this,” Mama chokes out before turning and rushing from the room.

It’s been a week since we buried my sister and I still can’t stop crying. It’s like a fresh hell every single morning. I wake ready to run into her room and pester her and then it hits me. She’s not there.

My bedroom door creaks open and Trevor steps his big body through the door. He has that Stetson held up over his heart. That's as far as I'll let my eyes go.

He also seems to be frozen as he stands with his back pressed to the door he just closed. He drops his arm to his side. I tighten my hold on the pillow.

"This ain't right, Lynn, and you know it. I can't lose you both. Why are you shutting me out?"

"I should have been there. If I weren't with you, I would have been there. I would have been on the side of that road to hold her flashlight while she fixed that stupid broken down truck," I sob.

"Don't do that. We couldn't have known she'd break down. She should've called me. I would have been there. I would have helped," he replies with so much pain in his voice, but I still can't look at him.

"I should've been there. Period. Brooke was always there for me," I shout back at him.

My heart hurts so much as I think of my sister dying on the side of that road without me. A broken sound comes from Trev, causing my eyes to snap up to his face. Tears stream down his cheeks.

"I should've been there," he says. "I'm her best friend. I've always been there when she called."

"She's my sister. I should have been there. To protect her, to die with her. I should have been there."

He drops his hat to the floor and moves to sit beside me, pulling me into his arms. I lean against him and break down. I allow him to give me the comfort I don't deserve.

I don't know how much time goes by as he holds me. What I do know is that it still hurts. I'll never get to see my sister's big, bright smile again. She's gone.

"We can blame ourselves 'til we're blue in the face. It's not going to bring her back, and it won't change the fact that that

bastard was on that road driving drunk,” he murmurs into my hair.

I squeeze my eyes shut. “If I were there... I could have warned her he was coming. I could have covered her,” I whimper.

He places his fingers under my chin and turns my head until I face him. “Please, Cakes, look at me.”

I lift my eyes to his blues. He searches my face. “Brooke wouldn’t want this. She wouldn’t want you locked in here crying for days. She wouldn’t want you blaming yourself. I know it’s hard. I wake up every morning thinking of how I should’ve been following her home like I always did—”

“But you didn’t because you were with me.”

“I was where she wanted me to be. Brooke told me to go after you. She told me to be happy. She’s the reason I had the courage to tell you how I felt, how I feel. We weren’t doing anything wrong,” he says.

“And yet, we lied to my daddy,” I whisper.

“He was distraught. I couldn’t allow you to get into trouble. That one is on me. I’ll take the blame if needed.”

“Why didn’t she tell us she was leaving? Why didn’t she wait for us?”

“Because she’s Brooke. She was giving us time. She knew we wouldn’t have let her leave without us.”

I close my eyes. “I don’t know what to do from here. Everything seems wrong. Sitting at the table for a bowl of cereal. Talking on the phone, watching TV, anything she’s not here to do with me seems so wrong.”

“One of the last things your sister told me was ‘Live, love, be happy. We only live this life once.’ We should do that for her,” he says, causing me to open my eyes.

It’s there in his blue gaze. He’s going to say something to change both our lives forever. Something that my sister would have suggested. I can feel it.

“Do what?”

“Go to Paris. I already looked into it. Daddy said he’ll take care of everything. You can take her place on the trip. Well, not take her place... I... I was thinking.

“Brooke spent the last year planning this trip. She wanted to do this so bad. I have to go. I have to see those places for her. I just thought... well, I was thinking you’d want to do it with me.”

“I can’t. It was her trip,” I say softly.

“I think she would want us to go. Think about it. We could do this in her memory. Go to all the places she wanted to see. Experience it all. Maybe leave pieces of her there. You know. Like those bracelets she used to make for us.” He gives a sad smile.

He continues. “I still have those. I can bring a few to... well, we can figure that out as we go. I want to do this for her. I just thought it would be... right if we do it together.”

I draw my brows. I don’t know. It sounds so like Brooke. Wanting to make her mark on the world. This trip meant everything to her. Her room is filled with maps and an itinerary for the trip. At night, I’ve been reading her journals to feel closer to her.

Brooke made Paris sound like this magical place that would help her find herself. However, everyone who knew Brooke knew she could romanticize anything.

Yet, something in my heart begins to open to the idea. Maybe I can find myself there. The music has stopped. I haven’t written a single lyric or note since the morning before I lost my sister.

“You think my mama and daddy will let me go? They didn’t want me to go before... they really won’t want me to go now.”

“Leave that to me. I’ll talk to them. If you’ll go, I’ll make it all happen.”

“For her. I’ll go for her, but we have to stick to her plan. I want to do everything she wanted.”

“That’s the plan, darlin’. Right down to the baguettes, chocolatier, and the perfumers.”

I give a tear-filled smile. Brooke wanted to create her own scent and name it Pook de Cakes. My lips tremble as I give a small laugh at that.

“Let’s do it. For Pook,” I say.

“For Pook.”



TREVOR

“YOU REALLY THINK this is a good idea?”

Tom stares at me like I’m crazy. I think I might be. Losing Brooke has left me raw inside, but the thought of losing Lynn, too, has left me hollow.

I lean back in my saddle and let my mind wander for a bit. Nothing makes sense anymore. I thought I needed answers before. I need them more than ever now.

“This trip was the only thing I could think of to get her to stop avoiding me,” I murmur and reach for my hat to lift it and push a hand through my hair before running my forearm across my brow.

Brooke wouldn’t have wanted us to break up over this. Well, can we even call it breaking up? We were just getting started.

It took everything in me not to kiss her trembling lips this morning as I sat on her bed holding her. She was gorgeous even with her tearstained cheeks and wild hair from not doing a thing with it for days.

All I wanted was to take the pain away. I wanted to wrap her in my arms and hold her until it got better. However,

there's nothing I can do to bring her sister back and we'll both have this gaping hole forever.

"I sort of understand, but this could blow up in your face. You know that her daddy has been having her music shopped, right? Some bigwigs in New York are interested," Tom says.

His horse releases a whine that sounds more like he's agreeing with Tom. He's not telling me anything I don't already know. The Galvestons have family in the music business.

They're pulling strings where they can for Lynn. I know that they won't have to pull too hard. For now, I need to think of one obstacle at a time.

I nod. "I'm aware. Pook told me."

"She has a shoot. I mean, you know this. Cakes has the talent to make it big. You could make this trip happen and it'll blow up in your face when we come back home."

He's right. "I've thought of that. Bringing up her music was the only way I could get him to agree with her going. Once I talked about her music and this trip being the inspiration she needs, he opened up to listen."

The gleam in her daddy's eyes said it all. Moses no doubt wants his baby girl to find her muse again. I understand the man. He's been working the ranch harder than ever since the accident.

"So he'll go for this then?"

"He said he'll think about it, but he'll say yes," I reply. I look out over the acres of my family's ranch. "Especially if she doesn't come out of that room. He's giving her time, but he'll start the busywork soon. It's his way of dealing with things."

When Brooke and I were thirteen, I watched Mr. Galveston lose his brother to cancer. Instead of grieving the way most would, he worked that ranch like a madman.

He also drove Lynn harder with her music. She learned three new instruments and went from vocal lessons three days

a week to five. Brooke would hide out at my house so he wouldn't target her and her love of soccer.

It took a year and the flu to get him to ease up. Deep down in my gut, I know he'll allow Lynn to come to Paris so she can work on her music and songwriting.

“She still won't come out?”

“No,” I say and grind my teeth. “She cried herself to sleep before I went to talk to her daddy.”

Tom heaves a heavy breath and shakes his head. “You might have something. If she's willing to go. Cliff still planning to stick around and help your daddy with the ranch for the summer?”

“Yeah, you know him. Traveling ain't for him. He'd rather be here working in the heat. This is the life for him.

“He only planned to go for Pook. Now, I don't think he could bear to. He'll probably never leave.”

“He can have at it, I need a break. I don't know if this is it for me. I'm going to take the summer to figure some things out,” he says.

“I know exactly what you mean. Nothing makes sense anymore.”

Tom releases a long breath. “I still can't wrap my head around this. She's gone. She was just on my back, laughing in my ear. Dude, I walked her to her truck.”

“Yeah, I've gone to call her every damn day. You know I would have come home if it weren't for her. She used to send me pictures of Brad and Ann.”

“I know. She and Cliff would pick them up from school for your mama and take them for ice cream. She loved them like her own siblings. How are they holding up?”

I shake my head sadly. “My entire family is devastated. Mama bursts into tears if I just look at her. Brad and Ann cling to me when I'm around.”

I had wanted to come home so bad. Brooke was the one who told me my family had been counting on me to see my dream through. Although my dreams had changed, I appreciated Brooke helping me to connect with my family to keep me going. I didn't want Brad and Ann to see me as a quitter.

“If I never told you, man. I love you. The four of us thought we would live to grow old and watch each other raise families. I never thought we'd lose her. And like this... I want to beat the shit out of that motherfucker.”

“He's on life support. Not sure he'll make it for the ass whipping waiting for him,” I mutter, then click my teeth and tug the reins to get my horse to turn. “Besides, that's not what Pook would want. This trip. Us going to live out her dream. That's what we have to do.”

“So that's what we'll do.”

CHAPTER 6



Wings

Lynn

I CAME OUT HERE to try to breathe. Snow was Brooke's favorite horse. His pure white coat always shines because of the great care my sister gave to him.

I sit curled up with my knees in my chest as I huddle in the corner of Snow's stall. He's not paying me much mind as he whinnies to himself.

"You miss her too, don't you?" I whisper.

As if just noticing I'm here, he turns and comes to me. I pull an apple from my hoodie and hold it out to him. Unlike Brooke, I've never claimed one of our father's horses for my own. He's bought plenty, hoping I'd want them. I've just never found my soul mate.

I believe horses and their riders are meant to be together like kindred spirits. I've yet to find my spirit animal.

However, Brooke and Snow hit it off from day one. The Camarillo White Horse was her favorite from the lot my father had brought in. He had plans for Snow, but he couldn't tell Pook no when she asked for him.

Snow was the first horse we both helped to break. I think that's when I fell in love with horses. Watching my big sister be so brave made me want to be the same.

I brush a hand down Snow's muzzle. He snorts and places his forehead to mine. I get the sense he knows Brooke's not going to return.

"What am I supposed to do?" I sob. "Nothing feels right anymore. I wish... I wish... I wish she would've told us she was leaving.

"I wish we would have left and found her on that road before it happened. I know Trev is right; she wouldn't want me to pull away from him. He's our friend. He always has been. I should lean on him to get through this, right?"

My voice breaks and I can't hold back the tears. Snow starts to lick my face, but I can't stop crying. He bumps my forehead with his as if trying to calm me.

"Babycakes?"

I look up to find my daddy and begin to frantically wipe away my tears. I don't want to add to my parents' pain. I already feel bad about lying to them when they asked why I wasn't with Brooke.

"Hey, Daddy," I say as I sniffle.

"I've been looking all over for you. I've been thinking about what Trev said earlier. Do you want to go on your sister's trip? You know, to find your music?"

"Can I be honest?"

"Of course, you know that's how we do things."

Pain sears through my chest. I haven't been honest and I know he doesn't want me dating. How would he feel if he knew Trev and I had started a thing?

Not that he has to worry about that. It's over. The one thing I've dreamed of all my life turned out to only last for a day.

"I'm so lost without Pook. She was my best friend. She'd play my guitar for me as I'd figure songs out. Even while she was away at school, she'd help me through songs when I got stuck.

“Those are all her friends. I’d feel like I’m trying to live her life. I could never be Pook. She was so much more than I could ever be,” I choke out.

“Now, hold on there, Miss Missy. You’re just as special as your sister. She admired you as much as it sounds like you admire her.

“I raised two of the most kind young women I could have asked for. I think this trip might be good for you. Your mama had me convinced, but hearing your words, I know you should go.

“Go find your music, Babycakes. If you walk in Pook’s shoes for a bit, you might begin to see who you are without her. Trev’s a good boy. I know he’ll look after you,” he says and gives me a weak smile.

“I’m scared. What’s life without her? Will I fit in with her friends? What if I turn out to be a burden to Trev? I’d be clear across the world.”

“And I’d be on the first plane to come get you. Although Trev wasn’t only Pook’s friend. He’s been yours as well. I see how concerned he’s been for you.”

“I don’t want them to pity me because I lost my sister.”

“Stop making excuses, baby girl. I’m not going to fight you to run across the world with a bunch of horny boys and spoiled girls,” he says and gives me a pointed look.

I give a half smile. “Okay, can I think about it a little more?”

“You only have a few days to get ready. You know how your mama likes to shop. Make a decision, we’ll support it either way.”

“I’ll have an answer by morning, promise.”

“All I want is to see you fly, Lynn. If this returns your wings, I’m okay with it. The Monroes have seen us through a lot. It’s nice of Trev to look out for you like this.”

“Thanks, Daddy.”

“You’re welcome, baby girl.”



TREVOR

“HEY, TREV, YOU BUSY?” Brad pokes his head into my room and asks.

“Nope, I always have time for you. What’s up?”

“I was hoping you’d toss the ball with me. I want to work on my passes. It’s not all the time I have a wide receiver around,” he says excitedly.

“Sure, why not?”

I stand up and follow him out to the front yard, where we usually toss the skin around. I have to admit. Brad has gotten a lot taller since the last time I was home. The smile on his face right now is one of the reasons I’ve been wanting to come home.

The other reason comes running out of the house and takes a seat on the porch step. I turn to Ann and give her a wink. Her face lights up with pride like I’m the best big brother in the world.

I double back to kiss her on the forehead then turn to Brad and clap my hands. I can already see his form has gotten better. The kid is a natural.

“I’m going deep. Show me what you got,” I call and take off running.

The kid sends a dart my way. I catch it, but I’m surprised by the power behind the throw. Wanting to see if it was just luck, I toss it back to him.

“Again,” I say as he catches it.

I catch it again and have to shake my hand out. My chest swells with pride. I can’t wait to see him get drafted. He’s going to do big things in the football world.

We toss the ball around a bit more until Mama calls us all in for dinner. As Brad and Ann run inside to wash up, I stop and place my hands on my hips. I stand lost in thought, looking up at the sky.

“I’ll make it right, Pook. Just get her to go on this trip with me. After that, I’ll make everything right.”

“That means you too, Trev. Get on in here and wash up for dinner,” my mama calls, breaking into my thoughts.

“Yes, ma’am.”

CHAPTER 7



Take Off

Lynn

I'M DOING THIS. I'm going to Paris. I'm also ready to throw up. I've never flown before.

I think I'm going to hyperventilate. We haven't even boarded the plane and I think I'm going to freak out. My stomach turns and my palms start to pour sweat.

"Hey, Cakes. You all right?"

I look up into the hazel eyes of Cody. He stares back at me with a mixture of concern and sadness. He's probably thinking I'm having a meltdown over my sister.

I'm still grieving her loss, but this has nothing to do with that. Our plane has pulled into the gate, and for some reason, the thought of getting on that thing is freaking me the heck out. I dart my gaze around at all my sister's friends as they talk enthusiastically about the trip and the things they plan to do.

When I find Trevor, he's at the desk. I close my eyes and remind myself that I'm not going to do more than be friends with him. It's probably best if I don't cry out for his help.

"Lynn." Cody places a hand on my shoulder.

"I've never flown before," I push out, a little above a whisper. I open my eyes. He gives me a warm smile.

“Oh, okay. My little brother hates flying. I usually sit with him to keep him from freaking out. Total bummer. He squeezes the shit out of my hand every time,” he says.

I give a short laugh. “Good thing I’m not sitting by you, right?”

“Well, let me see your ticket. Maybe we can go get them to change our seats,” he says and winks.

“That’s not going to be necessary,” Trevor drawls, stopping right before us. “Come on, Cakes. We’re moving to first class. They’re asking for your ticket and ID.”

“First class?” I say dumbly.

“Yeah, the seats are bigger. We’ll get to sit together. Drink this.” He hands me the bottle of water Tom rushes over to him.

I take it as I realize how thirsty I am. My hands are trembling a little as I open it. I take a sip, avoiding everyone’s eyes.

“I think she was having a panic attack,” Cody says.

“I got that,” Trevor says sort of harshly. “I have her too. Come on. They’re going to let us board early so I can get you settled.”

I look at Trev with my mouth open. He’s glaring at Coby with his jaw set. I take Trevor in for the first time. I mean, really look at him.

He’s dressed in a white T-shirt and blue jeans, with black cowboy boots. He makes the simple outfit look so damn good. He’s filling out that T-shirt.

However, upon closer inspection, it’s clear his muscles are corded tightly beneath his shirt. The tension in his entire body is visible. His fists are even clenched tightly at his sides.

I pop up from my seat to defuse the situation. I know Trev too well to sit here and not move. He picks up my carry-on bag and places a hand on the small of my back.

“I need your ticket and ID, darlin’,” he says.

I pull them out and hand them to him as we reach the counter. It's not until I have a new ticket and he's guiding me onto the plane that I realize he's been rubbing soothing circles on my back.

I look up at him. "How did you get us on the plane early?"

He gives me a brilliant smile. His eyes sparkle with it, taking my breath away. I chide myself.

He's just a friend. Nothing more will happen between us. It can't. My daddy would kill me.

"You should know by now that I'll always take care of you. I saw you about to freak out. It wasn't a matter of if they would do it. It was how fast," Trevor says.

"Thanks," I murmur.

"Anytime."



TREVOR

SHE'S SO BEAUTIFUL. I can't tear my gaze away from her as she sleeps. We've been in the air for six hours so far and my hand still tingles from where she squeezed it as we took off, but I'm not complaining. I'll hold her sweaty palm again just to make sure she's okay.

I reach to brush a hand along her hairline, unable to help myself. She opens her lids slowly and her gaze lands on mine. Those pretty brown eyes come into view.

"Sorry, I didn't want to wake you," I whisper.

"It's okay. How much longer?"

"We have about three more hours to go."

"Ugh." She rolls her eyes and wiggles in her seat, turning toward me. "I never thought about this part."

“Yeah, but it’s not so bad, right? You fell asleep almost as soon as we got in the air.”

She smiles. “Yeah, I guess. Still can’t wait to step on solid ground again.”

“Soon,” I murmur. I know I shouldn’t. I’ve noticed that she’s still pulling away from me, but I ignore my gut and say the words anyway. “About us, I thought we could talk.”

She lowers her lashes. “On a plane full of people?”

I swallow and nod. “I see your point, but we need to talk.”

“Trev, I need a friend. Can you be that for now?”

“For now, yes, I can be that.”

Her eyes light up and she straightens in her seat. “Good, because Pook wanted to play cards with you on this trip. It was in her journal. You cheated her last time and she was determined to kick your butt. I packed cards to do just that.”

I stifle a laugh so I don’t disturb everyone else on the flight. “You’re on,” I say and pull down the table for us to play.

She pulls a fresh deck of cards from her backpack at her feet. When I see they’re Uno cards, I smile broader. This could get heated.

I think of the last time I played Brooke. She had accused me of cheating. I hadn’t, but she didn’t want to accept defeat. I think fondly of the memory.

“No funny business, mister. I’m watching you,” Lynn warns.

She narrows her eyes at me, but that pretty smile is on her lips. It’s not as bright or large as I’m used to, but it’s still there.

“Show me what you got, Babycakes.”

That does the trick. Her smile lights her entire face as I call her by the nickname her grandmother gave her. We all shortened it to Cakes, but Nanna gave her the name when she was a tiny little thing in her kitchen wanting to bake. Lynn tilts her head at me.

“You know, I went to see her before we left,” she says.

“How is she?”

“She’s moving. That big old house is too much for her. She’s *downsizing*,” she says, making air quotes.

“Who downsizes in Texas?” I chuckle.

“I know, right? She’s literally going from like five thousand square feet to thirty-five hundred,” she giggles. “The floor plan actually makes the place look bigger.”

“I bet.”

Her smile turns sad. “She gave me some things of Brooke’s to take with us. Things to leave her mark. A few pictures and a lock of hair she had placed in a locket.”

“I brought the bracelets and, don’t laugh, but I found one of her socks in my room.”

Lynn bursts into laughter and covers her mouth with her hand. Her eyes shine with mirth. I hold back my own laughter, knowing what she’s most likely laughing at.

“Why did she always have to kick off her shoes and socks? No matter where she went, she’d end up barefoot,” Lynn giggles quietly.

“That’s how you knew she was comfortable with wherever she was.”

“Very true. She was always grumbling about losing her socks. She’d come to borrow mine when she would get low on them.” Her lips start to tremble and she wipes a tear.

We both fall silent. Lynn begins to deal the cards. I’m lost in my own thoughts when her voice pulls my attention again.

“Promise me something.”

“Anything.”

“This would have been a happy trip for her. I don’t want to spend the summer crying. It still hurts, but this was her happy place. I want to be happy while I do this for her. No tears.”

“We can do that, darlin’. No tears.”

She gives me a small smile. I reach for her hand and squeeze it, silently promising that this will be a happy trip if it's the last thing I do.

CHAPTER 8



*L*et's Explore

Trevor

EVERYONE PASSED out as soon as we got to our hotels. Lynn, Tom, and I are staying at Hôtel Raphael. Some of the others are choosing to stay at accommodations with smaller price tags.

We've slept in most of the morning. Our group chat just came to life around one p.m., which makes it around eight a.m. back home. I'm up, showered and ready for the day.

I want to get things started. We have so much to cover and I want to do it all. I know Brooke would have been up and at it hours ago; forget jet lag or the fact everyone else would still be sound asleep. The thought slices through me, leaving the searing pain behind.

I'd promised her we would go for éclairs together our first day in Paris, no matter what. This is our no matter what. I know she's here with me... with us in spirit.

I'm pulled from my thoughts as Lynn opens her room door. "What time is it?" She yawns.

I'm speechless for a moment. Lynn's scarf has come loose and is crooked on her head, the left side of her face is covered in lines from her pillow, there's a little drool in the corner of her mouth, and one leg of her pajama pants is bunched up her

thigh—nearly stuck in her crotch, but she’s the most beautiful girl I’ve ever seen. I wouldn’t change a thing.

Well, I would. If I had it my way, I would have been lying next to her when she opened her eyes. I wish we were sharing a room instead of my getting stuck with Tom.

I shake my head to clear it. Lynn blinks those big brown eyes at me, pulling a smile to my lips. “It’s one here. About eight in the morning back home,” I reply.

Lynn groans. “I’m going back to sleep, Trev.”

I move fast when she tries to close the door. With one hand on the door, I reach for her arm with the other. She stiffens and turns slowly to look at where my hand is wrapped around her bicep. Her flesh has pebbled over, but I ignore the reaction and push my way into the room, closing the door behind me.

“I know you’re tired, but I made a promise. I don’t want to do this one alone. I’m sure you’re as hungry as you are tired,” I say softly.

She looks up at me through her lashes, and for a brief second, the same desire and hope from our day at the cabin appears. However, as fast as she allows it to show, it disappears. Lynn takes a step out of my hold.

I drop my arms to my sides and shove my hands in my jeans pockets. She shifts her weight from foot to foot. The war within is written all over her face, leaving me to wonder what she’s warring with.

We agreed we’d do this for Brooke, and we’d be happy while we’re here. I hope she’s not having second thoughts. I don’t think I can do this alone.

She tugs her pajama leg down and starts to wipe her face as if just realizing what she looks like.

“Give me some time to shower and get dressed,” she murmurs and rushes toward the bedroom.

I follow behind her, stepping into the living area as she disappears behind the bedroom’s decorative curtains. This suite is nice. It was a gift from my parents.

We all want to make this easier for Lynn somehow. I look around. My room is similar, except for the two bedrooms I'm sharing with my best friend.

My gaze lands on Lynn's guitar case open across one of the accent chairs. I walk over to lightly touch the strings. A grin comes to my face when her notebook and pen on the coffee table come into view.

However, my grin falls when I look around again and the trash bin full of crumbled-up pages comes into view. I saunter around the chairs to the bin and squat to pull out one of the pages.

There's only a single line on the page that's been scribbled through. I sigh, wondering when the last time was that she wrote more than a few tossed-out lines. Lynn is so talented.

Her mama was the one who told me she hadn't been singing or writing since the accident. Lynn not singing is like her not breathing. This alone tells me how much pain she's in.

Pushing up, I amble over to the couch and take a seat. I'm so lost in my thoughts; I don't know how long I sit waiting for Lynn to get ready. When she opens the curtain, I stand and shove my hands into my pockets again. The moment she steps from the room, I'm breathless.

She's wearing a yellow sundress that gives her skin a warm glow. Her curves are on display, bringing a blush to my cheeks. Her hair looks beautiful in the braids she had done before we left for this trip.

They're loose this time, the reddish-brown color perfect as the extensions reach down her back. Something in her eyes has changed in the last few weeks. She looks older. Wiser but also sad. Yet there's one thing that's undeniable.

She's stunning.

I want nothing more than to go over and reach for her. I'd devour her peach-tinted, glossy lips. I can't stop thinking about how they felt against mine. However, this isn't the time for that, so I push those thoughts to the back of my mind.

I clear my throat. "You ready?"

“Yeah, I’m starving. Where does she have us going?”

“L’Èclair de Genie,” I try to say in my country accent.

Lynn releases the sweetest giggle. I’d screw those words up a million times to hear that sound again. This time, I can’t remain rooted to the spot I’m standing in. I move across the room to where she stands and reach out to tuck a few of her braids behind her ear.

When she tilts her head back to look into my eyes, I can’t help dropping my gaze to her lips. They’re so full and inviting beneath the gloss. She parts them slightly before tugging her bottom lip between her teeth.

I suck in a breath. I’ve gone from having her to being unsure of everything about us. The day we went to the cabin, I had decided not to rush.

I wanted to take my time with Lynn. Now, I feel like I’m racing against some invisible clock. I’ve never been this out of sorts in a relationship.

Do we still have one? I’ve had the same thought a million times. I have to find a way to get back to where we were. Again, not able to help myself, I trace her hairline with my fingertips.

“We should go,” she whispers as she drops her head and turns for her bag.

Disappointment rolls through me, but I remind myself to be patient. I’ve waited all these years. I can wait a little more.

However, when Lynn has fully turned her back to me and her bare skin and round bottom come into view, I question my sanity. I’m putting myself through torture, for sure.



LYNN

I'M SO CONFUSED, and looking at Trev isn't helping. When I stepped out of the room, he shoved his hands in his pockets, causing his muscles to tighten and bunch, stretching his T-shirt. I thought I was going to trip over my own feet. He's not wearing his Stetson.

Not that I've never seen him without one on. It's... he has on sneakers, jeans, and a black T-shirt, but something is so different. His thick blond locks are combed back and still damp from his shower. His eyes seem to be brighter.

How am I supposed to forget about him when he looks like this? I barely catch myself from shivering when we enter the elevator, and Trev places his palm on the small of my back, guiding me away from the other people already inside the tight space. I lift my head up when he starts to brush his thumb back and forth against my bare skin.

He seems to be lost in thought as he does it. "Trev," I whisper.

He looks down at me expectantly, but the chime of the elevator pulls both of our attention. I take the safe route and step off quickly. He pulls a pocket guide from his backpack and flips it open.

I note the scribbles and scrolls around the edges. Right away, I know he's gotten it from my sister. Brooke loved to daydream while she scribbled. I have tons of songbooks she got a hold of.

"We'll need to catch a ride. It says we're eighteen to twenty minutes away," he says.

"Okay, I can split the cost with you."

Trev turns his head to me slowly and lifts a brow. "No thanks, I have us covered."

He places his hand on my back once again, but this time, I'm not ready. I jump from the electrifying current that passes from him to me. I look up at him while chewing on my lip, wondering if he felt that too.

He gives me a weak smile. Instead of asking him not to touch me or asking if he felt that, I duck away shyly and hurry

forward. I chide myself.

This is not about you, Lynn. Focus on what you came here for.

The items in my bag feel so heavy with the weight of my thoughts. Pieces of my sister. That's what I'm here for. So Brooke can leave her mark on the world.

"You all right?" Trev asks as we settle in the back of a cab.

"Yes, just thinking."

Silence fills the small space and I'm left to my thoughts for a bit. Well, not really. I can feel his gaze on me. Those blue eyes are going to burn through my skin. That is, if his scent doesn't drive me crazy first. Trev's cologne has always made me weak in the knees.

He reaches for my chin with his fingertips. "Cakes," he calls my nickname. "Let's not make this awkward. You know how I feel about you. I understand why you've been pulling away, but..." He cuts off and searches my face.

I'm breathless until he continues. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Yes." The word is out of my mouth before I can think better of it.

"Don't shut me out. We're here... together. I know you feel it too. We have an entire summer to be together to figure this all out. We can do both; be here for Pook and each other," he says.

When did he get so close? His breath fans my mouth. I allow my tongue to creep out and wet my lips. Suddenly, the gloss doesn't seem to be doing the job.

A small voice warns me that this is nothing but trouble. I don't know what I'll tell my daddy when I get back home. I already know if we do this, I won't be able to ignore Trev once we return.

Then there's the guilt. What am I to do with that? I don't think it's just going to go away.

“Trev, I—”

Before I can get the sentence out, he crushes his lips to mine. I hesitate for the briefest moment before throwing my arms around his neck and shoving my hands into his hair. Trevor groans and moves a hand into my braids. He tugs my head back and deepens the kiss.

This isn't like our other kisses. There's so much passion and heat. Trev is devouring me, and I don't know how to stop it. Scratch that; I don't want to stop it, but I should.

My mind grows heavy with confusion. My heart is telling me to go with it. It feels like this is right, but it also feels wrong. My sister is gone because of me and this man.

No, she's gone because of a drunk driver. Pook would want this for you. Don't shut him out.

He moves his lips to my neck and places a soft kiss there. “I won't lose you too,” he says next to my ear. “Say yes, say you'll give us a try. We can make this time ours as much as we make it Brooke's.”

His deep voice sends chills through me. When he kisses my neck once again while running a hand down my arm, I know I can't fight this feeling all summer. I cup his face and brush my thumb over his cheek.

“Okay, all right, for the summer.”

He cups the back of my neck, bringing me to his lips for another toe-curling kiss. This is definitely a different side of Trevor. He was holding back a lot during our first kisses.

When he breaks the seal on our lips, he kisses my forehead and tosses an arm around my shoulders to tug me into him. I rest my head on his chest and wrap one of my arms around his waist.

“Now, this will make Pook happy. Europe with a real romance,” he says with a smile in his voice.

He's right; Brooke couldn't have planned this better herself. Makes me wonder if my sister is smiling down on us, guiding what happens next. That would be so like her.

CHAPTER 9



*E*clairs

Trevor

“THESE ARE SO GOOD. I’m going to be so fat by the time we go home,” Lynn gushes as she takes another bite of her éclair.

I know I said I’d give her time, but once we were in the cab and I was surrounded by her sweet scent, I couldn’t stand being so close yet so far away. I’m glad I followed my instincts.

Lynn has a genuine smile on her face. She’s been talkative and has even told a joke or two. It almost feels normal.

“These are delicious. I don’t think you have anything to worry about with your weight though. You never gain weight,” I say.

Lynn sits back and crosses her arms over her chest. A small grin teases her lips. She scans me with her gaze.

“I gain plenty. Not everyone can stay as fit as you without work,” she says.

I scoff. “I work plenty for this body, darlin’ and I like your body the way it is. However, if you put on more curves, I’d be happy to hold those too.”

She holds back the smile that threatens to spread across her face. Lynn has a great figure. Thick and curvy. At about five-six, it all fits in a nice, delectable package.

She clears her throat and looks around. I tilt my head to study her. When she turns and looks at me with wide eyes, my interest is piqued.

I lean my elbows on the table and lift a brow at her. She takes another quick glance around before she mirrors me and leans in to whisper.

“So how should we do this? What should we leave here? I think she would have wanted to leave a mark here.”

I smile at her. “I was thinking the same thing. You got any chewing gum on you?”

“Chewing gum?” she wrinkles her cute little nose at me.

“Yeah, chewing gum.”

She reaches for her bag and digs inside. Pulling out a stick of gum, she hands it over to me. I take it and pop it into my mouth.

“What are you up to, Trev?” she asks with a smile.

I keep chewing as I pull my wallet out. I take out the strip of pictures I’ve carried around with me since the day the three of us took them. In one, Lynn sits in the middle of the two of us as we all make faces at the camera.

I tear that one off and hand it over for her to look at it. She smiles down at the photo with a teary smile on her face. Nodding, she hands it back to me.

I stick the rest of the photos back into my wallet. Then I look around quickly as I take the chewed-up gum from my mouth. Sticking the chewing gum on the back of the photo, I swiftly reach under the bench I’m sitting on to press the photo beneath it.

I wink at Lynn. “This place will be ours for life now. Brooke was here.”

“Thanks, Trev. I think she would love this.”

“I’d do anything for you girls. What’s next on the list?”

“We take our first walk on the *Champs-Élysées*.”

“First?” I lift a brow in question.

“Yeah, we can’t do all the things in one day. We’ll make a few trips according to the itinerary.”

I groan and release a chuckle. “Do you remember how she would sing that song?”

“I do. I can’t wait to hear you sing it with that old country drawl of yours. I printed the lyrics just for you,” she sings.

“You didn’t.”

“I did. On the Champs-Élysées. Sing it with me, honey.”

“Oh, no. I’m not the one who sounds like an angel when I sing. I’ll leave that to you, darlin’.”

She gives me a coy smile. “You flirting with me, Trevor Monroe?”

“Darlin’, you’ll know when I’m flirting,” I say and lean across the table to drop a kiss on her lips. “Come on, let’s get this show on the road.”

I stand and hold my hand out for hers. My chest swells as her smaller hand settles in mine. This feels right, like where my hand always belongs.



LYNN

BROOKE WOULD HAVE LOVED THIS. My feet ache and my face hurts from smiling so much, but I wouldn’t change a thing. However, I do wish we had more time today.

Given our late start, I couldn’t really shop as much as I would have liked to on the *Champs-Élysées*. Instead, Trevor held me against his side as we window-shopped and he promised we’d spend a day where I could indulge.

I’m looking forward to that. However, this moment, standing up here on the rooftop of the *Arc de Triomphe* as the

sun has set and it seems like the city has come to life, this is what my sister wanted to come here for.

The Eiffel Tower lights up the sky from this breathtaking view. A smile comes to my face as Trevor drapes his denim jacket over me. I look up over my shoulder at him.

He's looking down at me intently. I wish I knew what he was thinking. He's fallen quiet a few times today.

“What’s on your mind, handsome?”

“This place reminds me of her. As much as it hurts, as weird as it may sound, I can’t think of her as anything less than victorious.”

I frown. “What do you mean? What makes you say that?”

“Did you see the name of this monument was once *Place de l’Étoile*? If I’m translating right that means Star’s Plaza? Brooke was a star in her own right.

“Darlin’, this place is a monument to honor those who fought and died for France during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Those names are the names of all the French victories and generals. There’s even a vault beneath. Under it lies the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from World War I.

“It sounds morbid, but I could see that being Brooke in another life. The one who doesn’t get the credit by name for all her sacrifices. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve watched your sister do things for people and never say a word just because it was the right thing to do.

“They call this a symbol of victory and sacrifice. Pook was always the first to sacrifice for those she loved. Everything she did was out of love and to make others happy. In that was her own sense of victory.

“Your sister taught me I want to be a better man. I want to be the one to make those sacrifices for the greater good, to make those around me happy.

“I don’t know if I’m explaining myself right. I know how my mama and daddy raised me, but Pook made me want to

apply those lessons,” he says.

“I think I understand. She was the first to want to make it right. If someone does you wrong, you do better,” I murmur the words my sister used to say.

“Exactly. Standing up here, it’s all sinking in.”

“I guess you have a point. We could both stand to work on our tempers,” I say with a chuckle.

“Darlin’, those pretty lips haven’t told a lie.”

“What did she used to call us?”

“Wild hearts.”

I laugh. “You two and those wild hearts are going to get y’all in a world of trouble someday.”

“Old hotheads,” he mocks as he finishes the words Brooke used to chide us with as we would fuss with each other.

“Now look at us. Who would have thought?”

I smile up at him as he holds me in his embrace. Under the stars and surrounded by all the lights, I feel like I’ve stepped into the pages of a love story. Trevor dips his head and takes my lips in a deep kiss.

The pain in my feet and the exhaustion in my body are all forgotten. In this moment, I allow him to teleport me to a time where life is fair and perfect. Everything is right in the world. When he kisses me, I can almost forget how broken I feel.

CHAPTER 10



Louvre & Friends

Lynn

MY SISTER WAS SO detailed in her journal. Where to go. When to go, and how to navigate. I almost feel like she's here with us. I can hear her excitement in my head.

It's a new day and there's an adventure awaiting us, all courtesy of Brooke. Trevor groans beside me, grabbing my attention as I look through Brooke's journal. I look up to see the line to the Louvre and immediately understand what must be going on in his head.

"Darlin', I don't know about standing in that line. Maybe we should come back another day. I'm still jet-lagged. What else is on the list?"

"Attends mon ami."

"Come again."

I snort and laugh. "I thought you took French with Pook. I said, hold on, my friend."

"I did take French. I'm a bit rusty. I took more to learning Italian though."

"That makes sense. Your daddy gets all those gorgeous exotic horses from those Italians."

Trevor looks down at me and smiles. "That he does. Still haven't found one perfect for you though," he croons.

“I still have hope. Your daddy and mine promised they’d find my perfect horse one of these days. The girl with a hundred horses but not one that owns her heart. Sad, right?”

“If they don’t, I’ll make sure you get one.”

“You? Horses aren’t your thing. You’re not going to work the ranch, are you? No NFL, no ranch, then what’s the plan, Mr. Monroe?”

“You’re going to laugh if I tell you.”

“I will not. Come on, what’s that mind been dreaming up?”

“I want to go into construction. I’ve taken a few construction management and construction technology classes and it felt right. My business degree will come in handy.

“I like to work with my hands. I’ve been fixing things around the ranch for years. I think I can make something of it.”

“I think you can do anything you put your mind to, Trevor Monroe.”

“You know, I never really thought about what I’ll do until now. I only knew what I didn’t want to do. Saying it out loud makes a whole lot of sense now that I’m hearing it.

“I appreciate the beauty that can come from using my hands and mind to build something. Thinking about it excites me.”

“Then you’re going to love this place. Come on, Brooke gave us a better way to get in and cut this crazy line.”

“Lead the way, darlin’. I’m right here with you.”

I gasp and rush to place Brooke’s journal back in my bag and pull my songbook out. Without thinking, I stick my tongue out the side of my mouth as I jot down a few lyrics to work on later. These are the first real lyrics I’ve written and felt since...

I force myself not to go there and stay in the moment. No tears. I’ve had to chant those words a lot since we stepped off the plane.

Trevor tugs me into his side as I place the notebook back in my bag. I look up at him. He leans in to peck my lips. My heart skips a beat with the gesture.

“I’m proud of you, darlin’. I knew this place would bring the music back.”

“I don’t know if it’s the place. It might just be the man.”

He winks at me. “I’ll take that. As long as you always have a song in your heart for me.”

“I do believe I was born with a song in my heart for you, Trev. I’ve been singing it for years; you just weren’t listening.”

“Oh, I’ve been listening, darlin’. I just couldn’t do a darn thing about it until now.”

My hands itch to take my notebook back out, but I bank his words for later. I don’t think I’ll be forgetting them anytime soon. With that thought, I walk with him down the stairs to the Louvre with a big, goofy grin on my lips.



TREVOR

I CAN JUST IMAGINE Brooke’s face if she were here. There’s so much to see, but the architectural design is what’s calling to me. I didn’t tell Lynn, but I already changed my major three semesters ago.

However, I hadn’t honestly thought of going into construction until she asked me what I planned to do. Daddy has been talking about me someday taking over the ranch after my career in football.

I hate that I’m going to disappoint him twice over. None of that feels right to me. However, I want to raise a family and work hard at something I love to get up and do every day.

Looking around at all these intricate details tells me what road I’m leaning most toward and as I look into Lynn’s

gorgeous face, I know who I want to do it with.

Maybe I'll follow her to New York for a bit. I wouldn't mind working construction there. All those skyscrapers. There's a ton I could learn.

"What are you thinking?"

Lynn snaps a picture of me as I stare up at the art and sculptures on the ceilings. I look down at her as she smiles back at me. She takes my breath away.

I just want to drag her into one of these corners and kiss her until her lips are swollen and she's breathless. Instead, I wrap my arms around her and tug her close.

"This place is amazing. The details, the sheer beauty. The structure in and of itself is the perfect stage for the artwork. I can only wish to someday be a part of creating something like this."

"I can't wait to see it," she says.

"I'd be honored to have you with me at the ribbon cutting. Maybe you'll sing your biggest hit at the time for the people."

"Maybe."

She runs her hands up my back. I squeeze my arms around her and dip my head to kiss her lips, not able to hold back. When I break the kiss, she looks up at me with a dreamy look on her face.

A sigh leaves her lips as she glances around. "I can see why she wanted to come here. It's breathtaking."

"That it is. Ready to find the Mona Lisa?"

"Sure, that's the last stop on our list. We've ticked off everything else."

Her stomach growls. My own is ready to begin to protest. It's definitely time to find something to eat. We've been here for about two hours.



LYNN

“I DIDN’T THINK it would be so small,” I whisper as people take pictures all around us.

“Words no man wants to hear,” Trevor mutters.

I snicker and shake my head. The painting of the Mona Lisa seems so tiny in this room. Not what I was expecting at all.

Trevor turns me and pulls me into his side. I smile as a lady aims Trev’s camera at us. The woman snaps the photo.

I expect him to take the camera back, but he reaches for my chin instead and lifts my head so he can plant a kiss on my lips. The woman snaps another as she coos at us.

“You’re such a gorgeous couple.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Trevor says as he retrieves his camera.

His phone pings in his pocket, causing him to knit his brows. He pulls his phone out and reads the text that’s come in. With a smile, he lifts his gaze to mine.

“Looks like we’re in trouble. The group has been looking for us. They want to hang out in one of the rooms tonight. Should I ignore them?”

I laugh. “I don’t know. Do you think we’re being rude? Should we maybe hang for a little while?”

“I don’t want to share you, but we could hang for a bit if you want.”

My stomach fills with butterflies. Paris would be such a romantic place to lose my virginity. However, I’m nervous as heck. I know Trevor is more experienced than I am.

I can’t help wondering if it’s crossed his mind. Maybe it’s best to rejoin the group. This is still new. I need more time to

think.

“Darlin’, we have all summer to be alone. Let’s go get something to eat and then we’ll join the group,” Trevor says as my mind spirals out.

CHAPTER 11



Good Morning
Lynn

TREVOR FELL asleep in my bed last night after we hung out with our group. We were talking and reminiscing before he was supposed to return to his room for the night. However, he passed out and I didn't have the heart to wake him.

Instead, I sat watching him sleep. He's so handsome. As I watched him, a tune started to play in my head. The colors and the notes began, then the music filled my heart.

I fell asleep for a little while, but when the colors and notes returned with the music as I woke, I had to get the song down. Now I'm strumming my guitar as quietly as I can as I softly sing the lyrics dancing in my heart.

*I've lost my way and don't know how to return to where the
happiness lives.*

*But when I look into your eyes, butterflies fly, and my hope
starts to lift.*

*Then you spoke the words that made me want to take that leap
to breathe again.*

Lead the way, darlin'. I'm right here with you, you say.

Should I dare to breathe....

Promise you won't leave...

Quickly, I jot the lyrics down, then I start to hum as I close my eyes and sway. The bed shifts beside me. I open my eyes to find Trevor looking up at me. I freeze, placing my hand over the strings.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

He inhales sharply as his blue eyes focus and light up. His blond hair has fallen into his face. I smile as he grins and pushes it back.

“Don’t stop. You sound great. Is it a new song?”

“Yeah, I’m trying some things out. It’s still really raw.”

“Will you sing it for me?”

My cheeks heat. I’ve sung in front of him millions of times, but this feels so intimate. He’s lying here in my bed. He’s my boyfriend now, not just a friend.

He gives me the cutest pout and puppy eyes. I can’t help laughing. I brush my braids back and nod.

“Okay, it’s not finished, but I’ll sing it for you.”

I take a deep breath and begin to play and sing. I run through the first verse and go into the chorus, tweaking as I go. I like this version better than the last few I’ve sung. It feels right as I look into his eyes.

My phone rings right as I get to the end of the chorus. Trevor sits up and kisses my forehead before giving me a wink. He then stands from the bed and ducks into the bathroom.

I shake my head as he disappears behind the door. Falling back against the bed, I squeal into my hands as reality hits. I’m on vacation in Paris with my boyfriend, Trevor Monroe.

Why is that just setting in? I pull it together and grab my phone to answer it. Seeing it’s my mama, I smile wider.

“Hey, Mama,” I sing into the phone.

“Hey, baby. How are you? Is everything working out okay?”

“I’m good. It’s been going well. We’ve been to a few locations on Pook’s list so far. Everything is so gorgeous,” I gush.

“Your father just asked if you’ve been writing?”

“Yes, ma’am. I started writing something this morning.”

“That’s great. They’re so excited to hear what you’ve got in New York. I know you’re going to blow them away.”

“Has Daddy heard anything from Nashville? I’m excited about New York, but Nashville would be more my speed.”

“I know, honey. We haven’t heard anything yet. Your father can get doors to open for you in New York. Nashville has been a challenge.”

I sag my shoulders and blow out a breath. I get it, but that doesn’t mean I can’t dream. I’m grateful for the opportunity either way.

“I don’t want to hold you. I just wanted to check in and make sure you were okay. Don’t forget our deal. You call to check in at least once a day now that you guys are settled in.

“Stick with Trev. If he leaves someplace, you leave with him. Don’t go exploring without him. Be safe, Cakes. We miss you.”

“I’ve got it, Mama. I’ll stick to Trev’s side. No exploring without him,” I say as I place a finger in front of my lips as Trevor steps out of the bathroom.

He gives me a sexy grin and winks at me. I bite my lip and shake my head. My parents would have a coronary if they knew Trevor and I were dating.

At least Daddy would. I’m still his baby. Boys are the last thing he wants on my mind.

“Talk to you later,” Mama says before ending the call.

Trevor comes to stand beside the bed where I’m sitting cross-legged. He pushes his hand into my braids and leans in to kiss me. I’m surprised when he sticks his tongue in my mouth.

His breath is minty fresh as if he used my toothpaste while in the bathroom. He deepens the kiss as I push my hand into his hair and cling to him.

I moan into his mouth, not wanting the kiss to end. He leans in and I fall back against the bed. Trevor reaches for my waist, following me down as a groan leaves him.

I'm still in shock as I kiss him back. We didn't make out much last night. Although I felt like he wanted to kiss me as much as I wanted to kiss him.

"Damn it," he growls as a knock comes at the door.

He places his brow to mine as we both pant from the heated kiss. I run my fingers through his hair and claw my nails down the back of his neck. He shivers.

"I should probably go. I'm going to shower in my room, then we can head out."

"Okay."

My voice comes out shaky, causing me to give a nervous laugh. He pecks my lips and turns to leave. I look up at the ceiling and blow out a breath. Thank God I brushed my teeth before I started writing that song.

I palm my forehead and laugh. I allow it all to set in. I'm Trevor's girlfriend, I have my first boyfriend. Or do I? He never gave this a title.

I could totally be misreading this. I begin to panic. Tears spring to my eyes. Brooke isn't here for me to get advice from.

I swallow down the sob that tries to rise. Guilt tries to settle in, but I push it back. Brooke wanted this for us. She wouldn't want me to feel guilty.

"Suck it up, Cakes," I huff. "You can ask him later what you are."



TREVOR

“HEY,” I say to Tom as I open the door to Lynn’s room to exit.

“I thought I’d find you here,” he says with a smile.

“Nothing happened. I fell asleep, is all.”

He holds his hands up. “None of my business. That’s your girl. You two do whatever you want.”

“I don’t think she’s ready for any of that.”

“Did she say that?”

“Come on, bro. This is Cakes, I’m going to take my time with her.”

“I’m just saying. I saw the way you two looked at each other last night. I thought you were going to kill Cody if he kept trying to talk to her.”

“What the fuck is his problem?” I growl.

“I mean, you guys haven’t said you’re official. I think he has a thing for her. The way you were sneaking kisses, I don’t think he saw and caught on.”

“Fine, I’ll have to make things clear.”

“What are you guys up to today? You going to ditch us again?”

“We’re not trying to ditch you guys. We just want to make sure we cover Pook’s list.”

“I get it. How did that work out?”

“It felt good. Kind of like a healing process. I think it’s good for us both.”

“Cool, cool.”

“I’m going to hit the shower. I believe we’re going to *Canal Saint-Martin*. First to ride the ferry, then a picnic.”

My mind goes to what we can leave behind in memory of Brooke. I have these coins from high school. I think those would be perfect.

“Oh, great, I think some of the bars the guys have been talking about are down that way.”

I groan. I’m not really in the mood to hang around in some bar. Lynn is old enough to drink here, but I don’t know how her parents would feel about that. I already feel guilty about not telling her daddy she’s my girl.

“I think I have a compromise for us all. I have to check on something. I’ll text you later and we’ll meet up with you guys like yesterday.”

“Gotcha. You look happy. I’m glad things worked out.”

I pull a hand down my face. I am happy. I’ve thought of Brooke a lot. All of that still stings, but I’m glad we’re here and I’m happy Lynn came with us.

“Yeah, I am too.”

CHAPTER 12



*L*ive the Dream

Lynn

I HAVEN'T BEEN able to stop smiling. This day has been great. Riding up the canal on the ferry was a beautiful experience. We've taken so many pictures and I've been able to write down a few lyrics as I've been inspired.

While under the tunnel part of the canal, Trevor kissed me senseless the entire time. I was a little disappointed when we returned to the light of day. However, he's been more affectionate today.

I touch my kiss-swollen lips and smile as we sit by the canal. Trevor has purchased lunch for us to eat while we sit on the side of the canal and people-watch.

"This is good," he says as we stuff our faces.

"Yeah, I wasn't expecting much, but this is delicious. Pook did her research."

Trevor nods and wipes his mouth. "I was thinking. Do you remember that kissing booth?"

"Y'all's senior year?"

"Yeah, when Pook talked me into building and running that thing with her," he says and rolls his eyes.

I start to laugh. I remember it all right. They argued about it for months. We all knew, in the end, he would do whatever

she wanted, but he griped about it anyway.

“I remember,” I say through my laughter.

“Remember those coins she had to have?”

“I sure do. The kissing coins. God, she drove you crazy, but she got her coins.”

“I still have a few of those,” he says and digs them out from his pocket.

I tear up as he hands me a few. I look down into my palm and squint at the embossing on them. It’s the year they graduated and their high school mascot, along with the words *kissing coins*.

“I figure we could toss a few in,” he whispers, nodding his head toward the canal.

I nod in agreement. I like that idea. I close my eyes and say a prayer for my sister, then toss the coins into the canal. Trevor looks around us, then kisses his hand before he tosses his in.

“For Pook,” he says as they make a little splash.

“Want to get some ice cream and head over to the park? I think I’ve had enough of the water for now.”

“Sure, we can do whatever you want, darlin’.”

I want to kiss him. He looks so handsome in the light-blue T-shirt he has on. It’s bringing out the light blue in his eyes, making the dark blue around the edges stand out.

He didn’t wear his Stetson today, which has left his handsome face on display. His blond locks are sporting their natural curl pattern.

He tilts his head as he looks me over. “What’s that look about?” he asks with a smile on his lips.

“You’re gorgeous,” I breathe.

“That’s funny. I was thinking the same thing about you. Come on, we can find a nice spot. Then you can stare at me all you want.”

“Oh hush,” I say and toss my napkin at him.

He stands and tugs me up. Then he picks up my bag and leads me to the ice cream shop we noticed earlier. Without me having to ask, he orders my favorite. Soon, we're in the park, sitting on the blanket I brought along in my bag as Brooke's journal instructed.

"Want some?" I ask as I find Trevor watching me eat my ice cream, his own seemingly forgotten.

He reaches for my hand and brings it to his mouth. I gasp when he licks the ice cream from my skin as it drips over my hand. He doesn't take his eyes away from mine as he does so.

I have to stifle a moan. I lean into him unconsciously. He releases my hand and cups the side of my face as he takes my lips in a searing kiss. I feel this one in my toes.

My heart begins to race and my skin hums from his touch. I'm ready to melt right along with this ice cream. I don't like chocolate ice cream, but the flavor on his tongue bursts in my mouth and causes me to whimper.

"You keep kissing me like that, I might start to think you like me, Trevor Monroe."

"If you're not sure about how I feel about you, I must be doing this wrong," he says against my lips before taking them again.

He sure is doing this right. I'm starting to feel a pulse between my legs and butterflies have taken over my belly. I've never felt anything like this.

When he begins to pull away, I follow him, not wanting the kiss to end. He chuckles and kisses the tip of my nose. I pout as he pulls away out of my reach.

"Finish your ice cream, darlin'. There's plenty of time for kissing later."

I'm tempted to toss the ice cream aside. I crave his lips on mine. I love the way he claims me with his kisses. They are so addictive.

I finish the ice cream so fast that if it weren't melting and already warm, I might have given myself brain freeze. When

I'm done, I stare at Trevor as he rests back on his palms and holds his face up toward the sky.

His muscles are stretching the sleeves of his T-shirt. His strong thighs are pushing against the light blue jeans he has on. I smile as I note he's taken his shoes off and he's now barefoot.

My mind goes to my sister. I bet she'd be here just like this. Barefoot and basking in the sun. My heart warms. It really is like she's with us.

I turn my attention back to Trev to tell him just that but stop in my tracks as he runs a hand through his hair before placing the hand over his heart. Such a simple gesture, I know, but it calls for my attention. He looks so relaxed.

I get an idea and move swiftly to bunch up my skirt and straddle his lap. He opens his eyes with a look of surprise on his face. I cup his strong jaw between my hands and press my lips to his.

He places his warm hands on my waist. Slowly, he moves them to my bare skin, exposed by my crop top. The kiss heats up as he deepens it.

I try my best not to grind against him as my body comes alive. I moan into his mouth when he begins to brush his thumbs against the undersides of my breasts. I shiver as he tightens his hold on me, his nails biting into my skin.

My desire for him peaks as he brushes his thumbs over my rock-hard nipples as if trying to rub the fabric away. I whimper and settle my hips down onto him with more pressure. That's when I feel him harden in his jeans.



TREVOR

I **BREAK** the kiss before things can get any more carried away. I plan to take my time with Lynn, but if we keep this up, I

might forget all that and rush us back to the hotel to finally claim her body as mine.

“Trev?”

Her voice sends fire through my veins. I have to place my forehead against her chin to take a moment to breathe and think. I swallow hard and move my hands to grip her waist.

“Hold on, darlin’, we need to slow down,” I murmur.

“Did I do something wrong?”

“No, not at all. You’re perfect.”

“Then what just happened?”

I pull back and look into her eyes. She scans my face as she looks confused. I brush a few braids behind her ear. I don’t think she has a clue how sexy she is.

“I’m assuming I’ll be your first.” She nods and bites down on her lower lip. “I want to make things special for you. I don’t want to rush.”

“We were just kissing,” she says innocently.

I clear my throat. If she thinks that was just kissing, I really need to slow this down. My jeans are painfully tight.

“My body says otherwise. Trust me, that was a lot more than kissing.”

“Oh,” she breathes.

Before either of us can say another word. Her alarm goes off. She climbs off my lap and sits beside me. I cup the side of her face.

“That’s our warning to head back.”

She ducks her head as if she’s embarrassed. I lean in and kiss her lips softly. When I pull back, she gives me a shy smile.

“What’s that look for?”

She shrugs. “I’m a little embarrassed.”

“Why?”

“I think I might have been doing too much. You’re my first, almost everything, Trev. I didn’t mean to make you—”

I take her lips in a searing kiss, cutting off her words. She has nothing to be embarrassed about. If her daddy knew about us, this whole situation might look a whole lot different.

I meant what I said the other night. I want to be that man who does things right. I already feel my love for Lynn growing deeper.

When we return home, I want her to remember this trip as our beginning. Years from now, when she’s swollen with our first child, I want her to be able to look back on this and say her man has always treated her with love and respect. I want to tell my sons and daughters the epic love story of us.

Our little girls will know what a loving man looks like and our sons will know how to be one. It’s what my mama and daddy showed me and what I’ve seen in the Galveston home as well.

“Almost?”

She gives a tiny smirk. “I’ve kissed one other boy.”

“You mean, you’ve kissed a boy before because I’m no boy, darlin’.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Making sure you know the difference.” I kiss her nose. “You’re fine, sweetheart. I was right there with you. Come on. Let’s get out of here. I have a surprise for everyone.”

“A surprise? Oh, this should be good.”

She starts to pack our things as I place my shoes and socks back on. Once I’m done, I stand and gather the blanket. I place it in her bag and put my backpack on my back.

I tuck her under my arm after we collect our things to leave. She looks up at me with a smile. I peck her lips and then kiss her forehead.

“I hope it keeps this smile on your face.”

“You do that all on your own.”

CHAPTER 13



*P*arty

Lynn

“OH MY GOD, this is so much fun,” Maggie says as we dance to “Girls & Boys” by Good Charlotte.

Trevor has rented out the bar on the rooftop of our hotel just for our group. The DJ is playing all of Pook’s favorite songs. My sister was like me, we love all music.

“I know, right? I never in a million years thought we’d party to this type of music. This is amazing. We’re getting the best of both worlds.”

“So true. I’m loving it though. Speaking of boys and girls, what’s going on with you and Trevor?”

I shrug as I look over at him sitting at the bar with Tom. His eyes are on me. I smile and wave. He tips his imaginary hat.

I bite my lip and shake my head. “I guess you can say we’re seeing each other.”

“Are you kidding me?” she gasps as she pulls me closer. “I thought that was just a onetime thing. You know, that night...” She pauses and frowns, seeming to think over her words and think better of it. “What about Cody?”

I pull a face. “What about him?”

“Honey, you can’t seriously tell me you haven’t noticed how he’s been flirting with you.”

I frown deeper. “Cody is sweet as pie, but I’ve never seen him like that.”

“Well, sugar. You have two of the hottest guys on this trip pining after you. I’m just saying,” she says and fans her face.

I go to reply right as Cody comes over and grabs my hand to dance with me. I glance over at Trevor to see him working his jaw. I keep dancing but pull my hand back.

This isn’t Trevor’s thing. I know he’s not going to come dance with me, but I’m having so much fun. Sweat is dripping down my back as my braids feel soaked down to the roots.

“Good thing I come from plenty,” Cody leans to say in my ear.

“Huh?” I say as I look up into his hazel eyes.

He points a finger in the air as Joel Madden sings about girls not liking boys but cars and money. I laugh as I get what he’s hinting at. Cody’s family is pretty wealthy. Like mine and Trevor’s, Cody’s family is a ranching family.

However, where Trevor and I come from horse and oil ranchers. Cody’s family are beef ranchers. From what my daddy says, there’ve been rumors of his family turning a few acres into a guest ranch.

I can totally see that. Cody’s mama is a social butterfly. She loves to talk and host.

Mrs. Billings has hosted some type of event for every season I can think of since I was a little girl. I guess that’s where Cody gets his charm from. Bless his daddy’s heart.

The man always looks like he has a stick up his heinie. Mr. Billings has never been mean to me, but I get the feeling he doesn’t like people much.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right if you go by the song,” I finally say.

“You don’t believe it to be true?”

“Not for every girl.” I shrug. “Not for me at least. I plan to make my own. I won’t need to worry about what my man has.”

“I think that’s one of the reasons I like you. While other girls go crazy over my cars and when I talk about the trips I take with my family, you’ve never given a darn.”

“I’ve known you all my life. Your daddy has always had flashy things. Besides, I’m no stranger to money and nice things.”

“This is true. Well, since you’re besties with the wealthiest ranchers in our part of Texas and your family is a pretty close second, how do I impress you?”

“Why would you need to impress me, Cody?”

“Aw, come on. You have to know I have a thing for you,” he says and reaches to wrap one of my braids around his finger.

“Ah hell,” I breathe as I see Trevor get to his feet. “Cody, I don’t think you’ve noticed, but I’m sort of seeing—”

“If you want to keep that hand, Billings, you’ll get it off my girl before I break it off and shove it up your backside.”

“Trevor, he didn’t know. He meant nothing by it,” I rush to say as I get between the two.

The song changes to “Times Like These” by the Foo Fighters. I grab Trevor by the hand and pull him to me. He comes reluctantly as he continues to glare at Cody.

I wrap my arms around Trevor’s neck and look up at him. Tugging his head down, I get him to kiss me, but he doesn’t take his eyes off Cody until our lips meet. He grasps my face and deepens the kiss as I melt into him.

“Your girl? Are you claiming me as your girlfriend, Trevor?” I ask breathlessly as he breaks the kiss.

“I thought I made that clear to you. Now, everyone else has the memo as well.”

“I guess you did clear that up. Good to know.”

“Come here, let me make it crystal for you.”

He dips his head and takes my lips again. I run my fingers through his hair and get lost in his soft lips. My belly heats and those darn butterflies take flight, causing me to press in closer to him.

I begin to bounce to the music as we kiss. He breaks the seal of our lips and smiles down at me. God, he’s beautiful.

I love the way his eyes light up as we dance. Well, I’m dancing. Trevor just stands watching me as I dance my way around him.

With Cody forgotten, Trevor stays out on the dance floor with me for a few more songs. Until we’re both sweating from the warm evening air and my feet start to hurt. I lift up on my toes and lean into his ear.

“I’m thirsty. Want to get me a beer?”

“I’ll get you a Coke,” he says pointedly.

I frown. “I have my ID. I’m legal here.”

“Coke with ice coming up.” He winks at me.

“You suck,” I mumble.

He tugs me into his arms and pulls my back to his front. Then he buries his face in my neck. I moan as he sucks my skin into his mouth.

“I do, but I think we both like that.”

“Whatever,” I try to say without him hearing how affected I am.



TREVOR

I HAVE Lynn held tightly on my lap as we sit at a table with our friends. I’ve had a few beers and Lynn has been sneaking sips when she thinks I’m distracted. I’m letting her have fun.

It's all I can do to keep from collaring Cody and flinging him across this rooftop. I've known for years that he's had a crush on Lynn. This trip isn't his chance to explore that.

"Oh, I love this song. Stop glaring holes into Cody and come dance with me."

"I have two left feet, darlin'. If it's not line dancing or a fumble through some ballroom dancing, I'm useless on the dance floor. Besides, I've had enough to drink to keep me in this seat."

"Oh, that's a load of bull. I've seen you dance after a few. Come on, *please?*"

"You're lucky you're so adorable," I mutter.

I groan as she stands and tugs at my hand. Being that I can't deny her anything, I go with her. Black Rebel Motorcycle Club blares through the speakers.

Lynn pulls me to the center of the dance floor. I've always admired her and Brooke's eclectic taste in music—they love some of everything. Having enough alcohol in my system to loosen up, I wrap my arms around her waist and tug her into my body as we move to the edgy music.

"All right now," she croons as she wraps her arms around my neck.

I take her lips and kiss her deeply. She pushes her hands in my hair and laces her fingers in my locks. I devour her mouth and pull her into my body.

I'm growing hard in my jeans. I release her lips and move to her neck to lick and suck at her sweaty skin. I'm so turned on by her scent and the flavor of her skin, I can't help myself from grabbing hold of her ass over the tight jeans she changed into for tonight.

"Trev?" she pants.

I pull away and look into her eyes. The lust I see looking back at me sends my pulse racing. It's as I look at her, I realize the music has changed. They've switched from the alternative tunes and Snoop Dogg's "Beautiful" is now playing.

I go to beg off, but she turns in my hold and wraps my arms around her tightly as she gyrates her ass against my growing erection. With her heels on, her ass fits into me perfectly.

“Okay now, Trevor. That’s it, honey,” she sings as she looks back at me with a smile on her face.

I’m doing nothing more than following her moves to keep her plump ass against me. I drop my gaze to watch her hips. Licking my lips, my mind goes to what she’d taste like.

Lynn grabs one of my hands and begins to tap it against her thigh. I grasp her waist with the other hand and bury my face in her neck. When she begins to roll her body against mine, I lose it.

Grasping her throat, I tilt her head back and take her lips. When I break the kiss, I look down into her eyes as I bite my bottom lip. She licks her lips and smiles.

“We should leave,” I say huskily.

“Oh, thank the Lord. I thought you’d never catch on. I’m not wasting this romantic setting. This is where I want to give myself to you.”

I growl and peck her lips. “Hold on now, I need to leave before I embarrass myself in front of everyone. I said nothing about taking you.”

“Trevor Monroe. If you don’t take me back to my room and blow my mind, I’m gonna dip you in honey and feed you to a bear.”

I chuckle and place my sweaty forehead to hers. Inhaling, I allow my body to calm. I’d much rather we take our time.

I’d prefer it if her daddy knew about us. Granted, there’d probably be questions again about why Lynn wasn’t with Brooke that night. The lies I told to cover for her would blow up in both our faces.

However, it doesn’t feel right for her father not to know about us. When I claim Lynn, she’s mine. That’s going to be a forever love. She deserves nothing less.

“I’m willing to fight a bear over you. I guarantee me eating that honey off you is a better use for it. Be good and we’ll test that out for a fact.”

“Trev, why is everything spinning?”

I give a hearty laugh. “Come on, darlin’. I’ve got you.”

CHAPTER 14



*M*oon and Star

Trevor

I CAN'T STOP SMILING as I stare down at Lynn fast asleep in her bed. All that talk and she passed out in my arms on the way back down to her room. I'm not mad. This works out perfectly because I know it would have been a struggle to deny her.

I brush her braids back from her face and lean in to kiss her forehead. Her daddy would kill me if he knew she was drinking. I glance at the time and do the calculations in my head.

I should be able to catch both our parents to check in before their bedtime. Not wanting to leave but also not wanting to wake Lynn, I move to the balcony of the suite to place my calls.

I pull out my phone once I'm outside and dial my parents first. My mind is heavy with so much I think it's best I talk to my folks before reaching out to the Galvestons.

"Hello."

"Hey, Daddy. It's Trev."

"Hey, son. Brad just asked if I thought you would call before he went to bed. He's gonna be so disappointed he missed you."

“Man, I’ll have to call back when I wake up to catch him. I’m glad you answered. I need to talk.”

“Everything all right? How’s Cakes holding up? Is there anything we can do?”

“She’s doing better than I expected. I think this is good for her, for us.”

“Trev? When you say us, do you mean us as a couple? I’ve been hearing rumors about the two of you,” Daddy says cautiously.

“Shit,” I mutter away from the phone.

I should’ve known people would talk. I had hoped no one would say anything about me kissing Lynn at the lake. Most of those people are here on this trip, but there are a few of Lynn’s friends who are still back home.

I groan. “Yeah, Daddy, that’s how I mean it. It’s new, but I’ve been crazy about her for a while.”

“Trev, that’s my best friend’s baby girl. You’re a grown man. Lynn’s just becoming a woman. Does Moses know?”

I swallow hard. “No. That’s what I want to talk to you about. I sort of lied to keep Lynn out of trouble. She was with me the night of Brooke’s accident.”

“Darn it, Trev. You know good and darn well Moses never would’ve allowed that girl to go along with you if he knew. Hell, I wouldn’t have allowed it.”

“Daddy, I care about her. I’m not gonna do anything to hurt her.”

“Listen to me, son. Lynn has a bright future ahead of her with her music. I want to see you happy, but if that girl returns carrying my grandchild, it’s gonna break a friendship I’ve had all my life and ruin any shot she has of following that dream.

“Don’t tell her I said this, but he’s been talking about taking this opportunity away from her. Losing Brooke has been a huge blow. The man is hurting and looking for answers. Please don’t give him a reason to take this away from her,” he pleads.

“Daddy, Lynn was born to sing. Music is in her bones. I would never dream of doing anything to take that from her. Maybe I should tell him before we get back.”

“I would normally tell you that’s the best thing to do, but I think she needs this break more than anything. I know my friend. I know how he gets. If you tell him, he’s going to want her back home now.

“Be careful, Trev. Don’t do anything we haven’t raised you to do. You two have your entire lives before you. You have a football career and that girl’s gonna sing at the Super Bowl someday while you watch on in your Cowboys uniform,” he says proudly.

I don’t dare to tell him that the plan has changed. I do consider his words though. Telling Lynn’s daddy now would change everything.

“I love her. She’s the one. I could never do anything to harm her. I want to put my ring on her finger one day.”

He chuckles. “And here I always thought it would be Pook.”

“It was always Cliff for Pook. She and I had something else. We never felt that way about each other. She knew how I felt about Cakes.

“Talking to Pook always made me understand the man I want to be. Being with Cakes makes me him. My world makes sense with her in it.

“Losing that would be losing the core of me. I don’t want to screw this up, Daddy. Tell me what to do.”

“Be the man we raised you to be. That’s all you can do, son. It will all work out from there. Moses appreciates you trying to help his little girl. That’ll go a long way when you have a talk with him.”

I nod as if he can see me. I’ve just expressed feelings I didn’t know I had. Yeah, I know I have feelings for Lynn and have for a while. However, I hadn’t realized she was my peace.

My temper is in check around her. I can think clearly when she's near me. Mostly because I'm always focused on her safety and happiness. Daddy's right. Returning home with a pregnant Lynn would look bad.

I would question my motives if she were my little girl. Lord help the boy who played that game with me and mine. I know exactly what I want for me and Lynn, that's what I'll work toward.

"Thanks, Daddy. I know what I need to do."

"I love you, Trev. Take care of our babycakes. Can't believe I didn't see this sooner," he chuckles.

"I don't know if anyone other than Pook did. I hid it well."

"That you did. You're a good man. I'm always proud of you. Enjoy your time away. Not too much, but have a good time."

"I will. Don't worry. We're not ready to make any grandbabies. I want to watch her set the world on fire first."

"Call back to talk to Brad and your mama. Ann's been talking about what you'll bring her back all day."

I get an idea before he hangs up. There's something I want to do before we return. I think Lynn will love it. This one is for her.

"Daddy, one more thing. I need a favor."

"Anything. What do you need?"

I SPEND another ten minutes on the phone with my daddy before we hang up and I call to check in with the Galvestons. Mrs. Galveston did sound as if she might be a little suspicious for a moment, but that could've been my guilt.

Mr. Galveston had more questions about Cakes's music and progress than anything. I could hear his uncertainty about New York in his voice. He wants Lynn to succeed, but he's now reluctant after losing Brooke.

I sigh and look out over the city as the Eiffel Tower's lights dance in the night sky. Turning, I catch sight of the moon and stars. Suddenly, I feel like Brooke is smiling down on me. I feel her presence as if she were here.

"I've got this, Pook. I hear you," I murmur.

My mind goes to my end goal. I could finish my senior year in New York. If Cakes has to be there for her music, I can be there with her to protect her. Then, her father wouldn't have to worry.

With my thoughts still heavy, I go back into the room to check on Lynn and kiss her good night one more time. I find her now on her back, sprawled across the bed. She must have woken up to place her scarf on her head and changed into her tank top and shorts.

Her silky-looking legs are on display and her perky tits are thinly covered by her top. Shaking my head, I bend over to kiss the tip of her nose and then her lips.

"Stay," she says as I turn to leave.

I turn back and look her over. Her eyes are still closed. My thoughts go to my conversation with my daddy. Lynn is too precious to me to knock her up and ruin her dreams.

With that thought, I know I can handle staying the night. I want to hold her in my arms as I dream of our future. Lynn's going to be a star.

I'll need to make good money to provide for her, so she doesn't have to spend a dime of her own money. Maybe I'll start something of my own. I have savings and the trust my daddy set up for me. It's something to think about.

I kick off my sneakers and tug my T-shirt over my head. It's warm in here, so I chuck my jeans as well. Once down to my boxers, I climb under the cool sheets, tossing my leg out to find that perfect temperature.

I settle in and close my eyes. Just as I'm ready to fall asleep, Lynn finds her way under the covers and lies across my chest. Wrapping an arm around her, I smile.

“Night, Trev,” she yawns as she kisses my bare chest.

“Night, darlin’.”

CHAPTER 15



Our Montmartre

Lynn

A week later...

IT'S BEEN a week since we've been in Paris and each day has been magical. I've written a few songs and I'm not crying as much. At least not when anyone is around.

Since Trevor has been sleeping in my room with me every night, I cry in the shower before pulling myself together to start the day. Each morning, I find myself crying less.

I think of something funny Brooke would say or something I would do to annoy her, then I find the strength to get on with my day. However, it's moments like this. When I know we're doing something she would love, I feel this pang in my heart and wish I could see her smile.

"We have to take a picture here. Pook would have loved this," I gush as we stand before the *I love you wall*.

This little park is so sweet. My sister made it a point to note to stop here on the way up the hill to *Sacré-Cœur*. It's one of three stops we will make in honor of Brooke today.

Tom, Maggie, and Elise have come along with us. I believe there has been some friction among the girls over the last few days. I noticed a few of the girls acting strange toward me after the rooftop party.

“Tom, come take this photo for us,” Trevor says as he pulls me into his arms.

Tom comes and gets the camera from Trev’s hand as we stand before the wall. Elise stands with her own camera and takes a couple of shots while Maggie looks on with a huge smile on her face. I believe Elise and Maggie were my sister’s closest female friends. Although everyone loved Brooke.

“This is so much sweeter in real life. I’m glad I came along with you guys. Brooke would have loved this,” Maggie says.

“I know, right?” Elise adds. “I’m not even going to complain about all the walking.”

“I’ll do that for you. The walking is insane,” Tom groans.

“There’s like two or three hundred stairs up to the dome. Are we skipping those?” Elise asks with hope in her voice.

“Lord, I hope so,” Tom mutters.

“I didn’t see going to the dome in the journal. She mentioned a walk up *rue La Vieuville* to have ice cream and through the Artist Square to get some art and wanting to see *Square Marcel*. I guess we’ll play it by ear once we get up there.”

“You two lovebirds have at it. I’m not doing it. I came for a vacation. Not this type of workout.”

“Tom, why don’t you hush on up. I told you there would be plenty of walking today,” Trevor grumbles.

“Man, this is still better than hanging with the others. The indecision and bickering were too much for me.” Tom shrugs.

“Yeah, Brooke wouldn’t have wanted any of that. It’s making me sad. I came to live this out for her, not argue every day,” Elise says.

“I came to find a French lover to sweep me off my feet,” Maggie says dreamily. “Pook was going to lead me right to him. May she rest in peace. God rest her soul. Now, I’ll forever be stuck in Texas with no hope. I miss my girl.”

“We all do,” Trev says.

“Yeah, but you’re living out what she wanted for you. Pook knew you two were in love with each other. All she wanted was for her sister and her best friend to admit their feelings and— Ow, what the heck was that for?” Maggie pouts at Elise.

“Bless your heart. You still can’t read a room,” Elise replies.

I can’t help laughing at them. I peek up at Trev and he’s staring at me with his brows knit. There’s something in his eyes I’m not sure I’m reading right.

I’ve been falling deeper for Trevor with each day. He’s slept in my bed every night since we’ve been here and all he’s done is hold me. I know he wouldn’t mind if we did more; that’s evident each morning.

However, he’s been a perfect gentleman. I still have moments when I get sad that my sister isn’t here and he’s right there to comfort me. Yes, I was in love with Trevor before, but I’m *in love* in love now.

I wonder if that’s what this look is about. Does he have those kinds of feelings for me? Should we even be allowing these feelings to grow? He’s returning to college and I’m heading to begin my music career in New York or Nashville.

“What is it?” I ask.

He shakes his head and kisses me. I’m breathless when he pulls away. Placing a tender kiss on my forehead, he then places his hand in mine and leads me to sit on one of the benches.



TREVOR

“YOU ALWAYS SMELL SO GOOD,” I murmur into Lynn’s neck as she sits on my lap.

“Ah, young lovers. This will be nice. I will create a wonderful memory for you,” the artist says from behind his easel. “I am Philippe. Make yourselves comfortable. *Oui?*”

“It’s nice to meet you, Philippe,” Lynn says with that sweet voice of hers.

We’re at *Place du Tertre*, the Artist Square, after walking around to see all the artwork and the different styles of art. We decided to start with sitting for this artist here to have a portrait done of the two of us. His work is in the caricature style.

“Have you two been together long?”

“Not really. I’ve known him all my life, but the relationship is new.”

“Ah, yes. It is always the ones right under your nose who are your *pour toujours*. How do I say this in English? *Oui, Oui*. Your forever.”

Lynn releases a laugh as if she couldn’t possibly be my forever. I noticed the look on her face earlier when Maggie mentioned us being in love with each other. She looked like a kid caught with her hand in the cookie jar—telling me this isn’t a one-sided relationship.

I wanted to tell her then and there that my feelings had grown way deeper. I’m completely in love with Lynn. I love everything about her.

Her voice, her face, the taste of her lips, I even love her tiny little snores at night. I’ve found myself sitting up watching her in her sleep. I can see myself doing so forever.

“How do the families feel about our budding love? There is support?”

“He was my sister’s best friend. She sort of pushed us together. We’re hoping our parents feel the same way.”

“Lover, I want to hear from you. How do you feel about *ta petite dame?*”

Lynn turns to look at me with that brilliant smile on her face. I give her a smile back as I search her gaze with mine. It

didn't feel right to tell her for the first time in front of our friends. I know I'm not going to say it for the first time in front of this stranger.

"She's always had a place in my heart. I don't think there will be a day where that changes," I reply.

I note the disappointment on Lynn's face. However, when I tell her I love her for the first time, I want it to be special. In fact, I have something planned just for that moment.

"Paris has a way of enhancing the magic of *amour*. Trust me, you will be forever changed after spending time here with your love. Can I share something with you?"

"Sure," I say.

"I can see the aura of your love. It is a strong one. It will only grow with time. Until you become *inseparable*. Trust the process. Trust each other to guide the way and you will find your path to the heart each time. You have it."

"Have what?" Lynn and I ask in unison.

"*La flamme de l'amour*. The flame of love. It's the fire that burns in the soul. When ignited, it is a force all its own. It will burn through any challenge. You watch and see."

"That sounds like something Brooke would say," Lynn says.

"It does."

"She sounds like a wise woman."

"She was," we say.

We all fall silent. I tighten my hold on Lynn as I get lost in thought. I haven't been able to stop thinking about my talk with my daddy. I'm going to have to come clean with Mr. Galveston.

I'm no fool. That talk is going to come with a whole lot of drama. However, I'm willing to go through anything for this woman.

It's been so hard to keep my hands off her. Having her in my arms at night has kept my body tight and hard. Her soft

curves calling for my attention.

I'm pulled from my thoughts as her pussy grabs my attention while she sits on me. Her heat already has me semihard. Now I can feel her pulsing against my leg.

Gliding my palm beneath her shirt, I brush my thumb against her smooth skin. Goose bumps rise beneath my palm. Every time I see her bare legs or a patch of her brown skin, I can't help but want to taste it.

I groan and lean into her ear. "What are you thinking about, darlin'? You do know I can feel that kitten between your legs purring on me."

"Huh?"

I chuckle and kiss the side of her head. "Never mind. Forget I said anything."

CHAPTER 16



*B*on Appétit

Lynn

I HAVEN'T BEEN able to stop smiling since Philippe turned the portrait around to face us. We look so cute and in love. My smile is exaggerated and Trev has an overly smoldering look in his eyes as he looks at me.

I've been staring at the portrait instead of getting ready for the date Trev wants to take me on. I can't get his words from earlier out of my head.

What are you thinking about, darlin'? You do know I can feel that kitten between your legs purring on me.

I had been daydreaming about him pinning me to the wall and kissing me. Slowly, he slid his hand into my shorts. Then, the daydream was broken into by his deep voice.

My pussy did have a heartbeat as I sat on him, thinking of his tongue deep in my mouth and his hand in my shorts. I wish I knew what to do to get him to move past sweet kisses.

Sleeping in his strong arms has been great, but I need something more. I'm snapped out of my musing as the door to the suite opens. I put the portrait away and smooth my hands down my dress.

It's a short dress, shorter than it had been when I packed it for this trip. I think my breasts have filled out a bit. My butt is definitely hiking it up in the back.

I was going to change into something else, but once again, Trev's words came back to me, so I went with the short floral dress and a pair of black strappy wedge-heeled sandals.

"Darlin', you ready to go?" Trev calls through the room.

I step from the bedroom to find him in a button-down and jeans. He looks so handsome. His top three buttons are loose, showing off his smooth skin.

"I'm ready," I say as I sway with my hands clasped in front of me.

He looks me over, devouring me with his blue eyes. I smile and close the gap between us. As I stop in front of him, he cups the side of my face and takes my lips in a searing kiss.

I reach to wrap my hand around his wrist as it's all I can do to keep from melting into a puddle at his feet. I don't want this kiss to end, but he pulls away much too soon.

"You look gorgeous. You always take my breath away," he breathes as he presses his forehead to mine.

"I changed a hundred times. Nothing seemed to be right."

"You look perfect. You would look perfect in anything you wear. You're always beautiful."

"Thank you. You clean up nicely yourself. Where are you taking me?"

"You'll see. You want to grab a sweater in case the temperature changes?"

"Yeah, I guess I should, just in case."

I turn and rush to get a sweater and my bag. When I return, he laces his fingers with mine and leads me from the room. It's right on the tip of my tongue to tell him how much I love him.

I don't think I could have done this without him. The music wouldn't have returned if not for Trev. I will forever be grateful to him.



TREVOR

WE'VE BEEN SO focused on Brooke's list I don't think we've taken time to do something as a couple. I wanted to take Lynn on our first official date.

I still have something we'll get to check off the list while leaving a piece of Brooke behind, but this is mostly for us. I want to see that smile on her face and in her eyes tonight.

"This place is so nice and quaint," Lynn says as we sit down for dinner.

"I wanted to take you someplace special. I hope the food is as good as the reviews say. I'm starving."

"Oh, then I hope they don't serve those tiny portions. We might have to order room service when we get back," she snickers.

"I hope not. I think we should be fine," I say and wink.

This place will serve us a five-course meal. I should be good with that. I'm a big guy, but I'm not hard to please.

I watch as she scrunches up her face while looking over the menu. Her mouth falls open as she scans the selections. I laugh and shake my head to myself as I glance down at my own menu. It's in French, but there are English translations.

That was one of the things that stood out to me in the reviews. The waiter comes and takes our order. Since this is a special occasion, I order a bottle of wine.

Lynn gives me an adorable smile as the waiter leaves to get the wine and place our order. I place my hands on top of the table and turn them over for her to place hers in mine. Rubbing my thumbs over her knuckles, I take her in. Her brown eyes sparkle with true happiness.

"What?" she asks as I silently stare.

“You’re gorgeous. I’m just thinking about how lucky I am.”

“That makes two of us. I can’t believe I’m in Paris with my boyfriend. This has been mind-blowing. I have so much music playing in my head. The colors are so bright.”

“Colors?”

“Yeah, I don’t just hear the music. I see it in colors. The louder the music gets, the brighter the colors become. I don’t know; it’s always been how I create,” she replies with a shrug.

“You’re amazing.”

“You’re not too bad yourself. I saw your sketch pad and I know you can build just about anything. I’m excited for you. When do you plan to tell your daddy?”

I blow out a breath. “I have a lot of talking to do when I get back to Texas. That’s just one of the conversations I need to have. I’m going to finish my final year. After that, I need to figure out what’s next.”

“Trevor Paul Monroe Construction and Design. I can see it now. You’re going to build me my dream home once I make it big.”

“I plan to build *us* our dream home one day.”

She gives me a beaming smile before lowering her head shyly. I give her hands a gentle squeeze. I want her to know I’m in this for the long haul.

I go to tell her just that, but I’m interrupted as the bottle of wine arrives. I taste it before both our glasses are filled. I can’t help but smile as Lynn lifts her shoulders to her ears with a huge smile on her lips.

Reaching for her glass, she swirls it and takes a sip. Then she lifts her gaze to mine. I can’t tear my eyes away from her lips as she sticks her tongue out to lick them.

“Are you trying to get me drunk so you can have your way with me?” she teases.

I wink at her. “Never crossed my mind.”

I frown when her shoulders sag and she pokes her lip out. Again, I'm interrupted as I go to find out what just happened. We start on our first course and her excitement returns. I decide to let the change slide.

I want this night to go perfectly. It's important to me. It has to go right.

CHAPTER 17



*P*ont des Arts

Lynn

DINNER WAS AMAZING. My belly is nice and full and this walk is doing wonders. Trevor's warm hand is so comforting.

His voice is only adding to the calm that has come over me. I wish things could be like this always. I lean my head against his arm and keep in step with him as we turn and walk up a set of stairs.

I'm not sure where we are, although I know we're in the area of the Louvre. Just as I thought, the Louvre comes into view. I glance around and it becomes clear where we are, *Pont des Arts*. We're on the Love Lock Bridge.

"This was a big one on her list. She talked about it all the time," Trev says as he looks down at me. "I have her old high school combination lock. I know it's supposed to be a lock between lovers, but we loved her and she had a love for this place."

"It's perfect," I choke out.

He pulls the lock from his backpack and leads me over to the bridge railing. I nod for him to do the honors.

A slight wind begins to pick up. I close my eyes and think of my sister. It's as if she's standing right beside me.

"There's one more thing, darlin'," Trevor says, causing me to open my eyes again.

He's holding up a pouch with a huge smile on his face. I knit my brows in confusion. He reaches into the pouch and pulls out another lock.

"I had this one made just for us. I figured it only right we place our own here as well."

I take the lock from him with shaky hands. It's heavy and cool to the touch. He had the date engraved on it. When I turn it over, the other side is engraved as well, the words inscribed across the metal.

I love you now and forever.

Trev and Lynn

Forever.

I look up into his eyes as tears fill my own. I don't know what to say.

"I'm in love with you, Lynn. I've always loved you, but I stand here sure as the day is long, knowing that I'm completely in love with you," he says.

I run a hand under my nose and nod my head. "Yeah, I know without question, I'm in love with you too."

He cups my face and kisses me passionately. I hold the lock against my chest as he pulls me into him. The wind seems to swirl around us then pushes out over the water.

"Want to do the honors?" he asks when he breaks the kiss and kisses the top of my head.

I nod and take the key he hands me to unlock the padlock. He moves behind me and wraps his arms around my waist. I find the perfect spot next to Pook's lock and click ours into place among all the others.

Trevor then takes the key and holds it before my lips. I kiss the key before he lifts it to his lips to do the same and then tosses it into the *River Seine*.

"This was perfect. I hope she's happy."

"I'm sure she is. If she can see how much I love you, I know she is."

I turn in his embrace to look up at him. I smile and reach to cup his face. My heart fills with so much love for him.

“Want to show me how much love that is, handsome?”

He sways me in his arms before dipping his head to take my lips. It’s a soft, tender kiss. At first, I don’t think he’s going to lean into it any further.

However, I smile into the kiss as he groans and glides his hands down to grasp my butt and pull me into him. I lock my arms tighter around his neck and allow him to devour my lips.

I’m breathless when he pulls away and looks me in the eyes. “Wow,” I breathe.

“Come on, let’s get back to the room. We can cuddle and talk. Maybe you can play me one of your new songs.”

Disappointment settles in my gut. I thought maybe... never mind. Trevor is a gentleman. It will happen.

“Yeah, I’m not sure about some of the songs. I’d love some feedback. I wish I had someplace to try them out.”

“I’ll listen all night if you want.”

“That’s no help. You have to love everything I write.”

“Who told you that?” he teases.

“You did. You said you love me, so you have to love my music.”

“Hold on now. I’m not going to lie to you because I love you. Love and truth come hand in hand, baby girl.”

My stomach drops. There’s something sexy in the way he says baby girl. It’s new, but I like it.

“Good, because I never want you to lie to me.”

“Never gonna happen in this life or the next.”

My heart soars. What I would give to love this man for a lifetime and then another. I’m already completely head over heels for him in this life.

CHAPTER 18



Uⁿdeniable

Lynn

I STEP out of the shower and wrap myself in a towel. I had to call back home so Trevor took his shower first. My mouth dropped to the floor when he stepped out with nothing more than a towel wrapped around his waist.

Lord, the man is beautiful. I needed to shower just to cool off. As I step out of the shower, I go to grab my lotion to rub some on, but have a thought and change my mind.

Instead, I take the lotion into the bedroom with me. I find Trevor still in his towel while sitting on the edge of the bed on the phone. He glances at me and gives me a weak smile.

I sigh. This might not be the best time for my idea. However, I muster up some courage and push forward anyway.

I saunter over to the accent chair across from him. I take a seat and pour some lotion into my hands before crossing my legs and rubbing the cream into my skin. Trevor looks over to me and raises a brow.

I pretend not to notice and begin to sing to myself softly. Uncrossing and recrossing my legs, I switch to the other leg, moisturizing it.

“Cliff, I need to call you back. Keep your head up; it will all get better.”

A smile comes to my lips as he ends his call. However, I still don't give him my full attention. I begin to rub lotion into my arms instead.

"What are you up to, darlin'?" Trev says with a smile in his voice.

I look up through my lashes as I rub my hands together. He's leaning back on his palms as he looks at me. As I thought, there's a smirk on his lips.

"I can't be out here with dry skin. You want my mama to tan my hide? No, sir."

He stands and strolls over to where I'm sitting. Without a word, he lowers to his knees. Taking the bottle of lotion from me, he pours some into his palm.

"We can't have that. Let me help you with this. We can't have Mrs. Darla after you, now can we?"

"No, we can't."

He peels the bottom of my towel apart and starts to rub the lotion onto the top of my thigh. My chest begins to heave as his strong, warm palms massage my skin.

He doesn't take his eyes off me. I grab the arms of the chair as he applies a little pressure and moves his hands toward the inside of my leg. His fingers brush precariously close to my secret place.

My belly drops and those butterflies take flight. My stomach gets warm and tingly. My skin feels so warm under his touch.

Not removing the towel completely, he places more lotion in his palms and begins to rub it into my belly. I bite my lip as he moves his hands up my torso.

Between my legs starts to throb as he brushes the underside of my breasts. I close my eyes and breathe when he brushes a thumb across one of my hardened nipples. I open my eyes as a deep masculine sound comes from him. He has this look in his eyes as if he wants to devour me.

"Good?" he asks as I release a moan.

I nod my head, unable to speak. Trev chuckles sexily and leans in to capture my lips. I grasp his face to keep him close. He deepens the kiss as I wrap my legs around his back.

He moves in closer to give me better access to him. His body heat is searing, but I get the feeling he's feeling my heat just the same. I'm hot all over for him.

Much too soon, he pulls away and stands. When he's at his full height, his tented towel comes into view. I bite my lip and sit forward, reaching for his length.

"Don't," he says in a pained voice as he grabs my wrist.

I lift my gaze to his and stare at him questioningly. He shakes his head as he pulls me up to my feet. My towel falls away, exposing my naked body. Trev groans and pulls me into his chest to wrap his arms around me.

I sigh as I press my face against his chest. To my surprise he runs his hands down my back and cups my cheeks. His erection, now poking into me, pulses as it's trapped between us.

"I want to make you come. We don't have to jump right in. There's so much I can do to you without being inside you. Tell me you're ready and I'll take you places you've never dreamed of," he says in a deep husky voice as he sways me in his hold.

"I'm ready," I say before he can finish his words.

He releases a short laugh and dips his head to peck my lips. I run my shaky hands up his smooth, bare back. He cups my face between his hands and kisses me passionately.

Backing me up toward the chair, he then turns and takes the seat I was once in. I stand before him nervously, not knowing what I should do. Trev allows his gaze to roam over my naked body.

"Come sit on my lap," he commands with a lazy, sexy grin on his face.

I step between his legs. He reaches for my waist and turns me until my back is to his front. Slowly, he pulls me down into

his lap and tugs me gently back against his chest.

He cups my breasts in his big hands and nuzzles the side of my neck before placing feather-soft kisses against my skin. I moan and reach to lace my fingers in his hair.

He licks his way from my shoulder up to my ear. I shiver and moan some more. He's driving me crazy.

"Do you want me to make you come, baby girl?" he says in my ear as he rolls my hardened peaks between his fingers.

"Yes," I whimper.

"I'm gonna find you wet for me, aren't I?"

"Yes."

He sucks my skin into his mouth then releases my breasts to reach for my legs. He places his hands between my thighs and pulls my legs apart to place them over his, then he spreads his legs open. I'm stretched wide open with the movement.

Agonizingly slow, he drags his fingertips over my inner thighs. I'm panting so hard my cheeks heat with embarrassment. Placing one hand at the apex of my left thigh, he reaches with his other hand to palm my sex.

I convulse a bit as he rubs his thumb against me—testing, probing, priming. My eyes roll back as he circles my pearl. He growls into my neck, then moves his fingers to my folds.

"Look how wet you are for me, darlin'."

I cry out when he pushes a finger into me. He reaches with his other hand to gather my braids and push them all over my left shoulder to give him better access to my neck and shoulder.

"You're so gorgeous," he murmurs against my skin as he kisses across my shoulder blades with open-mouthed kisses.

"Trev," I cry out as he adds a finger and increases the pace.

I try to close my legs, but he tightens his hold on my thigh and widens his legs to keep me open. He's strumming my body like his favorite guitar.

Leaning back and sliding down in the chair, he then pulls me back with him to hold me tightly against his chest. He moves his hand from my thigh and runs it up the front of my body until he cups one of my breasts.

His warm breath sends sparks through my body as he ghosts his lips across my neck. I turn to look at him and he locks his gaze on mine.

The heat I see in his eyes sends fire through me. I work my body against his as best I can as he pushes his fingers in and out of me. When he takes my lips with his, I can't help but whimper into his mouth.

This is amazing. The feel of his erection pulsing against my behind, only covered by his towel, sends more sensation rocketing through my body. He breaks the kiss to look at me.

His eyes say so much as they blaze at me. He goes from squeezing and kneading my breast to tugging and rolling my nipple with his long fingers.

“Don't forget to breathe,” he says.

I nod as my body feels like I might fly away. Those butterflies now feel like molten lava flowing through my core. He reaches for my throat, causing me to finally take a breath.

“That's it, baby. Let go. Take this pleasure. I bet you taste amazing. Come for your man.”

It's like I lose my mind and control of my body. I convulse against him as he continues to push his fingers inside me. My sex squeezes tightly around him.

When the shaking stops, he pulls his fingers from my body and lifts them to his lips. I can't move, I sit staring at him like I'm drunk and it has nothing to do with the wine we had at dinner.

He hums around his fingers. “I knew you would taste like heaven. Want to taste?”

I bite my lip and nod my head. He pulls his fingers from his mouth and reaches to pump them inside me a couple of

times, causing me to moan. Then he lifts his hand to my mouth.

Shoving his fingers between my lips, he keeps his eyes on me as he squeezes and kneads my breast. I suck on his digits, surprised that he's right, I do taste good on his fingers.

He releases my breast and reaches with his free hand to begin to work my sensitive sex again. It's like this orgasm is building faster and more intensely.

When he pulls his fingers from my mouth to grasp my face and deliver a toe-curling kiss, I know I'll never be the same. My climax rocks through me like a tornado.

"That's my girl," he croons against my ear.

That's the last thing I register as my lids feel heavy and my body goes limp with satisfaction.

Wow.



TREVOR

I GRIN DOWN at a passed-out Lynn. That last one took her over. She's amazing to watch come.

I allow my body to calm as I catch my breath. I need to get Lynn to bed and go clean up. The way she gyrated on top of me made me come in my towel.

I shake my head. "You don't even know how amazing and sexy you are," I muse quietly to myself.

Feeling my legs come back to me, I stand with her in my arms bridal style and walk her over to the bed to place her under the covers. I kiss her forehead.

"You're everything to me," I breathe.

CHAPTER 19



Just for You
Lynn

Two weeks later...

WE'RE in our third week of this vacation and I have mixed feelings. Trevor and I grow closer with each day. However, I still have this festering guilt growing inside me.

It's not just about my sister either. I don't know how my father is going to feel about all of this. I'm not a baby anymore, but I don't know if he'll see it that way.

It's one of the reasons I'm happy Trevor won't allow me to rush things. He's right. We haven't had sex yet, but he's found a way to blow my mind every day since the night of our date.

The things he does with those hands. I learn something new each time. He's so patient with me. I love that.

"You are totally glowing," Maggie gushes as we stand at the bar, waiting for our drinks.

"Am I?"

"Hell yeah, honey," Elise says.

"Are you two having sex? You totally look like he's giving you some good old Texas loving," Maggie whispers.

"If we were, I sure wouldn't tell. That's between us."

"Oh, come on. Let me live through you, *please*."

I laugh and shake my head. “Look at how he watches you. You’re totally letting him in those panties,” Elise says.

“A lady never shares her business.”

“I love you guys together. You both look so happy. He’s crazy about you.”

“I love me some him,” I sigh.

Elise smiles at me and reaches to tuck a few braids behind my ear. I search her pretty brown face. She and Brooke were the closest.

“You’re so pretty. You look so much like her. She was my best friend, like my sister. You have no idea how much your sister loved you. You were her everything.

“I promise I’ll always be here for you. I’m not a good enough person to replace her, but I’m here anytime you need me.”

“Aw, Elise, thanks. That means a lot.”

“Well, you have two new sisters now. You’re stuck with me too, honey,” Maggie says.

I fight to hold back the tears that are burning the backs of my eyes. They have always been kind to me, but this means more than I can express.

“Thanks, guys,” I choke out.

They pull me into a group hug and squeeze me tightly. My heart swells because I know it’s genuine. These are Pook’s people; they know all her secrets.

Our drinks come and we make our way back to our table. I take my seat next to Trevor and lean into his heat. He wraps an arm around my shoulders and kisses the top of my head.

“Still not ready to tell me why you had me bring my guitar?” I say as I look up at him.

He gives me that handsome, mischievous smile and winks at me. “You’ll find out soon enough. Hold tight.”

I poke my tongue out at him. Him and his secrets. He's been up to something all vacation.

“Good evening, everyone. It's time for our open mic session. I hope you signed up for your spots,” a lanky guy steps up on stage and says.

I look at Trev and gasp. “No, you didn't,” I breathe.

“You said you wanted to try your new songs out. I asked around and found out about this place. I figured, why not?” he says and shrugs.

“You're amazing, you know that, right?” I say as I smile at him.

“I'm glad you think so because you're up first. I wanted to get here to sign you up as soon as I could.”

I lean in and kiss his lips. He grasps my face and deepens the kiss. I only pull away as my name is called to go up on stage.

Trev hands me my guitar and goes to hand me my notebook. I shake my head. This one is in my heart. I wrote it the morning after he made me come for the first time.

“I got this one,” I say and wink.

I head up on stage as my heart pounds. It's always like this when I go to perform in front of a crowd. This place has a nice one tonight. The vibe is just what I need.

Settling on the stool on the stage, I look out at our group, spanning two tables. My eyes lock with Trev and I inhale deeply to calm my heart. Closing my eyes, I begin to strum the first few cords.

Woke up this morning and you were the first thing on my mind.

Went to call your name and realized we have no more time.

*I grabbed a piece of paper and wrote a letter to an angel
because that's who was heavy on my heart.*

I have so much to say, but still, I had trouble with the start.

So, I started with the truth.

*You're not here anymore and I'm falling in love and I'm living
a life that doesn't feel like mine.*

*He makes me happy and has made all my songs sappy, but I
thought you should know he loves me too.*

Now, all that's missing is you.

So much to share but you're not here.

What am I supposed to do?

I'm sure you're God's favorite angel—

I know he's keeping you close.

I just might break into heaven—

Did God know I needed you most?

Every time my beau says he loves me—

I lose my breath... 'cause I don't deserve him—

I'm bracing myself for his loss.

PS I hope you can forgive me—

I didn't know I was trading an angel for love.

I remember you brushing my hair while I gushed about him.

Even I didn't know how much I loved him then.

But you saw me and wouldn't ignore me.

Instead, you said to have patience and one day, I would see.

*Now, when he holds me tight and kisses me at night, I hear
your voice saying we're perfect—*

My heart sings, Linnie, she's right.

But how do I deserve him?

Losing you doesn't feel right.

I feel like I'm losing my purpose.

You were the one who helped me keep sight.

*Still someday I hope to write another letter telling you all
about our life.*

*I guess I should say thank you.
None of this would have happened without you.
It hurts that you won't get to see me become a mom and a wife.
My heart bleeds when he says that he loves me—
I just wanted you to know you were right.
I'm sure you're God's favorite angel—
I know he's keeping you close.
I just might break into heaven—
Did God know I needed you most?
Every time my beau says he loves me—
I lose my breath... cause I don't deserve him—
I'm bracing myself for his loss.
PS I hope you can forgive me—
I didn't know I was trading an angel for love.*

I PLAY THE FINAL CORDS, and the crowd erupts. I open my eyes and feel the moisture on my cheeks. When I woke the morning after Trevor and I said I love you and then had that amazing moment, I wanted to call Brooke so badly.

I wanted to tell her everything. Then I remembered I couldn't. That's when I grabbed my notebook and started on this song. I've been singing it in my head for days.

I walk off stage and head back to our table. Trevor pulls me into his arms and hugs me tight. I hold him as close as I can with my guitar still in my hand.

"If I could bring her back, if I could trade places with her, I would," he murmurs into my hair.

"I know."

"You deserve to be happy. She would want you happy. We would make her happy," he says in almost a plea.

"Trev, it's okay. It's just a song. I wish I could tell her how much I love you now. This was my way of telling her."

He pulls away and looks down into my face. “Are we good?”

“Yeah, we’re good.”

He kisses my nose and wipes away my tears. There’s still a bit of concern in his gaze. I wrap my arms around him and bury my face in his warm chest.

He has no idea how much this simple gesture means to me. I needed to get that out. The jagged hole in my heart feels like it heals just a bit more.



TREVOR

I’VE BEEN LOST in my head since Lynn sang that song. I hate that she thinks she doesn’t deserve me. How can she believe she’s going to lose me?

My heart beats for her. I can’t see my life without her. I haven’t been able to keep my hands off her, but not just because of the physical connection. Bringing Lynn pleasure makes my soul feel free.

It’s like I’m living for the first time. She’s blooming into her own as well. It’s phenomenal to watch.

However, I can’t ignore the things she sang. I heard her words when she tried to reassure me that it was just a song, but I’ve known her too long to believe that’s all there is to it. When I have her alone, we can talk some more about it.

If not for the other two songs she sang, once they called her back up for more, I would have pressed her. Hearing her sing happily soothed my rising concern a bit. Those songs were just as beautiful as the first, making my chest swell with pride.

“This has been good for her,” Tom says as he comes over and takes a seat next to me.

Lynn went to the restroom with Maggie and Elsie. I'm glad the girls have taken her into their circle. The others haven't been as welcoming.

I've been annoyed with them, but so has everyone else. Corinne has been the worst of them. I have a feeling I know why. I had been dating her cousin while away at school. Things didn't work out between us.

Brooke never liked Corinne's cousin. I honestly think she befriended Corinne to keep an eye on her cousin. My best friend always had my back.

I smile at the thought and look at Tom. "Yeah, it's been real good for her. She's writing and I think she's beginning to feel like herself again."

"You two are great together. Who knew? I'm so used to you guys fussing. It's been weird to see y'all all in love."

I scoff. "Don't jinx it. We haven't had a tiff since we've been here. I think that's a record."

"It is." Tom chuckles. "You look happier than I've seen you in a long time. That song... you told her you love her, right?" Tom asks while searching my face. I'm sure he's not the only one who caught that and wanted to know. I'm not going to shy away from my feelings for Lynn.

I wouldn't have said it if I didn't mean it. They can all take that however they like. It's not going to change how I feel.

"Yeah, I did and I do. Life is too short to hold in things like that. I can think of a million things I wish I'd told Brooke and she was just a friend. I couldn't imagine holding back from Lynn."

I take a sip of my beer and glance around for Lynn. Not seeing her yet, I turn back to Tom. He has this look on his face as if he wants to ask me a question but isn't sure if he should.

"What's going on in your head?" I ask.

"Cliff. Is he going to be all right?"

"She was his girlfriend. He was planning to propose. He was in Dallas with his daddy to pick out a ring that day. Moses

was finally coming around to the idea.

“He’s broken. Angry with himself for not letting her know he was committed to coming on this trip for her and angry that they didn’t get more time. Most of all, he’s angry he wasn’t there that night.”

“I thought his plan was genius. Surprising her here during the first week so he could propose in Paris. I get why he kept telling her he wouldn’t come.

“It’s not like it was unbelievable that he wouldn’t want to. Cliff is Cliff. If he never leaves Texas, I wouldn’t be surprised.

“Once he got here, that was going to blow her mind. The perfect romantic gesture. He shouldn’t be too hard on himself,” Tom murmurs.

“I know, but that’s gutting him now. That she died thinking he didn’t want to be here with her. That she’ll never see the ring. He’s in bad shape.”

“I feel sorry for him. I hope that if I ever fall in love, I can protect her until we take our last breath together.”

I smile at that thought. That’s exactly why I want to go to New York with Lynn. I want to keep her safe. In a few years, we’ll settle down and get married, but as long as she’s pursuing her career, I want to look out for her.

I’ll figure the rest out. The more I think about it, the more it feels like the right thing to do. I’d walk to the ends of the earth for that girl.

“I couldn’t imagine going through what he’s going through. It took so long for her to get her daddy to approve of her dating anyone,” I say.

“She was in love with Cliff for years.”

“Don’t I know it. She refused to date him until she tested the waters with guys she didn’t even like, but Cliff only had eyes for her. He would have died waiting if he had to.”

“Which makes this all so much more fucked up. I miss her so much, man,” Tom says as he plays with the condensation on his beer.

“Yeah, me too.”

I look up to land my eyes on Lynn, getting impatient for her return. I spot her over at the bar. Some French guy’s all up in her face.

I stand immediately. I don’t even think twice before I’m crossing the room. I nearly snarl when Cody stands in my way.

“They’re fans. Do you really want to ruin her moment?” he says.

“When did I ask you a damn thing?”

“Look, I get you’re not a fan of mine, but think about it. This is going to be her life. We all know she’s going to make it big. You storm over there now, it’s gonna blow up in your face.”

“Billings, I don’t remember asking you for advice. What I am telling you is to get the hell out of my way. Now,” I snarl.

He holds his hands up and sighs. “Fine, I tried. Someone’s gonna need to figure out how to reel you in since Pook is gone,” he mutters the last part to himself as he mopes away.

I narrow my eyes at him and nearly take a swing. However, Lynn is more important. I need to make sure she’s safe.

Ignoring Cody, I head toward the bar where Lynn is. One of the guys now has his arm draped over her shoulders while the other holds up a camera, taking a picture.

I step right between the camera guy and Lynn and the other asshole who’s touching what doesn’t belong to him. I wrap my arm around Lynn’s waist to pull her up from the stools she’s on and tug her into my body.

“Let’s go,” I murmur while glaring at the sleezy-looking guys.

I don’t like the vibe I’m getting from either of them. I’m almost tempted to break the camera. When one of them says something in Italian to the other, I turn and do just that.

Like I told Lynn, my French might be trash, but my Italian is as good as my English. These two assholes aren't fans. They're scouting for young women.

"Trev," Lynn gasps and grabs my arm before I can swing.

One of the guys shoves her in the process and I see red. I black out. When I come to, Cody, Tom, and Roger are all holding me, nearly dragging my ass out of the bar.

I look around wildly for Lynn. I don't see her right away and that causes me to fight them all off me. Looking through the glass of the bar, I can see the two guys rolling on the floor, trying to get back to their feet.

Sobbing catches my attention. I turn left and see Lynn surrounded by Maggie and Elise as she cradles her guitar against her chest. My heart sinks immediately.

"Fuck," I bite out and shove them off me, holding my hands up in surrender.

I didn't mean to lose my temper like that. The thought of those two having a picture of Lynn and trying to track her down during this trip made me see red. Then when that asshole shoved her, I snapped.

I pull a hand down my face and take a calming breath. Part of me wants to go back in there to finish the job. Another part of me needs to make sure Lynn is okay.

I move to Lynn and pull her into my arms. She comes to me, but she's stiff as a board. I rub a hand up and down her back and kiss the top of her head.

"Are you okay?" I murmur into her hair.

"I just want to go to my room," she sniffles.

"Okay, let's go."

"I'm going to head back with Maggie and Elise. I'll see you later," she says as she pulls from my embrace.

"Lynn," I say in warning.

"Give me space, Trev. *Please.*"

“Not when those guys were sizing you up to snatch you. Who knows if it’s just the two of them? I promised your mama and daddy I wouldn’t allow you out of my sight.”

“This is too much, Trev. Can’t you see that?” she yells. “We’re not kids anymore. You can’t go around beating everyone up because you think they hurt my feelings or something.”

“Have you lost your mind? Did you not hear what I just told you? They were plotting to hurt you.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because I understand Italian. Lynn, stop acting like a baby and use your head. I’m trying to take care of you, protect you.”

I regret the words the moment they’re out of my mouth.

“Elise, Maggie, can you please come back to the hotel with me? You can stay in my room for the night if you like. The bed is large enough for you to share with me,” Lynn says through clenched teeth.

“Lynn.”

She holds a hand up to cut me off. I run a hand through my hair, frustrated and pissed off. Her gesture causes her to come into the light.

I nearly growl as her busted lip comes into view. I close the distance between us and reach for her face.

“Darlin’, come here,” I murmur.

She pulls away from me and shakes her head. “No, Trev. I can take care of myself. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. I’ll text you once I’m in my room.”

“Lynn,” I call after her as she walks away. “Lynn.”

Rage runs through me. I turn and punch the glass of the bar, sending spiderweb cracks through it. Tom grabs me and tugs me to take off.

“Come on, we need to go,” he says sternly.

“I need to pay for the damages.”

“We can send them a check or something. I’m not comfortable being behind bars in a foreign country. Besides, your issue is heading to our hotel, not the local precinct.”

“Fuck,” I snarl and shake out my stinging hand. “What the hell just happened?”

“Hell, if I know. What did the guy say to set you off?”

“We’ll take this one and the other two brown girls with her. We’ll get a nice price. Distract the—’ he didn’t get to finish,” I reply and shrug.

“Well, hell. I don’t blame you now. But you’re gonna need to fix this with Cakes.”

“How did I ever think we wouldn’t end up fighting?”

“You two love to be at odds almost as much as you love each other,” Tom says while shaking his head.

“She so stubborn,” I grumble.

“So are you.”

“Shit.”

CHAPTER 20



*R*ain Showers

Lynn

IT'S BEEN RAINING all day, which isn't helping my mood at all. I still can't believe what happened last night. I never thought Trev would lose his temper like that—not that I don't know he has a temper.

I don't know what that guy said to make him snap, but whatever it was turned him into another person. Then I got shoved and all hell broke loose.

"You okay, honey?" Elise asks, causing me to turn from the window I'm sitting in front of.

"No."

"You want to talk about it?"

I look around the room for Maggie. The two slept over last night to keep me company. I wouldn't stop sobbing once it all came crashing down on me.

"She went back to our hotel to get us some clothes," Elise says to my unspoken question.

I move my legs so she can sit with me at the window while the rain pours down outside. She sits and places a reassuring hand on my knee. I look into her eyes and give a wobbly smile.

She reaches to tuck my braids behind my ear and cups my cheek. My heart aches as the gesture reminds me of my sister. If Brooke were here, she would know just what to say.

I sigh and shake my head. “I hate this. We shouldn’t be fighting.”

“You know, Pook said that’s how she knew you two were in love with each other. You love pressing his buttons and he loves allowing you to.”

“For as long as I can remember, he’s always been like a raging bull when it comes to me. If someone bothered me, he’d set them straight in a heartbeat. Pook was always there to calm him down, but if someone messed with me... he would fly off the handle and lose it.

“Last night, that scared me. Not that I think he would hurt me. It all happened so fast.

“I don’t even know what that guy said to set him off. I’m so confused. I knew that temper was bad, but I’ve never seen him like that.”

“Believe me. He was within his rights to be angry. Tom texted me last night to tell me what the guy said. Trev may have saved your life as well as mine and Maggie’s.

“Him protecting you is nothing new, so tell me what’s really stuck in your craw,” she says, looking deep into my eyes.

“He called me a baby. That hurt. What if I’m never enough for him?”

“What if this is all moving too fast and I’m not ready? I already have all this guilt and sadness. This might be the wrong time.”

“Lynn, you’re eighteen and a beautiful young woman. Being in a relationship is a natural thing at your age. It’s a part of growing and exploring,” Elise says softly.

I sigh. “My father already treats me like I’m still nine. I was shocked when he came to tell me I could join you guys on this trip.”

“You’re not the only one. I was just as shocked to hear you were coming along. I knew it would be what Pook wanted, but I was more than surprised, nonetheless.

“Your daddy has always been more protective of you than Brooke, but can I ask you something?”

“Yes.”

“Do you really think Trev sees you as a baby? Because whenever I see him look at you... that’s not how a man looks at a baby.”

I shrug my shoulders.

“You might be looking for something to go wrong, Cakes. What I heard was a concerned boyfriend. Now that I know what was said, I totally understand what he was trying to convey to you.”

“See, now I feel even more immature. Maybe I’m not ready for this.”

She gives my knee a squeeze. “Only you can know that. I believe if you love someone, you shouldn’t waste time overthinking everything. Your sister was in love, but she overthought a lot to protect that love.

“Cherish this time. Allow that fine-ass man to treat you like gold. He loves you.”

I nod but remain silent.

“You know what? I’m going to head back to my hotel. You give him a call and talk to him.”

“What am I supposed to say?”

She places a hand over my heart. “Whatever comes from here, that’s what Pook would have told me.”

My eyes fill with unshed tears as I know, in my heart, she’s right. My sister would have given me the same advice.

“Thank you, Elise,” I say as I lean to pull her into a hug.

Once she leaves, I sit with my thoughts for a while. Lifting the collar of the T-shirt I’m wearing, I turn my nose into it. It’s

one of Trevor's that he left here.

It still smells of him. After our fight, when I got back to the room, the first thing I did was change into it. I needed the comfort. If I'm honest with myself, I'm scared, not of what happened last night, but of what will happen if I keep falling for Trevor.

Seeing how hard he's willing to fight for me, I can't help but think about how things are going to go with my daddy. I mean, Daddy and Vernon have been friends all their lives. And still, Daddy had been reluctant to allow Brooke and Cliff to date.

Mr. Monroe's own nephew. Heck, Daddy and Travis Monroe, Cliff's father and Vernon's younger brother, are just as friendly and have known each other just as long. Things back home are bound to get intense.

Maybe the timing isn't right. If I pull away now, we can avoid all the drama and we can go back to being friends. That way, he won't be all possessive over me.

"Phew, child. The lies you tell," I mutter to myself.

Trevor isn't going to change. The real thing that's causing me fear, above all else, is the fact that I want things I'm probably not ready for. And I feel the time coming. You can want something and fear it at the same time.

Suddenly, I hear my sister's voice in my head. The last thing she said to me before shooing me off to go with Trevor to the cabin.

Don't be nervous, Cakes. It's Trev. He's always gonna put you first. Relax and allow him to take the lead. Just enjoy the time.

As her words fill me, I know what I need to do. I need to find Trev so we can talk this out. I miss him.



TREVOR

“THIS... this is your plan to make up with her?” Tom says incredulously.

“Sure is. It’s going to work too. It has to.”

“If you say so. After visiting ninety-nine places—in the rain—that said no, this better work.”

He’s exaggerating. We’d been to five shops before I got the answer I was looking for. Although it did seem like way more. I was willing to try a hundred more if I had to.

“It will. Now, if this rain would stop so we can get back,” I mutter as I look out at the rain coming down in sheets.

We only need to make it back to the hotel without getting drenched. I know when I get to Lynn, I can fix this. This has to work.

I slept like shit last night. Not having her in my arms, my busted hand, and the thought that I might have hurt her feelings with my words—all of it kept me up last night. I have to make this right.

A smile comes to my face as I think of her reaction to my gift. I can’t wait to see the look on her face. Suddenly, doubt creeps in and settles in my belly like a lump of coal.

I shake it off as fast as it comes. This has to work. I’m not sleeping another night without her, not over those assholes and that stupid bar fight.

“Let’s go,” I say to Tom as the rain slows.

I grab my box and nod at the cashier. I’m grateful they were able to accommodate me. I’d hate to think of the disaster this could have turned out to be if I were left to my own devices.

“If you weren’t my best friend,” Tom mutters as we race from the shop.

“Then you wouldn’t have any friends,” I taunt.

“Neither would you, neither would you.”

I grin and shake my head. For all his griping, he wants me to fix this mess as much as I do. I found him pacing this morning and the first words out of his mouth were to ask what I planned to do.

I plan to get my girl back. That's what I plan to do. It doesn't feel right without her by my side. I don't feel like I'm breathing.

CHAPTER 21



Lost in Thought

Lynn

I TURN from Trevor's hotel room door with my shoulders slumped. There's no answer. I was sure he and Tom would still be here.

I pull my hands up into the sleeves of my thin sweater and wrap my arms around my middle. I'm so lost in my thoughts; I walk right out into the rain. I stand outside on the curb, looking around, not caring that the rain has picked up and is pouring down on me, soaking my clothes through.

I feel lost. All the pain and emotions I've been ignoring come rushing over me. My shoulders shake as a sob rips from my lips.

I must look like I'm crazy, but I don't care. I'm too numb to care about anything. I close my eyes and tighten my arms around myself to keep my insides in. I can't help feeling like they're going to fall out at my feet.

There's a sound that throws me back in time. I don't know what it is or where it comes from, but it's a trigger. I'm in the stable with my sister as she brushes Snow.

"What's it like?" I asked as I looked at her from my perch on the little stool I brought in with me.

"What's what like?" she said between cooing at Snow and humming to herself.

It's the humming that's brought on my curiosity. She'd been doing so all morning. I knew what she'd been up to.

"You know what I'm talking about. You and Cliff. You two had sex, didn't you?"

She looked at me and narrowed her eyes. I giggled and tossed some hay at her. I caught her coming into the house late last night. Her dress was on backward and she had this glowing smile on her face.

She sighed and hugged her arms around Snow's neck. "It was wonderful. I've never felt more connected to him. If I ever questioned things before, I know now that he's the one," she breathed.

"So you're saying I should wait for the one?" I asked.

She released Snow and looked over at me. Her brows pinched. We talked about everything, so I didn't think I was prying or overstepping her boundaries.

"I think you should do what your heart tells you. I followed my heart and I couldn't be happier."

"What if I can't trust my heart?"

She put the brush down and came to sit on the hay next to me. I looked into her pretty brown eyes as she combed my hair out of my face. I loved when she did that.

"Cakes, if you can't trust your heart, you can't trust yourself. If you're not ready to trust yourself, boys are the last thing you should have on your mind.

"When you find the one who deserves you, it's all going to click into place. Nothing else will matter and your heart will know. You will know."

I nodded and pulled her into a tight embrace. She chuckled in my ear. I pulled away and looked her in the eyes.

"What?"

"Besides, Trev doesn't bite his tongue. You will know when he's ready and I'm sure you'll be in agreement when he is," she laughed.

“Oh, shut it,” I said and rolled my eyes. “I could only dream of Trev being my first. I think you’re the only one who will have a Monroe to call her own.”

“Oh please. I know my best friend. He fights so hard to keep you happy and safe because he’s in love with you.

“One day, he’s going to realize that and honey, he’s coming for you. You just be ready, my dear Babycakes. Mark my words.” Her laughter then rang out through the stable.

“Lynn?”

My name is called, snapping me from the memory. I open my eyes and turn to look in the direction his voice comes from. I have to blink the rain from my lashes to see him clearly.

Trevor looks down at me with concern written all over his face. He hands the box in his hands to Tom, then tugs his button-down off and holds it over my head to lead me back into the hotel.

I go with him wordlessly. Once inside, I look up into his eyes lost for what to say. He looks me over to make sure I’m okay and then places a hand on my back to lead me to the elevator.

Tom follows us quietly. When we get to my floor, Tom hands over the box and Trevor leads me back to my room with his warm hand on the small of my back.

The warmth coming from his hand causes me to notice how cold I am from the pouring rain. I begin to shiver and my teeth start to chatter.

“Darlin’, what were you doing out in the rain? Are you all right?” Trev asks once we’re inside my suite.

I look around, lost. He places the box down on the table and comes to cup my face and lift it until I meet his eyes. It’s the searching and sincere concern in his gaze that breaks me.

“I’m so sorry,” I sob.

“Shh, baby girl. What’s going on?”

“I’m sorry. I don’t want to fight anymore. I came to find you and you weren’t in your room. I thought you didn’t care if we made up. You weren’t hurting like I w—”

He crushes his lips to mine, cutting my words off. I’m grateful my busted lip wasn’t that bad and healed by this morning. His kiss is so passionate, yet tender. I cling to his soaked T-shirt, needing to be closer to him.

Before I know what’s going on, he tugs my soaked sweater off my body and tosses it. I pull his wet shirt up his torso, but he finishes the job of getting it off, tossing it aside.

His lips are right back on mine as he devours me while releasing my bra and then moving to unfasten my shorts. I reach for his pants and release the button and zipper.

“I never want to be without you, baby. I love you so much. I only meant to keep you safe. I didn’t mean to hurt you. I’m the one who’s sorry,” he says against my lips.

I whimper into his mouth as he pushes my shorts and panties down my legs. He then lifts me, coaxing me to wrap my legs around his waist. I do so as my hands are back on his face.

“I love you too. I missed you. It felt like something was missing.”

“I need you. If you’re not ready—”

“Bears, Trev. Honey and bears. I promise,” I manage to push out.

With a smile, he pecks my lips and palms my breasts. He keeps his eyes on mine as he begins to roll my nipples between his fingers and walks us to the bedroom, all else forgotten. I whimper and arch my back to push my breasts closer to him.

Placing my naked body onto the bed, he stands and stares down at me. I take in my first unobstructed view of his glorious body. Feeling a little shy and self-conscious, I cross my thighs and reach to cover my secret place.

Trev shakes his head at me with a crooked smile on his lips. He runs a hand through his damp hair and eyes me while stroking himself. This man couldn't possibly become any sexier.

"Don't be shy with me, darlin'. If you want me, you have to show me you're ready for me," he croons.

I bite my lip and reach to cup and squeeze my breasts instead of covering my mound from his view. He drops to his knees. I open my legs and allow him to drag me toward him with them open.

"Now that's it. You're perfect," he murmurs.

Then he dives in and licks my pussy like he's been waiting to do this all morning. I shudder and reach to grasp the covers. Oh my Lord, this is better than the first time.

And to think, I thought I knew what to expect. I squeeze my eyes shut and throw my head back. My hips seem to have a mind of their own as I rock them against his face.

He reaches for my nipple and rolls it between his fingertips. A whimper escapes me as he lifts to take my lips in a searing kiss and then lowers to tug one of my hardened peaks into his mouth as he continues to play with the other. My heart begins to race with anticipation.

Trevor continues to suck on my mound as he teases and tests my folds. I scoot my hips forward for him to gain better access and widen my legs.

"You're so sexy," he murmurs as my breast pops free of his lips.

He then kisses his way down my body. Faster than I can think, he slips his shoulder under my legs and buries his face between my thighs once again. I don't know what I expected, but I wasn't ready for this.

"Oh shit, Trev," I cry.

He hums and dives in farther, pushing his face in deeper. I lock my legs around his head and give in to the motion of my

hips. Trevor grasps ahold of my thighs and continues to blow my little mind.

“Oh my Lord. Trev, yes. That feels so good. Don’t stop. Please,” I beg.

He doesn’t stop. Not for a second. Instead, he licks and sucks and reaches for one of my breasts to squeeze and knead while he devours me.

“Yes, yes, yes. Oh yes,” I scream.

“Hmm,” he hums as he bobs his head against me.

My body feels like it’s coiling tightly. My heart is thundering, but I don’t want him to stop. Suddenly, I can’t stop shaking.

“That’s it, darlin’. Come for your man. Let go and let it happen. I promise it’s going to feel good.”

I stop holding back and allow my body to go with it. The convulsing continues and my pussy throbs as I feel my juices gushing between my crack.

Pulling back, he looks me in the eyes as he pushes his fingers into me and begins to pump them in and out of me slowly. He licks his lips, then turns his upper lip up as if trying to smell it. A wolfish smile comes to his face as he passes his tongue over his mouth again.

“You taste better than I ever imagined, like you know I’m about to make you mine forever,” he croons.

“Trev, please,” I whine.

Leaning in, he takes my mouth and kisses me deeply. I whimper and reach for his wrist as he massages me with his thumb while still pumping his other fingers into me. It’s all too much, yet not enough at the same time.

My senses are on overload. As he kisses me, I can taste the sweetness on his lips. My mind goes to what he would taste like.

“Oh my God, Trevor, please,” I pant as I feel my body coiling again.

The next thing I know, he's standing at his full height, stroking his hard length. I lick my lips as I watch him, wanting to know what he tastes like. A strangled groan comes from deep in his chest.

"Don't look at me like that. I'm trying to take my time with you."

"There's your problem. You're trying. The man I love doesn't try; he does," I purr.

"*Lynn*," he drags out.

I smile and lift up, then scoot off the bed and drop to my knees in front of him. He looks down at me with so much love in his eyes.

"Will you show me how to please you?" I ask as I take his shaft from his grasp and kiss the tip. When I pull away, something sticky is on my lips. I stick my tongue out to remove it.

Trev groans. "I could stand here and stare at you and that would be enough," he says tightly.

"But you and I both know that's not what I mean."

Feeling bold and really wanting to do this for him, I take him into my mouth. I know the moment his restraint breaks. His head falls back and he palms the back of my head and begins to pump his hips.

"Fuck, Lynn. Just like that, darlin'. You can suck harder. Add a little pressure. Take me as deep as you can. *Fuck*," he growls the last word between his teeth.

My mouth waters as I bob up and down his length. I'm proud of myself as I hear how affected he is. I want more.

I try taking him as deep as I can, but my eyes water before I can even get half in. He's long, so I'm not surprised. I choke a bit and have to back off. My saliva covers him now.

I reach to stroke him the way I watched him do to himself. He twitches in my hands. I look up at him and he's watching me with his lips parted.

I glance at his deep V and rock-hard abs. Phew, this man is a work of art. Seriously.

I bite my lip as I continue to work him. He leans to reach into the drawer on the side where he usually sleeps. I'm surprised when he pulls a box of condoms out.

Looking back into his eyes, I lift a brow. I was under the impression that he wasn't ever going to go there. He searches my face for a second then smiles.

"I wanted to be prepared in case we got carried away," he says as if in answer to my questioning brow.

"Good thinking." I give a sage nod for him to continue.

He laughs and bends to peck my lips. Then he straightens and bites into the condom wrapper. I pout because I know he's not going to allow me to finish.

I'm not too disappointed as the throbbing between my legs increases to a full-on heartbeat from just stroking and sucking him. Knowing he's about to shove this heavy thing into me, I allow myself to take in the details.

The weight of his penis in my hands seems to become ginormous. My lips part and I knit my brows. Down here with it in my face, it's very intimidating.

It's not just thick-looking; it's long. I get why it has always felt so heavy resting against me. Any time he's gotten hard while we made out or while he's brought me pleasure, I've felt it.

There's so much hair around it, but a much darker blond than the hair on his head. I watch in awe as he places the condom over his length.

He rolls it on smoothly, reminding me this isn't his first rodeo. Trevor has been with other girls and has had two years to learn more than I know—that is, if he only started at eighteen. I start to get nervous.

"What if I'm really bad at this?" I blurt out.

A frown comes to his face. He lifts me from my knees and walks me back until he's climbing over me on the bed. He

settles between my legs and leans on one arm as he reaches beneath my chin to lift my head with the other.

He waits until I make eye contact with him and looks me deep in the eyes. I fall right into his gaze. It's like coming home.

“Today, we make love to each other; that's all that matters. Allow my body to guide yours. Feel me as I feel you. If you don't like something, tell me. Other than that, trust your instincts and follow mine,” he says then crushes his lips to mine.

I go with it. Trevor makes it so easy for me to relax. His hands and lips lull me into a sense of comfort and safety. I want this more than anything.

I'm trusting my heart. At the moment, it trusts him. So much so it feels like it's trying to jump from my body to get to him.

He moves his lips to my neck and begins to kiss me there until I begin to laugh. His stubble is tickling me. I noticed earlier that he didn't seem to have shaved today.

My laughs turn to moans as he sucks my skin into his mouth and palms my butt in his hands. He kneads my flesh and continues to suck and roll his tongue against my skin. I lock my fingers in his hair and tug.

“Trev, honey. Oh my God.”

He places my weight back down on the bed and gently places his on me as he relaxes in place between my thighs. Moving his lips back to mine, he cages my head between his arms. I run my nails down his back as he kisses me and grinds against me.

“We don't have to do this,” he says as he breaks the kiss and searches my face.

“Need I remind you again? Bears and honey.”

He chuckles and shakes his head. Then he kisses me hard. It's a hungry kiss. I feel it deep down in my toes.

“Oh,” I gasp as he begins to push into me.

“Relax,” he whispers and drops kisses all over my face.

Reaching for my hands, he laces his fingers with mine and raises our entwined hands over our heads. I tighten my hold as he pulls out and pushes back in. My juices allow for him to slide in.

As if knowing it's coming, he covers my mouth as I scream, capturing the sound as he pushes through my barrier. He tightens his hands over mine as he settles deep inside me.

We lock gazes as he groans. Tears roll back into my ears. I can feel him pulsing inside me.

“Are you okay?”

I nod as I work my mouth and hold back groans of pain. He kisses my forehead then my nose. Slowly, he begins to move again.

“I'm sorry. It will get better. I promise,” he says tightly.

I bob my head, unable to say anything. It does begin to feel a lot better. He latches on to my neck and begins to suck, making my eyes roll back in my head.

I'm vaguely aware of the loud rain still falling outside like a soundtrack to our lovemaking. It feels like the perfect day, the perfect moment. I get lost in it all. The rain, the feel of his big body on top of mine. The pain, and then the pleasure, which slowly begins to lift its head.

“Trev,” I gasp and moan.

I go from cradling him with my legs at his sides to wrapping my legs around his waist. The more comfortable I get, the more he works his body into mine.

He groans deeply and really begins to thrust into me. I throw my head back against the pillow as I get used to the feeling. Releasing one of my hands, he reaches for my butt and tilts my hips up as he thrusts down.

“Lynn, baby, oh my God. You feel so good,” he grunts between his teeth.

“Trevor, I love you so much. You feel amazing.”

He covers my mouth with his and breathes me in as our bodies work together. I follow my instincts, as he said. I start to feel him everywhere. My toes curl as I try to keep my ankles locked behind his back.

“Baby girl, I will never love anyone the way I love you. Damn, I knew we’d be great, but *fuck*.”

The way he drags out the last word is so sexy. Our lovemaking goes from sweet, slow, and tender to him pounding into me like he’s chasing something. Sweat drops from his face and chest and his cheeks have turned red.

I’m going to come again. I think I’m going crazy when it feels like he’s swelling inside me. I didn’t think it could get bigger. When he roars my name and warmth spreads inside me, I know he’s come.

“Trevor,” I cry out as I follow.

He has just ruined me for all other men. I will only ever want him. That was mind-blowing.



TREVOR

I LIE HERE WAITING for what happened to feel wrong. I have no regrets. That was incredible.

I’ve never felt that way in my life. Girls throw themselves at me all the time. I’m no stranger to sex, but that wasn’t sex.

I’ve never felt more connected to anyone in my life. If anything, I’m more determined than ever to make this work and make sure Lynn is a part of my life.

I could work the ranch for a few years to make some more money. Honestly, I have more than enough in my trust. I’ve just always thought of that money as my rainy-day fund. In case nothing else pans out.

“Trev,” Lynn says softly.

“Yeah?”

“What if everything changes when we get back? You have school and I have my music. How’s that going to work?”

“I’ll do whatever needs to be done to be with you. It will all work out,” I reply.

“Then there’s Daddy. He still doesn’t think I should be dating. What are we going to do about him?”

“I’ve been thinking about all of that. I love you, Lynn. Not loving you isn’t an option. I’ll always do what’s best for you.”

She kisses the center of my chest and runs a hand across my abs. I tighten my hold around her, then lean in to peck her lips as she looks up at me. This feels right. Last night seems like it never happened.

“I love you too. I’m glad you talked me into coming on this trip. It still hurts, but I feel better.”

“Let’s focus on the here and now. We still have so much to experience before we go home.”

“It kind of sucks that the group is falling apart so much.”

“Yeah, but people are going to be people. Maybe things will get better as we all settle in some more. This has been a long time to be stuck together.”

“I guess. It’s been nice having this space to myself. I really have to thank your folks. This was so nice of them.”

“How about we test out that bathtub? You should soak.”

“That sounds like a great idea as long as you’re coming in with me.”

“Wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Trev?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m glad it was you and that I love you so much. Being in Paris on a rainy... that’s going to make the memory last forever. I love you.”

I take her lips and kiss her deeply. “I love you too.”

Suddenly, her brows wrinkle. “What?” I ask.

“What was in that box?”

I give her a grin and peck her lips. “Stay right here,” I croon and jump from the bed.

I rush to the common area and retrieve the box. With a smile on my lips, I head back into the bedroom. I sit down on the bed and open the lid.

Lynn sits up with a smile on her lips. Her eyes are sparkling. My chest tightens with so much love for her. I reach to lift one of the cupcakes out of the box.

Turning to place the box down on the nightstand, I then turn back to her and peel the paper back from the treat. I hold the cupcake up to her lips.

She takes a bit with a smile, frosting on her perfect lips. I smile and lean in to lick it off. I groan, wanting to lay her down to take her again.

She wipes my lips and pecks my cheek. “You remembered our truce.”

I peck the tip of her nose. “I went all around Paris until I found a bakery willing to make our cupcakes.”

“They’re perfect. Almost taste like the real deal.”

“No one will ever make our cupcakes as good as you do.” I give her a grin.

“They don’t call me Babycakes for nothing.”

“Am I forgiven?”

“I thought I made that clear when I gave you my body.”

“You can give someone your body and not have feelings for them, darlin’.”

She moves to straddle my body. Then cups my face. “Promise me we’ll never make love while mad at each other,” she purrs against my lips.

“I don’t know,” I drag out.

“What?” she gasps and jerks her head back.

“When we’ve had angry sex or make-up sex, you’ll understand,” I chuckle.

She places her forehead to mine. “As long as it’s with you, I don’t care if it’s happy, angry, or all the emotions you can think of at once. I love you, Trevor.”

“I love you too, Lynn. I always will.”

CHAPTER 22



*B*utterfly Kisses

Lynn

I SIT in the accent chair, sipping my hot chocolate while humming to myself and watching Trev sleep. The sheet is low, resting right above the swell of his backside.

I lift a brow and smile at my thoughts. I almost let a giggle slip as I wonder if he has fingernail prints on that pale ass from me digging into it as he pumped inside me last night.

After our bath, we made love a few more times. Trevor was patient and careful with me each time. Well, almost every time. That last time was pretty intense and a little rough, but I liked it.

“I can feel your eyes on me,” Trevor’s deep voice fills the room.

I grin over my mug and watch as he slowly turns his head to look back at me. I wish I had a camera in my hands to take a picture of him just like this. His strong arms wrapped around his pillow.

His sleep-messed hair, his sexy body and smooth skin—I want to capture it all to keep the memory forever. My sex clutches as he turns on his side and props his head up on his palm, his elbow on the pillow.

I drop my gaze down over his abs to that sexy *V* and then lower to his length, pushing at the sheet. Phew, that thing is

magic. I shake my thoughts off and lift my eyes back to his face.

He has his lip trapped between his teeth as a smile plays on his handsome face. I realize that he's been watching me as well. My nipples tighten beneath the thin T-shirt I have on.

"What are you doing up?" he asks in a sleep-heavy voice.

"I had to get up and wash my hair and dry it properly so it doesn't smell," I say with a frown.

Being out in the rain yesterday drenched my braids. I never did get a chance to tend to them. I woke and got right to it this morning.

"You always smell delicious. Come here, I miss you. You're too far away," he croons and holds his arms open to me.

He doesn't have to ask me twice. I place the mug down and race over to the bed, hopping in and falling onto his chest. He wraps his arms around me and buries his face in my neck.

I laugh as his stumble tickles me. He reaches for my butt and gives it a squeeze over my panties. I moan and wiggle to push him on his back so I can get under the covers and straddle him.

Once I'm sitting on his stomach, I look down into his eyes. He looks up at me with a wide smile on his face. My belly flips. I'm so giddy and in complete awe that this is my boyfriend and we had sex.

Not to mention, he's in love with me. I would lose my virginity a million times if it were to him. I wonder if this is how my sister felt with Cliff. Cliff... he must be hurting something bad.

I've been so wrapped up in my own grief and life. I'll have to make it my business to spend some time with him when I get back. He loved my sister. This has to be taking a toll on him.

Suddenly, I'm flipped on my back and Trevor is hovering over me. A yelp escapes my lips and then a giggle as he begins

to tickle me.

“Where’d you go?” he says as he continues to tickle my sides.

“Trev, stop it,” I laugh out.

“Not until you tell me where you went,” he chuckles.

“I was just thinking.”

“Were you thinking about me?” he croons into my neck as he tucks his face there.

“No, not just then.” I snicker.

“Wrong answer,” he growls and starts butterfly kisses down my neck to my collarbone.

He goes from tickling me to palming my breasts and kneading them. When he pinches my hardened peaks, I buck my hips off the bed into him.

“Is your mind on me yet?”

“Yes, I’m thinking that you better get your big behind in that bathroom and brush your teeth and wash the crust out of your eyes before you think about poking that thing into me,” I laugh.

He sighs and rests his head between my breasts. “I’d be content lying right here. I’d miss you too much. I don’t want to leave this bed.”

I laugh again. “If you miss me this much and I’m right here, what are you going to do when I leave for New York or Nashville?”

“Nashville isn’t that far a drive and I’m thinking about my options in New York.”

“Not that far? Trev, that’s like a twelve-hour drive.”

“I can fly.” He rolls onto his back and groans. “I thought we were going to stay in the moment and think about all this when we get back.”

“I know what we said, but there’s so much to consider.”

“Okay then, I’m going to shower and then we can talk. If it means we get to relax and have fun after, we can talk all your little heart wants.”

“Are you patronizing me?”

“Not at all, darlin’,” he says and lifts to peck my cheek. “You want to talk about our future? We’re going to talk about our future. All ten kids and the dogs too.”

“You better be joshing. Who’s having ten kids?”

He gives a deep laugh and climbs from the bed. As I watch his tight ass move toward the bathroom, I shake my head. With that body, he might get five of that ten out of me.

I laugh at my thoughts and fall back against the bed. I find myself daydreaming about a life with Trevor, kids, a dog, and a house he builds for us. I can’t stop smiling as the images run through my head.

“He’d be a great father,” I hum to myself.



TREVOR

“YOU WANT SOME MORE JUICE?” I ask, holding the pitcher of orange up.

She covers her pretty mouth with her hand. “Yes, please.”

I fill her glass then mine. Then I place it back down and tuck into the rest of my breakfast. I was starving after my shower. I ordered room service before going back to my room for something to wear for the day.

“Do you really want to have ten kids?” Lynn asks quietly.

I look up from my steak and eggs and note the shy look on her face. I smile as I pretend to think the question over. I was joking earlier, but I wouldn’t care if we had fifteen as long as she’s the mama.

“I’m not married to the number. I know you’ll have your career. We don’t have to decide on a number now. I do want more than two.”

“Trevor, you’re talking like you want to be my husband or something,” she says as if she’s in disbelief.

I place my fork and knife down. Then I tilt my head as I stare at her. “Lynn, baby, have I not made it clear to you that I want you in my life?”

“I... I. Well, hell. I guess you have. It’s just a little weird talking about children and all.”

“You wanted to talk about our future.”

“Yeah, like how we’re going to handle my daddy. What we’re going to do about this coming year? Stuff like that.”

“I’ll handle your daddy. I’m going to go talk to him man to man. As for the next year, I might transfer or see if I can take a work-study program for my final courses. Then I can be wherever you are.”

“Really?” she says with her eyes all wide.

“Really, darlin’. I’m in love with you. I want to be where you are.”

She covers her face and squeals into her palms. She then peeks out from behind her fingers at me. I can’t help but laugh at her.

“I’m sorry. This is all so... It’s so unreal.” She holds her arm out to me across the table. “Will you pinch me?”

“I’ll do you one better.”

I grab her arm in one hand as I stand. Moving closer, I then lean in and push my other hand into her braids. Tilting her head back, I take her lips. They’re sugary sweet from the syrup on her French toast.

I groan into her mouth and deepen the kiss. Images of her writhing beneath me last night pop into my head. I swipe her mouth with my tongue, savoring the salty and sweet flavor.

Releasing her hair, I then reach down and pinch one of her nipples. I break the kiss, chuckling against her mouth. She gives my shoulder a playful slap, but she's breathless from my kiss.

She begins to swat her hands in front of her as I go to do it again. I dodge her little hands as I remember my girl is a second-degree black belt. She could hurt me if she wanted.

Lynn and Brooke have never truly needed me to come to their rescue. I've just seen it as my job since we were little. Moses and Darla raised little ladies. It has never felt right to leave them to defend themselves; that is for me to do.

"You said to pinch you," I tease.

"You know what I meant."

"Did I?"

"Trevor Paul Monroe, don't you play wi—."

I cut her words off as I dip my head and pull her tightened peak into my mouth over her tank top. I suck on it, applying a little more pressure each time I suck.

"Trev," she gasps.

Releasing her nipple with a smile on my face, I look into her eyes. I press my lips to hers again and place my hands on her waist. She wraps her arms around my neck as our tongues dance together. I palm the breast I had sucked and move my other hand to slide it into her panties.

Another gasp leaves her lips as I slide my fingers into her wetness. She tightens her fingers in the hair at the nape of my neck. I pull back and lift a brow when she bites my lower lip.

"Careful now, don't go getting yourself in trouble," I tease.

"You started it."

I laugh and shake my head. I did and I want to finish it, but we can't stay in here having sex all day. This is what my father meant about thinking responsibly.

"What would you like to do today?" I ask as I continue to pump my fingers in and out of her.

“What?”

“What are we doing today? We can’t stay in here all day.”

She shakes her head as if to clear it. “Why not?”

I move my lips to her ear. “Because I’ll end up fucking you all day. I can’t seem to keep my hands off you and I don’t have enough condoms for what I really want.”

“What do you really want?” she asks breathily.

“I want to spend the day buried deep inside you. Then I want to claim all of you.”

“All of me?”

I slip my fingers from her tight heat and reach farther to tap against her puckered hole. She tightens her fingers in my hair, pulling me closer to her. I don’t just kiss her; I consume her.

Now that I’ve had her, I can’t contain how much I want her. I hadn’t meant for us to go there yesterday, but after being away from her, I felt like I had truly lost her and being inside her was the only thing that made sense.

She’s mine now. We belong together. My heart beats for her. All we need now is to tame the flames within so we don’t burn each other.

I pull my hand from her panties and kiss her forehead. “Darlin’, go get dressed. We’ll spend the day on the Champs-Élysées, I’ll treat you to a shopping spree.”

“I can have anything I want?”

“Of course.” I give her a curious look. “Why? What do you have in mind?”

“Those condoms you’re needing.”

I laugh and kiss her nose. “Come on. We’ll get those too.”

She gives me the brightest, prettiest little smile and I swear I fall in love all over again. I’d do anything to keep that smile on her face forever. For her, I’ll be the best man I can be.

CHAPTER 23



*D*ream Home

Trevor

“ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT,” Lynn laughs as we hold hands while I carry her bags while we walk the Champs-Élysées. “If you must know, my dream home would have a big old porch. Oh, it has to have a porch swing, maybe two, one on each end of the porch.”

“You can only sit on one at a time.” I laugh.

“Yeah, but you said we’re having a bunch of kids. They’ll fight over who gets to sit where if we only have one. This way, the little ones can sit with us while the others sit together in the other.”

My heart swells as I begin to envision our little family and our home. I’ll build her a huge master closet. She’s done some damage today. I want to spoil her like this all the time. She’ll need the room for the lifestyle I plan to build for her.

“Sounds good. So, a porch. Come on, what else?”

“Three stories. I’m not a fan of the ranch style. I want our home to feel grand but still welcoming. Someplace for me and my music and a room for you and your crafts. You still build those planes?”

“I haven’t in a while. Haven’t had the space or the time.”

“Well, you need a workshop to build planes for our sons and dollhouses for our daughters,” she sings up at me.

“Yes, ma’am. Anything else?”

“Um, well.”

“Go on, spit it out,” I croon and lean over to kiss her forehead.

“Well, I might already have our land. You know Daddy gave me the acres on the lake. I’ve always seen my home right next to the lake placed just so.”

“That’s a great idea.”

Somehow, I know what I see in my head is just what she means. “We can have big windows in the master bedroom that look out on the lake.”

She gasps and looks up at me. “Exactly.”

I dip my head to kiss her nose. “Your wish is my command. I can’t wait to get it started.”

“Trev, we still have a long way to go.”

“Will we have stables?” I ask, ignoring her words.

I’m a determined man. She will have her house. I can already see one of our kids bringing out a pitcher of lemonade for the rest of the family. While Lynn is strumming her guitar, I’ll toss a ball with the others.

We can fish in the lake and have races in front of that big old porch. My girls will have their mama’s big old smile as they stand with their prom dates for pictures as their mama fusses over their hair and dresses. I’ll help my boys with their ties after spending the day with them getting fresh haircuts and, if they’re anything like me, a shave.

“What are you thinking about? What has that handsome smile on your face?”

“You. It’s always about you.”

“Aren’t you sweet.”

I lean to press my lips near her ear. “Not as sweet as you,” I growl then nip the side of her neck.

She squeals but wraps her arms around my waist. I wrap my arm around her and hold her close. It's been a great day. My stomach growls, ready for something to eat.

"You hungry?" I ask.

"Yeah, I could eat. You want to get some fast food and head back or go somewhere for local eats?"

"That's up to you, darlin'. Either way, I'm having you for dessert," I croon against her temple.

"Um, maybe I should make you wait. Take me to a restaurant, love. I want to feel your anticipation."

I laugh. "Careful, darlin'. I'm not sure you can handle what you're asking for."

"We're going to see, aren't we?"

I toss my head back and laugh as I give her a gentle squeeze. Yeah, we're definitely going to see. She'll be crying out for mercy before the night ends.



LYNN

WHY ON EARTH did I challenge this man? Phew. Trevor Monroe is one passionate man.

I feel like last night was just a prelude to the real thing. As if he took his time and was easy on me because he knew it was my first time.

Tonight, good Lord, tonight was totally different. It started with him pinning me to the door outside my hotel suite with his hips as he kissed my neck. I struggled to get us into the room.

Once inside, he dropped my bags at our feet and spun me to take my lips. One minute, we were kissing by the door. The next, I was wrapped around his waist as he devoured my mouth and palmed my breasts.

Trevor had his way with me all over this hotel room. Now I'm lying in bed beside him, feeling like he's still inside me, wishing he were. I can't stop smiling as I snuggle into his side.

"You were right," I murmur.

"About what?" he asks as he reaches for my leg and pulls it across his body to massage my skin.

"I wasn't ready for any of that. It was amazing, but I wasn't ready."

He releases a laugh. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I rode a bull. I think I'm going home with the purse though. It was a prize bull and I stayed on way longer than anyone expected," I tease.

He really laughs this time. "I'm happy I could help you get your points. You can come ride this cowboy anytime you like."

I groan. "Don't say things like that. My hoo-ha doesn't have any good sense. She wants to go for another round, but I know that's insanity."

"You could ride my face instead. I wouldn't want your hoo-ha to feel neglected."

I shift my body on top of his and look down at his handsome face. He reaches to run his thumb across my lips. I smile back at him.

"You haven't neglected me yet. How about a snack? Some ice cream, we can have them bring some up."

He reaches for his watch on the nightstand. "Ah, shit, you haven't called to check in. I'll run that bath, but you should call home."

"Way to kill the vibe, cowboy."

"I'd rather kill the vibe than have your daddy kill me."

I roll my eyes, then roll off him. I know he's right. If I don't call, my parents will worry. Since the group has plans tomorrow, I shouldn't put this off.

Trev heads into the bathroom. I grab my phone to call home. I'm humming a new tune as the phone rings.

Pushing a hand through my braids, I'm so glad my parents can't see me. I grab the sheet and tug it around my body. Finally, the line is picked up.

My father's voice comes through the line. "Hey, Babycakes. That you?"

"Hey, Daddy. How are you?"

"I'm fine. How's the music going?"

"It's going great. I have something working in my head now. I'm in my room for the night. I'll get it down when I hang up. I just wanted to check in."

"That's good. I heard from a friend in Nashville. You're going to get a shot. It will be tight; they're expecting to see you in New York, but we can stop in Nashville and then head there. I'm working the schedule out so I can go with you."

"Oh my God, Daddy. That's great. Nashville. Trev, I'm going to Nashville. I'm going to get to sing in Nashville," I squeal.

Trev comes running out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist and wide eyes. I palm my forehead as I realize what I've done. My breathing stops.

"Trevor is in your room. At this time of night? What time is it there?"

"Midnight," I murmur. "We were playing cards. Tom, Elsie, Maggie. We were all thinking about Pook and playing cards while reminiscing," I lie.

"You didn't mention the others to tell your news," he says sternly.

"Because Trevor knows how much this means to me." I think fast. "Daddy, hold on. Let me see everyone out. They're leaving."

"Put anyone other than Trevor on the phone."

“Daddy, I just told you they’re all heading out. They were leaving when I made the call. It’s just me now.”

“I didn’t wake up yesterday, little girl. You better not be making a fool of me.”

“But you and Mama said to stick to his side. Why is it a problem if he and our friends hang out in my room?”

“Because I wasn’t thinking when I said you could go. Oh God, what have I done? You girls have a thing for those Monroe boys. Shit,” he bites out away from the phone.

He then continues and I can hear the brokenness in his voice. “Your sister... she... she was supposed to be engaged to one of them. I gave him my blessing. My little girl was supposed to be engaged,” he sobs.

“Daddy—”

“Talk to your mama. I need to go. I need to start thinking straight,” he says.

My mother’s voice greets me next. Guilt settles in my belly like a ball of lead. I just screwed up royally.

“Honey, what’s going on?”

“I don’t know what just happened. Is he okay?”

“I don’t know. Why don’t you call back tomorrow. Let me go talk to him.”

“Okay. I love you.”

“I love you too. Be safe, sweetheart.”

I hang up as the tears sting the backs of my eyes. I can’t believe I just did that. I know my daddy. I knew he was going to ask to speak to someone, but I had to mention the others.

“I’m sorry,” I sob as Trevor pulls me into his arms.

He sways me back and forth as he kisses the top of my head. My emotions and thoughts are all over the place. Pook was getting engaged? I didn’t know that.

However, instead of hope blooming for me and Trev, I know I’ve just messed things up. What is wrong with me?

“This is bad, this is very bad.”

“It will all work out, darlin’. It will be fine. Congratulations, baby girl. Let me call down for that ice cream,” he says soothingly.

CHAPTER 24



Sorry, Babycakes

Lynn

I WAKE to the same guilt I fell asleep with. The one thing to comfort me is Trev's strong arms wrapped around me as he sleeps. I look up into his face and I can't help but wish it could always be this way.

My heart pangs as my father's words come back to me. Pook was going to be engaged. Cliff was going to propose.

She would have made such a gorgeous bride. I know how much she loved Cliff. I wonder if she was ready to get married? She would have been such a good mother.

I'm surprised Daddy gave his blessing. Brooke spent nearly a year working on my daddy just to date Cliff. I believe he only gave in at first because she was away at school at the time.

Being that Cliff works the Monroe ranch, he couldn't really run to see Brooke all the time. They spent most of their time together during breaks. Daddy means well, but he can be smothering at times.

Especially when it comes to me. I might be better off in New York. Now that Pook is gone, I know things are going to get more intense.

Then there's my blunder from last night. Ugh, why is this my life? My sister and best friend is gone and she's the only

one who knew how to deal with my daddy, other than my mama—who still hasn't mastered the task the way Pook had.

Trevor takes a sharp intake of air, breaking into my thoughts. He opens his eyes and reaches to run his fingertips over my cheek. I give him a weak smile.

"How are you feeling?" he murmurs, his deep voice sleep heavy.

I shrug my shoulders, not sure how I feel. The pain in my daddy's voice was enough to cut. He sounds like a shell of his former self these days.

"I shouldn't have lied. It was a knee-jerk reaction."

"Give him some time to cool off. I'm sure you can smooth it out."

"I hope you're right. I feel terrible. Did you know Cliff was planning on proposing to Brooke?"

"Yeah, I did. He was going to fly in a week after us all. He planned to surprise her and propose here. He was off buying her ring that day."

"She was on her way to meet up with him that night, right?"

"That's what he says. He was going to pick her up, but you know how she was about that truck."

"She wouldn't let anyone else drive it. Even if I didn't hate the thing, she wouldn't have allowed me to take it home for her," I sigh.

"And she called us stubborn," he chuckles wistfully.

"We get it from our daddy."

Trev runs a hand over my hair and kisses my forehead. "He'll come around. I get it. I'll be just as protective of our little girls."

"But I'm not a little girl anymore and neither was Brooke."

"In your daddy's head, you'll always be his little girl. He wants what's best for you. Someone to treat you right and

protect you. Cliff showed him he would do just that for your sister. I'll do the same.

"Trust me, Lynn. We've both made mistakes already, but it will work out. It has to. I'm madly in love with you."

"I love you too," I sing.

"Come shower with me."

Just as the words come out of his mouth, my phone rings. I sigh, knowing it's a call from back home. I look into Trev's eyes and bite my lip.

"This is your chance, darlin'. You handle that. Remember, I'll talk to him man to man when we get home and get permission to do this right.

"All you have to do is smooth things over between you two for now. When you're done, I'll be in the shower waiting," he says and pecks my lips then my nose.

I give him a weak smile before rolling over toward my phone. Just as I thought, it's from my home. It's either my mama or my daddy on the other end.

I take a deep inhale before I pick up. I'm either about to be yelled at or interrogated about last night all over again. Either way, it's too early for this, but I'd rather deal with it now than have it on my mind all day.

"Hello," I breathe into the phone.

"Hey, Babycakes," my daddy returns.

I close my eyes and sigh. I had been hoping it was my mama. She's always been easier to talk to.

"Hey, Daddy."

"Lynn, I'm sorry about last night. I... I just— Your mama and I happened to try to clean Pook's room yesterday. I found one of her diaries and she may have mentioned something about you crushing on Trev."

"Daddy," I say to cut him off.

“Hold on now, girl. Your mama talked to me and she’s making a whole lot of sense. I just want the truth from you.

“Are you and Trev more than the friends I know you to be? You two didn’t plan this trip to go fooling around behind my back, did you?”

“Trev is helping me heal from losing my sister, Daddy. We didn’t plan anything to do anything behind your back. I came to live Pook’s dream for her. To leave pieces of her here,” I say as I glance toward the bathroom.

“Then I’m sorry about last night. I have so much anger and emotions swimming through me all the time. I want my baby back.

“I want that man punished for taking her away. Taking her future from her. I should have made her get a new truck. I had planned to buy her a new one for graduation.”

He gives a sad chuckle. “She probably would have still driven that hunk of junk.”

I can see him shaking his head in my mind. He’s right though. She would have frowned at a new truck and got right into her beat-up love.

“This is all my fault,” Daddy sobs. “I dropped the ball on protecting my baby. I failed Brooke.”

“Oh, Daddy. No.”

“I did. I know I did, but I can’t do that with you. I’m sorry if I haven’t been there for you lately. Sorry if I haven’t noticed what’s important to you.”

“I’m fine, Daddy. Trev, Tom, and the others are helping me through. Doing this for Pook was the right thing to do. I feel closer to her. It’s like I’m seeing things through her eyes. I’ll be fine,” I reassure him.

“I’m proud of you, Cakes. If I’ve never told you that. I’m real proud of you.”

“Thanks, Daddy.”

He gives a lighter chuckle. “I shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions. Trev has always been like a brother to you.”

“You have nothing to worry about. I think Pook said he’s dating someone on campus. Trev already has a girlfriend. He’s not worried about little old me.”

I don’t know what makes those words come out of my mouth, but I feel they’re a mistake the moment they’re breathed. I palm my forehead and wonder why I can’t seem to keep my foot out of my mouth.

“Daddy, I better go. I need to get dressed. The group has plans today.”

“You go on then. Have fun, Lynn. It’ll be all work when you get back.

“Pook would want you to do your best at this. I know she’s watching you. You’re going to be the star she always knew you’d be.”

“I know, Daddy. I’ll do my best. I love you.”

“I love you too, baby girl. Talk to you later.”

“Later.”

I hang up as I sit and stare into space. I thank God for my mama. That was all her.

Absentmindedly, I reach up and untie my scarf and then retie it to tighten it. I blow out a breath and rub my palms on my thighs.

I know why I told that lie. I wanted to ease Daddy’s mind. Hearing his pain did something to me. Maybe Trev and I can wait to tell Daddy about us. Wait six months to a year.

My father isn’t staying in New York with me; he’s only tagging along for my audition. If things go well, from there I’ll be staying with family.

Same goes for Nashville. If I’m lucky enough to make it there, I’ll be on my own. That will give me the freedom to date Trev and talk to him on the phone. I know Trev said he’d

follow me so we could be together, but we'll just have to put a pin in that for a while.

Resolved in my thoughts, I stand and tug my tank top off, then drop my shorts. Moving to my things, I go to grab my shower cap from my hair-care bag and put it on. Turning for the bathroom, I make my way to Trev with my mind made up.

I saunter my way into the bathroom and freeze. I've had that powerful body over mine more times than I can count in the last few days. However, the power and sex appeal rolling off him will never cease to amaze me.

All he's doing is standing under the spray of the shower with his head back, his face turned up to the water. He's facing me while the water cascades down his front. Even in its soft state, his length is impressive.

As if feeling my eyes on him, he lowers his head and pushes his wet hair from his face. As our eyes lock, a brilliant smile comes to his lips. I realize I've been biting my lip as I stare at him.

"You're gorgeous," we breathe at the same time.

We both laugh. I nod toward the sink as he opens his arms to me. I need to brush my teeth first. His eyes twinkle as he nods his understanding.

I make quick work of brushing my teeth and splashing my face with water. When I turn for the shower, he has his arms open again. I start for him as he stands there with a sexy smile on his lips. I shake my head as I step inside with him.

He immediately wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me into him by my butt cheeks. I lift on my toes and wrap my arms around his neck. Trev takes my lips in a deep kiss.

"How did it go?" he asks against my lips.

"He doesn't suspect us anymore."

"That's good. It gives me a chance to talk to him when we get back."

I sigh. "About that. I was thinking. Maybe you should wait."

“Give it a few months. Maybe six months to a year. Time for him to heal from losing Pook. Then we can go to him and tell him things changed and progressed while you kept in touch after the trip.”

He purses his lips and remains quiet for a few beats. “I don’t like the lying. We’ve done enough of that. I’d rather come clean when we get back.

“We can tell him we hadn’t planned for this to happen. We did come to do this for Pook, but we fell in love while here. It’s not a lie. That’s how it happened. Yes, we had feelings before, but they grew while here.”

“Yeah, I get that, but what do we do with the lies we’ve already told? About that night, about you not being in the room alone with me, about you not being my boyfriend?”

Trev groans. “All lies we shouldn’t have started. I’ll take all that on. It was me.”

“But it wasn’t. You can’t keep covering for me. Daddy will figure it out if you do that. Trust me, we should wait. You didn’t hear him last night. Give it a few months, please.”

He looks down into my eyes, a perplexed expression on his face, his blue eyes searching. I see the moment he gives in. I can tell he doesn’t want to, but he does.

Lifting me onto his waist, he then turns us and slams my back against the wall. I cry out as he thrusts into my already wet sex. He was priming me as we talked, his hands kneading my ass and his long fingers teasing my lower lips.

“I love you,” I cry out as he moves in and out of me.

He groans and takes my lips. When he breaks the kiss, he places his forehead to mine. The intense look in his eyes says it all without him having to.

I can see his love, feel it through our connection. I cling to his back as he stirs what feels like all my emotions inside me with his dick. There’s something possessive and desperate about the way he bounces me on his hard shaft.

“I love you more than you could ever know,” he breathes into my mouth. “God, Lynn, I’m so fucking crazy about you.”

CHAPTER 25



Tower of Friends

Lynn

I SIT in the grass with the sun beaming down on my face. The entire group is here at *the Champ de Mars* as we hang out before the Eiffel Tower.

The guys have been tossing frisbees and a football off and on. At the moment, they're playing hacky sack after someone pulled a beanbag from somewhere. The girls have been sitting around talking among themselves.

I tuned them out some time ago, tired of hearing Corinne brag about nursing school. I get it, she got into a rigorous program and she's doing well, but Lord, you would think she was just elected president of the United States.

"Lynn, are you excited about heading to New York?" Elise asks, pulling my attention away from a shirtless Trevor.

I reluctantly pull my eyes away from the bead of sweat I was tracking down his muscular back. Elise gives me a pointed look as if pleading for me to save them from Corinne's insistent babbling and ranting.

I stifle a laugh and tune back in. "Yeah, I guess I am. However, I just got news Nashville might be calling."

"You're so lucky. I thought I was envious of Cody. He makes New York and going to Columbia sound so awesome."

I frown. Why didn't I realize Cody lived in New York during the school semesters. He's been going to Columbia University in New York for the last two years.

"I thought about going to college in New York," Corinne says.

I glance at her and have to fight not to roll my eyes. Brooke has a big heart. I can't for the life of me understand what made her become friends with Corinne. She's always given me mean-girl vibes.

"Right," Maggie says before taking a sip of her water.

"You know, Trev was seeing my cousin from freshman year until recently," Corinne says with a sugary-sweet smile on her face.

Before I can react or say a word to her, Trevor comes over and pushes a hand in my hair, tilting my head back. He takes my lips in a deep kiss before breaking it and looking deep into my eyes.

"Hey, darlin'," he croons and winks at me as I stare at him breathlessly.

"Hey," I say as my cheeks heat.

"I love you," he murmurs and kisses my nose.

I sit stuck as he releases me and jogs off to return to his game with the guys. Shaking my head to clear it, I then turn to look at Corinne and lift a brow. I could give two cows' nuts about her cousin.

He's mine now. It's not like I don't know he dated before me. I don't even bother to get in my feelings.

"They dated off and on," Maggie bites out. "I don't think he was ever serious about her."

"I'm just saying—"

"Just saying what? Whatever you feel you need to say, for the love of God, keep it to yourself, please. This isn't the time or place."

"I'm going to the tower. Annie, you coming?"

“I guess,” Annie says with a frown.

I try not to giggle as Corinne stomps off.

“Good riddance,” Elise huffs. “She was getting on my damn nerves.”

“You and me both,” Maggie says.

“I tuned her out a long time ago.”

“That’s because you can’t stop staring at your man. You two are so cute.”

We all fall into a fit of laughter. I’m not going to lie. Trevor has had more than my attention with those jeans riding low on his hips. He’s been showing off that sexy V since he tugged his shirt off. The other guys have taken their shirts off too.

However, the difference between Trev’s athletic, conditioned body and theirs is very clear. Tom and Cody come in close with the work they do on the ranch but are still, by far, no match for Trev’s chiseled body.

Thoughts of the way he let me trace his abs with my tongue flash in my head. Watching his eyes darken in the throes of passion is something I’ll never get tired of.

“You’re thinking about him naked,” Elise gasps, teasing me.

“Oh, be quiet. I am not.”

“Yeah, you are,” Maggie chimes in. “The way you’re biting your lip gives it away. Although, I think you’re thinking about more than him being naked. If you know what I mean.”

I grab a grape from my forgotten lunch and toss it at her. She catches it in her mouth, causing me to laugh. My heart fills with a lightness I haven’t felt since that call.

“Thanks, guys,” I choke out.

“For what?”

“I needed this. Not just the trip. I needed you guys more than you know.”

“Aww,” Elise coos as she and Maggie crawl to come surround me and pull me into a hug.

I bask in their embrace and friendship. The heaviness lifts from my shoulders and I begin to believe everything will work out and fall into place.



TREVOR

I STAND DRINKING from my water bottle. The sun beating down on my bare back. My gaze falls on Lynn as she hugs Elise and Maggie. I appreciate them taking her under their wing during this trip.

It had dawned on me that these were all more Brooke's friends than hers. When she wanted to come along with her sister, it wasn't a big deal because the three of us were most likely going to hang out together.

I feel a pang in my chest as I think of how inseparable the three of us had been every summer. Even after I left for college, I always came back to spend my summers with my girls.

Back then, Lynn and I fought about everything. Which is why I gave in this morning. I didn't want to wait to talk to her Daddy, but I knew disagreeing was only going to lead to another fight.

Lynn was excited last night, but as soon as my name left her mouth, I knew that was going to be a problem. I wouldn't tell her that. I could see the guilt already swimming in her eyes.

It's a good thing I have a surprise for her. She needs to remove herself from all this one more time. We may be away from Texas, but home still lingers here.

I think it's because of our friends and Brooke's connection to the trip. My surprise will kill a few birds with one stone.

I'm going to remove her from Paris and all the others. This last week will be ours.

"You ready for this?" Tom asks as he comes to stand beside me.

I shrug. "It will make her happy. I'm always ready to see her happy."

"We're going to miss you guys."

"You planning on hanging with Elsie and Maggie?"

"Naw, Roger wants to take a break from the others. You don't mind if he moves into our suite, do you?"

"That's cool with me. Maggie and Elise are going to stay in Lynn's room since it's paid for. I want to do something nice for them because of that." I point my water bottle toward the girls as they make Lynn smile and laugh.

"Roger not getting along with Cody and Blaine?"

"He's getting along fine with the guys. It's Corinne who's driving him crazy. Who knows, we may end up hanging with Elise and Maggie. They've separated themselves from the others."

"It was never this hard for all of us to hang together," I mutter.

"You can say that again. Brooke was the glue though. She never stuck to one clique or treated anyone like they didn't belong. Everyone wanted to be her friend. That's how our group of misfits became friends.

"They just have this light about them, don't they?" I muse.

"That they do. It's how I know she's going to go far."

"Hey, you guys calling it quits?" Cody says as he jogs over.

"Just taking a water break. It's hot," I reply.

"Cool, cool. You guys coming out tonight? I'm treating a few rounds since I have to head back in the morning."

I turn to look Cody in the eyes. It's not that I don't like him. We've been cordial over the years. I just can't stand him sniffing around Lynn.

He's a year younger than I am, but he's always run with our circle. His surly-ass daddy only speaks to my daddy when he needs something. Which I'm sure is more often than he would like.

"You're leaving?" I ask.

"Yeah, I have to head back to New York. One of my professors pulled some strings to get me a job. It's going to look great on my grad school app. I can't turn it down."

"That's great and it sucks at the same time," Tom says.

"Tell me about it. School is already kicking my ass. I need a break, but if you turn down one opportunity, you risk not getting another in that circle. I'm going to suck it up and take the job."

I remain silent. I forgot Cody moved to New York to go to college. Jealousy burns in my belly as I think of him being in the same state as Lynn while I'm forced to wait a year to tell her daddy I'm her man.

Once again, her plan leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. It's wrong. It goes against every fiber of my being.

It ain't right, but I take a breath and calm my temper because it's what Lynn needs me to do. It's the right thing for her. I will always do what's right for her.

Tom pats me on the back. "We'll be there."

I look at him and roll my eyes. I have plans with Lynn tonight. I want to head back to our room right after her surprise.

I'm still semihard from thinking about our lovemaking in the shower this morning. When I opened my eyes and saw her, I had to have her. I don't even think she noticed me putting that condom on while she brushed her teeth.

I did it so fast, impatiently waiting as she rinsed her mouth out and splashed water on her face. Once I was inside her, it

was like returning home. The feel of her soft skin beneath my palms, her cries of passion in my ear.

I wanted to spend hours buried inside her. The more I have of her, the more I want. However, the more time we spend with the others, the more stories she will have that involve more than me since we're not going to share with her daddy what we are.

"Yeah, we'll be there," I mumble.

I'll wait until after the bar to give her the surprise. That way will be more romantic. Not to mention, we can head back to our room right after.

"Cool, anyone else starving? I don't know if it's this heat or the energy we're using up. I could eat a horse," Cody says.

"Yeah, I was just about to say something," Tom says.

"Food would be great. I burned that sandwich off an hour ago," I add.

We all head for the girls. I don't believe we left much behind. We're going to need to make a food run. I open the little cooler our lunch was stored in.

Just as I thought, there's nothing left. I move to sit behind Lynn and kiss the side of her neck. She pulls into herself shyly, only making me tighten my hold to keep her closer to me.

She looks up at me, causing me to dip my head and take her lips. Her mouth is sweet. I deepen the kiss, wanting to taste more of her.

"You ready to get something more to eat? We're hungry and going for something else."

"You guys are like bottomless pits. That was only an hour ago."

"What can I say? We're grown, growing men."

"Don't I know it," she says with a little grin and a wink.

I bury my face in her neck and growl. I inhale and give her a gentle squeeze. She laughs as I sway her back and forth.

“You guys go ahead and eat. I’m good for now.”

I kiss the top of her head and reluctantly stand to find something to eat with the others. I grab my shirt and tug it back on. As I saunter away with Cody and Tom, Lynn’s pretty voice follows me.

“Looking good, Monroe. Looking mighty fine,” she sings. Glancing over my shoulder, I find her looking at my ass.

I grin and shoot her a wink. She lifts her hand to her mouth and blows me a kiss. I turn and catch the kiss as I walk backward, tugging the imaginary kiss into my chest and holding it over my heart.

“You’re so gone.” Tom chuckles.

I ignore his taunting and turn back to watch where I’m going. “One day, you’ll know just how I feel and I want to hear what you have to say then,” I toss back.

“That will be the day. I’ll be just like my daddy.”

“I doubt that.”

Tom’s father has been single for as long as I’ve known him. Tom’s mama was young and took off, leaving Tom behind for his daddy to raise. It’s been the two of them since.

“She’s gonna have to be one hell of a special girl to trap me,” he replies.

“It ain’t trapping if you’re in love. I want to spend the rest of my life with her. No trap necessary. I’m all hers.”

“You’re a lucky guy,” Cody says then holds his hands up. “I’m just saying she’s gorgeous, talented, and smart. Everyone can see that.”

“He’s right,” Tom agrees.

“She’s always been something else,” I add, not able to deny Cody’s words.

“I can’t wait until she returns to herself. She’s gonna take the world by storm,” Cody says proudly, as if she’s his girl.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Come on, bro. You have to see it. Losing Brooke broke her spirit. She’s not the same. That wildfire isn’t there, not like it used to be.”

I grind my teeth, hating that he knows her so well. I get what he means. It’s why I’m taking her on this trip. I want to help her find her wild heart again.

That fire that makes Lynn, Lynn. That glow that tells the world she’s a happy, loving person, just like her big sister was. The light that shines in her eyes and draws you in. I need to see that again before we return home.

“Yeah, I see it,” I mutter.

CHAPTER 26



Come With Me

Lynn

“HEY, Cody. I just wanted to say goodbye,” I say as I walk over to the table Cody’s sitting at with Roger, Blaine, and Tom.

Trevor wants to leave and go for a walk. Corinne has been working my nerves again, so I’m more than happy to leave. However, I couldn’t go without saying goodbye to Cody.

He’s been nothing but a sweetheart to me. I feel bad he has to end his vacation to go start his new job. I get it though. It’s a great opportunity for him.

“You’re leaving?”

“Yeah, thanks for the drinks. Travel safely and knock ’em dead or whatever,” I say and snicker.

“You should give me your number. If you ever need someone to talk to in New York or get homesick for a familiar face, you can give me a call.”

I tilt my head at him and smile. I’m not too sure how Trev would feel about this. I chew on my lip, knowing I might need to take him up on the offer.

“Come on, Cakes. You know I don’t bite and I totally respect what you have going on with Monroe. I’m not looking to start any trouble. I’m a friend, that’s all.”

I sigh and shake my head, holding my hand out. “Give me your phone,” I say.

He gives me a big smile and pulls his phone out. I take it and send myself a quick text. I hand it back and he stands to pull me into a hug. I’m reluctant to return it at first.

“I’m always a call away. Pook was always there for me. When I wanted to drop out of school and run back home with my tail between my legs, she was the one I called for advice.

“She didn’t just talk me out of quitting. She called as if knowing I was thinking about killing myself. Right in that moment, when everything was too much and I was going to follow through, she called me and talked me down.

“There isn’t anything I wouldn’t do for you. I owe it to your sister. Call me anytime,” he whispers in my ear.

I pull back with tears in my eyes. “Oh, Cody, I didn’t know that. I’m so happy she was there for you. The same stands. You call me if you ever feel it’s too much. I’m no Brooke, but I’ll listen and be a friend if you need me.”

“Don’t you go crying, sugar. I just wanted you to know you have a friend in me.”

I pull him in for another hug, but this time, a strong arm wraps around my waist, tugging me from behind. I look up and Trevor is glaring over my head at Cody.

“Not a threat, bro. Just saying goodbye to a friend,” Cody says.

Trev kisses the top of my head. “Let’s go. We have somewhere to be.”

I turn to face him. “I thought we were just taking a walk.”

He pulls a face as if just realizing his mistake. I smile up at him. I should have known. He’s been acting weird all day.

He dips his head and nips at my bottom lip. I cling to his shirt and allow him to kiss me deeply. My toes curl in my shoes and I forget all about what we were talking about.

He breaks the kiss and pecks my forehead. “We’re taking a walk to someplace we should be,” he murmurs against my skin.

“In that case, lead the way,” I breathe. I turn and wave to Cody and the others. “See y’all. Have a good night, fellas.”

Trevor reaches out his hand and laces his fingers with mine. I wrap my free hand around his bicep and lean in to place my head against him. My mind goes to what Cody just shared with me.

My sister was the greatest. She was always there for everyone. She became what you needed when you needed it. This world was a better place with her in it.

Corinne catches my eye and I have to wonder if I’m just being cruel. There’s something about her that rubs me wrong, but Brooke had to see something in her if she had her as a friend. Right?

“Trev?”

“Yeah, baby?”

My face warms from the endearment. I snuggle closer to him and squeeze his hand. He glances down at me once we’re outside, through the crowd moving into the bar.

“Did Brooke trust everyone here? I mean, were all these people really her friends?”

He gives me a wink. “Your sister was smart and wise beyond her years. She made everyone around her comfortable, but in that comfort came loose lips.

“In other words, no, not everyone was a true friend. She may have given them true friendship, but she knew who she was keeping close to shorten the distance of the strike.

“I learned a long time ago Brooke would make friends with your enemies or mine to keep us safe. Remember Lauren Fisher?”

I frown at the name. “Ugh, I remember her. She was so mean to me and then she would smile in your face and act like she was Pook’s best friend.”

“Pook knew. Lauren was only her friend to get to me after I caught her bullying you and beat up her brother. Your sister knew Lauren had one more time to bully you before the two of us got into trouble.”

I start to laugh. Trev shakes his head. “She had to be crazy. After she was mean to you and I caught her, I had no interest in her, no matter how big her boobs had gotten,” he says with a frown.

“Oh my God, but she still hung out with Pook all she could,” I say.

“And got herself nice and comfortable around her. Pook wouldn’t tell me, but Cliff did. That fight they got into was because Lauren made some comments about you, thinking Brooke wasn’t going to react.

“From what he said, she threatened to do something to you and Pook, laying hands like Jesus.” He chuckles. “But no one believed Lauren because, come on, this was Pook, she didn’t fight anyone.”

“Not like me. I would have gotten into so much trouble for what Pook did to her,” I say through my laughter and shake my head.

“Exactly,” he drawls. “She was always looking out for us and intercepting our bullshit.”

I wipe a tear. “God, I miss her.”

“I know, darlin’. I know. I do too.”

We fall silent for the rest of our walk. I realize after a while that we’re heading back toward the Eiffel Tower. It’s a nice warm night and the sky is clear.

You can almost feel the romance in the air. I imagine how my sister would have felt as she walked these streets engaged to her Monroe. Cliff proposing to her here would have been perfect.

I wish she could have had that. Maybe there’s some parallel universe where she’s living out that version of her life. I hope there is because she deserved it.

“Do you believe in parallel universes?”

“Say what now?” Trev replies as if I’ve pulled him from his thoughts.

“Do you believe we’re living another life on some other plane? Like if we don’t get it right here, we’re there making better decisions or experiencing a better version of this life.”

He shrugs. “I believe anything is possible. The one thing I know for sure is that I want to be in whatever life or universe where I get to spend my life with you.”

“Aw, Trev, I want that too.”

He leads the way to the Eiffel Tower and produces tickets for us to go up. I look at him with a questioning gaze. I thought we were saving this for last. We still have a week here.

He leans in to peck my lips. “You’ll understand once we get to the top,” he says against my mouth.

I smile and bounce on my toes beside him. My belly fills with butterflies and my heart feels so full it could burst right from my chest. My anticipation goes through the roof.

I think I hold my breath the entire ride up. When we exit, the wind is a little brisk. Trevor tugs me into his embrace and looks down into my eyes.

“I wanted to save this for last for a reason,” he says.

He reaches into his pocket as a guy with a handful of roses moves closer to us. I take my eyes off Trevor as the guy stops beside us. I bounce my gaze back and forth between them.

“Oh, right, these are for you,” Trev says with a nervous laugh.

He takes the roses from the man and hands them over to me. I take them and bring them to my nose, inhaling deeply. A smile spreads across my face.

“I thought long and hard about this one. We’d get in trouble trying to toss something from up here and I didn’t get the feeling that anything we left would stand the test of time, so I thought we needed to change the rules just this once.

“I took that lock of hair Nanna gave you and had it placed in this locket. You get one half and I get the other.” He holds up the locket for me to see.

“Look, if you open this side, there’s a picture of the three of us and if you open the other side, there’s the lock of hair. I thought... well, I thought we could make a promise to her.

“This doesn’t end here. Pook wanted us to live, love, and be happy. Right here, right now, we should promise her that, and as long as we wear these, she can live through us no matter where in the world we are,” he finishes and swallows, his eyes searching mine.

I cup his face and lift up on my toes to kiss his lips. “Thank you. This is perfect. You’re perfect. I love you so much and I love this. Thank you for being such a good friend to my sister, Trev. She would have loved this.”

He wraps his arms around my waist and tugs me in close. “I’m not done. Pook originally wanted to travel Europe, not just Paris. Not everyone could afford to do a month here, another month there, and then a few weeks somewhere else.”

“Yeah, I remember that,” I say.

“As a compromise, we all decided on Paris, but Pook still talked about hopping over to Italy before we returned home. You know, me, her, and Tom.”

“I had booked the trip to surprise her and Cliff. Especially after she spent the money to help a few book their flights when it looked like they wouldn’t have enough to make it.”

“She did that?”

“Yeah, you know her heart. Some had to work extra hours and save to come along. It was her Christmas gift to get them on the plane. Anyway, I still have these tickets and a romantic trip to Italy on my hands.

“I want to spend the next week with you in Italy. Will you come with me?”

“Are you freaking kidding me? Of course. Besides, wasn’t I told I have to stick to your side?”

He releases a scoff. “Yeah, that was the instruction given.”

He cups my face and brings his lips to mine. He kisses me passionately and groans into my mouth. I wrap my arms around his neck as best I can while holding my roses.

Up here, above it all, I feel like another part of me begins to heal. I’m following my heart and living out an adventure. I get to check off another place for my sis. All while in the arms of the only man I will ever love.

CHAPTER 27



M^y Juliet

Trevor

WE MADE it to our rental villa in Verona the night before last. The place is much nicer than I thought. It has an old-world charm to it, with upgrades of modern touches that surprisingly complement the space.

As annoyed as I am with Lynn, I can't help but purse my lips to hold back my grin and laughter. All we've done since arriving in Italy has been bicker.

It's like old times, only now I want to kiss her into submission each time she fusses with me. She's so darn adorable while she gives me all that attitude. This shouldn't even be an argument, but I believe we both love goading each other.

"Trevor, come on. I asked you a simple question. Why can't I get an equally simple answer? Do these jeans make my butt look cute or not?"

"I told you if you wear those, we're not going anywhere. That is a simple answer," I say and go back to looking at my laptop.

"Ugh, what's the problem?" she huffs and stomps over to me.

She turns every which way before me. I saw the darn things the first time. Her ass looks great in them. Her full seat

is stretching the fabric to the brink.

The seams look as if they're holding on by a breath. I want to peel the damn things from her body before I burn them, then fuck her until she gets why I'm not taking her in public with jeans that jump-start the imagination, forget about leaving nothing to it.

I grab her by her hips and bring her into my lap. My lips are on hers before she says another word. I move my palms to her ass and squeeze.

"Hmm, Trev. Don't we need to leave?" she moans halfheartedly into my mouth.

I look at her with the smile I've been holding in. "We're not going anywhere as long as you have these on. You want me to say it in Italian for you?" I kiss the tip of her nose.

"*You want me to say it in Italian for you?*" she mocks while making a face at me. Then she rolls her eyes. "Oh, come on, Trev. Is this really worth wasting a day here in Italy?"

"If that's what you choose." I shrug.

She rolls her eyes. I sit calmly and wait for her to make a decision. I don't like the way men have been eyeballing her. She can do this my way, or we'll ruin our plans by staying in all day.

I don't mind. I really would love to peel these jeans off and kiss my way down her body. The thought of eating her sweet pussy is enough for me to call the day off, but I want to take her on this date.

"Fine," she huffs. "But not because you're bossing me around. I just thought of something else I want to wear."

"I'm sure you did," I taunt.

She narrows her eyes at me in a glare. I roll my lips and try to keep my shoulders from shaking as I laugh. She stands and turns to storm off. I slap her ass, pulling a yelp from her lips.

I laugh and shake my head. I was right about this trip. I've seen more of her wild heart in the last two days than I have

since... We haven't mentioned that night much since we've been here.

"Babe, should I call home before we go?"

"Wouldn't be a bad idea. We'll be gone most of the day. Your daddy is probably already up, so you're not going to wake anyone."

"True. Let me change my hair and shoes and I'll call before we go. Is that all right?"

"Take your time, princess."

I glance over to where she's peeking her head back into the room I'm in. She pokes her tongue out at me. I laugh genuinely this time, not holding it in.

I'd spend an eternity having our animated squabbles as long as we get to have them together. With a smile on my lips, I check my emails. I frown as I see an email from my ex.

Playing football and living away from home makes you shake the moisture from behind your ears fast. Pretty girls come with caution once you look like you're heading for something great. I'm a five-star athlete, whether I want to play or not.

Everyone back home and on campus believes I'm heading to the draft. Tom, Brooke, and Lynn are the only ones who know any different. The breakup was because I knew I was not what she wanted and to be perfectly honest, she was never what I really wanted either.

"Hey, did you hear what I said?"

I look up to find Lynn in a brown sundress that matches her gorgeous brown skin. My mouth falls open and I wish I hadn't said a darn thing about those jeans. The color of the dress makes it look like it's poured onto her skin.

Every curve is on displaying making her look like a goddess. Her perky breasts sit at attention, revealing to my knowing eyes that she doesn't have a bra on. The locket around her neck brings attention to the swell of those breasts as it rests between them.

“Say what now?” I breathe after swallowing hard a few times.

“I asked if sandals were all right to wear. Will there be a lot of walking?”

“We’ll do a bit of walking. You should wear comfortable shoes.”

“Okay, my love. I do believe I’m ready this time,” she sings as she floats back into the room.

I stand and open my arms to her. She floats right over into them. Feeling playful, I drop kisses all over her face and neck, causing her to giggle within my embrace.

“Is this your way of saying sorry?” she says after I plant a kiss on her lips.

“I have nothing to be sorry about.”

She opens her mouth then closes it and shakes her head. “Never mind. You win. Let’s go.”

“You’re giving in? Should I sleep with one eye open?”

“I don’t know. Maybe. Depends on this date.”

“Did you make your call?”

“Yup. Daddy’s busy, so it was quick. I’m all yours. Take me away, big fella. Show this country girl what you got up those sleeves.”

I dip my head to kiss her once more and slide my hand down to grasp her ass. I groan as I feel she’s wearing a thong beneath the soft fabric. I don’t think I won this one at all.

“Come on, darlin’. You stick to my side like glue.”

“Of course, never planned to leave it.”

I roll my eyes and purse my lips. The little minx is a devil. However, the twinkle in her eyes brings a smile to my face.

She’s getting there.



LYNN

“YOU KNOW, my legs are a lot shorter than yours. You don’t have to walk so fast,” I tease.

“I’m not walking that fast,” he says, looking down at me incredulously.

“Yes, you are. I’m skipping to keep up.”

“It’s not my fault you didn’t take after your daddy. Come on now. Move those pretty little feet.”

“Oh, hush up, you giant. Always picking on us little people.”

He reaches to pinch my butt. I look at him with my mouth hanging open and then I attack. He bursts into laughter and runs ahead to dodge my assault. I jump onto his back and bite his ear.

He laughs harder. “What are you doing, you little munchkin?”

“I’m riding a cowboy,” I say with a grin as he reaches for my legs to hold me in place so I don’t fall.

He snorts. “Save that talk for later.”

I poke him in the neck. He chuckles and squeezes my thighs. I forgot how much I love taunting Trevor.

It’s that moment just before he notices I’m goading him when his nostrils flare and that temper rises, giving me a glimpse of the Trevor I know best. Then he melts and his anger turns to annoyance because it’s me and he knows I’m just trying to make him mad.

I love knowing Trevor would never hurt me. Most times, he’s looking out for me and mad that I’m doing something he thinks has the potential to be dangerous. It dawned on me this morning that Trev and Pook are the reasons I take risks.

For as long as I can remember, if I jump, they've been there to catch me. All our fights have stemmed from me testing the waters. I know it's immature, but I'm reluctant to let go of that bond between us, especially now with Pook gone.

"It's so beautiful here," I breathe as Trevor returns me to my feet and takes my hand in his, causing me to come out of my thoughts.

Trev rented a villa here in Verona for us to stay in for the time we'll spend here. Then, we're headed to Puglia for the rest of the week before flying back to meet up with the others to return home.

I have no idea what we're doing today. I'm excited no matter what it is. From Brooke's journal, I know this place is considered the home of Romeo and Juliet.

"But the smell," Trev grumbles. "I feel like I'm back on the ranch."

"I know, right?"

I wrinkle my nose. Not that either of us are strangers to the scent of manure and livestock. However, being away from the ranch for so long seems to make the stench so much more potent.

My face hurts from smiling as we walk the quaint little streets. My heart lurches when Trevor turns us into a little pass-through. It dawns on me right away where he's taken me.

"Juliet's balcony? Are you serious? This is so cool and romantic. Pook would have loved this so much. I have to go up. Can I go up?"

"We can do whatever you want, darlin'."

"You stay down here. I'm going up," I say excitedly.

"Hold on," Trev says before I can take off. He digs in his pocket and pulls out money to hand to me. "I believe there's a fee."

I drop my hip and tilt my head to the side, pulling a face. Still, I know this is Trevor and he's going to make sure to take

care of everything I want and need while we're here.

I don't bother to protest. I just reach for the money and race inside. It's not that crowded, thank goodness. I stop and take a moment to absorb it all.

I try to take it all in the way my sister would, with an open heart, soaking up the romance of the background and the setting. Then I head for the stairs to head up. I purchase my ticket and rush for the balcony as a few other people come back inside.

When I step outside, Trevor is down below looking up at me with a brilliant smile on his face. I think I'm falling in love with him all over again as he seems to look up at me as if seeing me for the very first time.

His blue eyes sparkle back at me while he has a face-splitting smile on his lips. In this moment, I feel like I'm looking at my future. His gaze holds all my dreams within it.

"Say something," I say excitedly, bouncing in place.

"What do you want me to say?" he calls back.

"I don't know. Repeat Romeo's lines or come up with something of your own."

Someone walks over to him and points, but Trev shakes his head. He frowns and looks down for a minute. When he lifts his head again, there's a new determination in his eyes.

I grin because I can feel in my bones he's going to say all the right things. We lock gazes and it's like everything else. Everyone else fades away. It's just me and the guy I love with all my heart.

"I won't give you someone else's words. You deserve your own. We have our own story, our own history, our own love and passion.

"What I will give you is a promise. My heart will always belong to you. As long as it beats in this body, it is yours.

"Know that I will be counting each day until I can go to your daddy and tell him I'm your man. Until then, know that I

breathe for you and when you're ready, my last name is waiting to be yours."

Applause breaks out and I realize a small crowd has gathered to witness his words. My lips tremble and my cheeks are wet. I want to jump over this balcony into his arms.

However, not wanting our romance to end in a tragedy, I turn and run back down, forgetting about the rest of the tour. When I push back out into the open, Trev is right there waiting for me. I jump into his arms and wrap my legs around his waist.

I pour all my love for him into the kiss. He holds me tightly against him as he consumes my mouth. I'm almost desperate to get him somewhere where I can get his clothes off and show him with my body how deeply his words have affected me.

"Our date isn't over. There's more," he says as if reading my mind.

I pout a little. "I love you. Your words couldn't have been more perfect."

"I love you too. Those came from my heart."

"I know they did. That's what makes them perfect. I couldn't have written them better."

"Now that, I'll take as a compliment."

I give him one last hard kiss before sliding down his body. He looks down at me and kisses my forehead. I wrap my arm around his waist. Then he tucks me into his side.

"Let's go write Juliet a letter," he croons.

I follow him happily, not able to wipe the smile from my face. This is the happiest I've ever been. I never want this feeling to end.

CHAPTER 28



Gelateria Walk Lynn

THIS DAY HAS BEEN MAGICAL. First, the home of Juliet, where we took pictures, wrote our letters and perused the little shop. Then we had lunch.

The pizza was out of this world and left me so full. We did some more sightseeing after that. Browsing the shops as I gushed over souvenirs I had to purchase.

I haven't laughed and smiled this much in so long. I have songs playing in my head I can't wait to get down. We rode the Funicular up to the viewing point at the top of *Colle San Pietro* to look out at the spectacular view.

Watching the sunset in Trevor's arms was a moment I will always remember.

We even found a spot to bury some of Pook's kissing coins. It felt like the right thing to do after tearing a page from her journal to write her name on at Juliet's house to leave her mark there as well this morning. This part of the trip is giving me so much peace.

"Let's get some gelato and walk the bridge," Trevor suggests as we walk hand in hand.

I glance up at him and smile. "Sounds good."

Ponte Pietra is the bridge he's talking about. As I look up at the Gelato shop, its named Gelateria Ponte Pietra, bringing a

smile to my face.

We go in and order our gelato, then go to walk over the Adige River. Verona has proven to be the perfect little stop for this adventure. I'm so glad we came.

"I've had so much fun, but my feet are aching," I say.

"I'll run us a bath and rub them for you when we get back."

I lean my head against his arm and smile to myself as I continue to eat my gelato. Trev remains quiet for a bit. I glance up at him to find him lost in thought.

I fall into my own thoughts. Suddenly, the last few coins I have feel like they're burning a hole in my bag. I had planned to hold on to the last few and take them back home with me.

However, now it only feels right to leave them here. As if my sister wants to set me free. Or as if she needs me to leave this part of her here.

I pull Trev to a stop and dig into my bag for the last of the coins. He looks at me with his brows furrowed. I sigh as I pull the coins out.

"I feel like I need to do this. She wants to be here," I say.

His eyes soften and he nods in understanding. I move to the brick wall of the bridge and whisper my final goodbye, having nothing else left to leave behind.

"I hope this is what you would have wanted. It feels right. I'm not letting your memory go, just the pain. I will always miss and love you, Pook."

With that, I kiss the last of the coins and toss them over into the Adige River. It begins to feel so final. My sister is truly gone. I shudder to think this is my new reality.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I think I will be. Are you ready to head back?"

"If you are."

“Yeah, I’m ready for that bath. Maybe even a bottle of that wine.”

“Tonight, you can have whatever you want,” he says with a wink.

I hope he knows I’m taking him up on that offer. I know exactly what I want. This day has been a soothing balm to my soul and it’s all because of him. I want to show him my thanks.



TREVOR

LYNN’S THOUGHTS are written all over her face as she sits across from me in the claw-foot tub while I hold her foot in my hands and massage it. The steaming water has left a shine of sweat glowing across her face, collarbone, and breasts. I lick my lips as I roll my gaze over her.

“See something you like, handsome?”

“I see someone I love, sweetheart.”

“Um, you’re working magic, honey. Don’t stop,” she purrs like a Southern belle as I hit a sweet spot on her tender foot.

We did a lot of walking and exploring. Those sandals she wore weren’t the best for walking. I kiss her little toes and then the sole of her foot, making her cheeks glow.

“I should’ve worn sneakers,” she murmurs, dropping her gaze to the water.

“Don’t get all shy on me now,” I croon, sliding my hand up her calf and then back down to her ankle again to drag her body closer to me.

Reaching for her other leg, I drape her thighs over mine and reach for her ass to pull her onto my lap. Once I have her settled where I want her, I wrap my arms around her and tug her into my chest.

She comes willingly and places her head on my shoulder. After holding her in my arms for a moment, I then begin to rub her back, massaging her skin as I breathe her in. She gives a sigh and relaxes in my hold.

“How are you really feeling?”

I ask the question because although I can see the desire in her eyes, I can also see she’s hurting. Something happened on that bridge. She’s been a little reserved since.

I won’t lie and say I hadn’t been thinking of Brooke during our walk. This should’ve been her trip. She and Cliff should’ve been in this tub celebrating their engagement.

“I don’t know,” she whispers in answer. “I can tell you what I’m thinking.”

“What’s that, darlin’?”

“Everything can change in the blink of an eye. One minute you have it all figured out and then just like that”—she snaps her fingers—“in the blink of an eye, one single action can change it all, and it doesn’t even have to be your own action.”

“Yeah, that’s a fact. I think that’s what burns me up about it all. Pook hardly drank a beer and yet a drunk driver took her from so many people who loved her.

“I’ve thought about that every time I’ve had a drink while here. My daddy would have a fit, but when in Rome,” she whispers while running her fingertips up and down my arm and back to my shoulder.

“They said his license was suspended for a DUI while having his kids in the car with him. He should’ve been locked under the jail then,” I snarl.

“Oh my God, what kind of monster drives with their child in the car while drunk?”

“That son of a bitch, apparently.”

“Our family didn’t deserve this, Brooke didn’t deserve this, but I know she would want us to let it go and move forward with our lives. I’m going to try. That’s what I’m thinking.

“I need to try to live my dreams and make them all come true while I can. Daddy wasn’t going to allow me to do my music thing. He wasn’t going to make the calls for me.

“It was Pook who made him see this is it for me. This is what I want. She recorded me singing my heart out and played it for him. That’s how she got him to see.”

“I know. We talked for hours about how she could get him to realize you needed to be a singer. I suggested recording you.”

“You did?” she gasps and lifts her head to look me in the eyes.

I nod. Brooke had agonized over how to get Moses to agree to allow Lynn to do something with her music. Although Lynn had applied to college and got into a few really great institutions, her heart wasn’t in it and Brooke knew it would be a waste of time and money.

Lynn cups my face and places her forehead to mine. “You’re amazing, you know that? I had no idea that was your idea. All my life, you two have been there for me. I’m so happy I still have at least one of you. I don’t know what I would do without you both,” she breathes against my lips.

“You’re never going to find out either,” I say and take her lips.

“I want you,” she says breathlessly.

I reach for the little table beside the tub, where I placed a few condoms. We keep our eyes locked on each other as I bite into the foil packet and drop the wrap over the edge of the tub. I then proceed to roll the rubber over my length.

Once fully suited, I reach for the back of her neck and pull her to me to kiss her passionately again. I groan into her mouth as she sinks down on me. She throws her head back and moans.

That’s when I notice it. That light returns right before my eyes. My baby lowers her head, catching my eyes again. This time as she slowly rides me, she reveals her feelings with her gaze.

“Lynn,” I growl and grasp her hips.

She begins to ride me harder as she grasps my shoulders and calls out my name. I claw my finger up her back until I’m holding her shoulders while thrusting up into her from beneath as best I can.

“Fuck, baby,” I say tightly.

I capture her lips. The taste of the wine we shared when we returned to the villa flavors her mouth. My feet slip beneath the water as I try to gain purchase to take over.

“Trev,” she cries out on a gasp and hitched breath.

I look her deeply in the eyes as I drag my fingers back down her back. Our lovemaking is so intense I feel it in my chest. My heart is beating double time and there’s this sensation I’ve never felt before, only with her.

“Lynn. That’s it, just like that. Take all you need from me.”

Water splashes over the edge of the tub, but neither of us notices. Instead, we stay focused on each other’s pleasure as our climaxes rush us and we connect on another level.

“Trev, oh my God, Trev,” she cries out as I squeeze her ass and thrust into her.

I can feel her walls tightening around me and know she’s not far. I grit my teeth as my own orgasm seizes me relentlessly. I glance over at the mirror and catch sight of us in it.

With her braids piled high on her head and her scarf wrapped around them, her neck is completely exposed to me. I have an unobstructed view of her perfect tits and sexy neck.

I dip my head and take her breast into my mouth, wanting to drag her orgasm out as she clenches around me. I groan around her tightened peak as I come deep inside her, spilling into the barrier between us.

At that moment, I vow that this is the mother of my children. Someday, there will be nothing between us but love. I stroke her back gently as I kiss her face and then press my lips to hers.

“I love you,” I whisper against her soft, full lips.

“I love you too,” she says sleepily.

CHAPTER 29



Mended

Lynn

I SIT in the living area, strumming my guitar as the music fills me and spills from my lips and fingers. My heart feels so light. We decided to stay in today.

I woke with music dancing inside me and went straight for my guitar. When Trev woke and found me writing, he said we didn't have to go anywhere. Then he left me to my writing.

I've been at it for hours. I only stopped to eat the sandwich Trevor made for me. While I ate, he called his parents.

I love Vernon and Gloria. They are so much cooler than my parents—well, my daddy, at least. They are so laid back.

After lunch, I got back to the music. Trev mentioned he needed to step out. I honestly don't know how long ago that was.

It's not until this moment, when I lift my head as I hear him return, that I realize he's been gone for a while. I furrow my brows and look over at the clock.

I begin to chew my lip as I draw my brows in deeper, feeling bad for getting so lost in my music. Trev comes and drops a kiss on my lips as he searches my face.

“What's the matter?” he asks.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to get lost all day. Look at the time. I haven’t even bathed and gotten dressed.”

He cups my face and kisses me again. “And you still smell amazing. Relax, it all sounds great. Keep going. No one is going to disturb you.”

“I should at least get up and shower.”

He snickers. “If that’s what you want. Believe me, I’ve seen and smelled worse in morning classes.”

“Seriously?” I laugh.

“Seriously, darlin’. You sit your cute ass right there and write your songs. You’re not offending anyone.”

I smile up at him and think to get up and shower, but before I can make the decision to do so, more lyrics fill my head. Trevor takes the bags he returned with and leaves me to it. Soon, I’m humming to myself, lost all over again.

It isn’t until the house fills with the aroma of something delicious and... cupcakes? At that, I pop my head up and place my guitar down to investigate. Now, Trevor Monroe can cook, but he’s a terrible baker.

The man just doesn’t have the patience for it. If I’m not by his side as we bake those cupcakes, they come out horrible. So when I find him in the kitchen with dirty mixing bowls in the sink as he stares nervously at the oven, I burst into laughter.

“What are you up to, honey?”

He turns to look at me. His cheeks turn red and he gets this sheepish look on his face. It’s so adorable and endearing.

“I’m making dinner and thought I’d make us some of our cupcakes,” he replies.

“You know, staring at the oven isn’t going to bake them any faster,” I tease.

“I was thinking, is all,” he says.

I tilt my head to the side. “Thinking about what?”

He looks at me, holding back a laugh. I groan because I know whatever he says next means he's goofed up the cupcakes and because I think it's so darn sweet that he's doing this, I'm not going to tell him if he has.

"If I put the right measurement of flour and sugar in."

I burst into more laughter and go to wrap my arms around his waist as he leans over the counter. I press my face against his back and breathe him in as I give his waist a squeeze.

"It's the thought that counts. Dinner smells delicious, by the way."

He stands up straight and turns in my embrace. I press my face to his chest and bask in his strength, warm scent, and love. We're both silent for a moment.

I sigh and snuggle in deeper. "Trev?"

"Yeah, darlin'?"

"Thank you," I choke out.

I want to tell him what all I'm thanking him for, but my emotions take over and I'm unable to get it out. Instead, I allow him to hold me tight, feeling that somehow, he knows.

We stand like that for a bit before I pull away and go to finally take a shower. During my shower, I can't keep my mind from replaying this entire trip.

Surprisingly, I don't see it from a place of sorrow. If you remove the bar fight and my mistake with my father, I can see the healing that has taken place. That block I felt in my music is completely gone.

The hole in my heart doesn't feel as raw. Oh, I'm not going to say it isn't there, but it doesn't feel like I'm going to bleed out all over the place anymore. Instead, I feel like I need to be whole so I can do all the things my sister would want me to do.

"I'm mending, Pook. I promise," I whisper to myself while in the shower.

In that moment, it feels like the warm water begins to wash all the pain, the hurt, and the void away. I watch the water go down the drain and feel a release come over me.

I don't know if this will last once I return to Texas, but for now, I feel free. I want to laugh, I want to sing, I want to run barefoot through the grass as the sun beats down on my face.

I step from the shower with another song in my heart. Throwing on a tank top and some shorts, I then make a beeline for my guitar and notebook. Trev comes to take a seat on the floor with a smile on his face as he listens quietly to me work my way through the song.

Several times, I've found myself thinking this could be our life. Me writing music and Trev pouring his presence into me, fueling my words and the bright colors in my head that have come back so vividly. More vibrant and lively than ever.



TREVOR

I HAD to reheat dinner because I refused to interrupt Lynn from her music. The smile on her face as she played and wrote made my chest fill with pride. She's amazing.

That light has returned to her eyes today. This is the Lynn I know. This is the girl I've always loved.

Her laughter rings out like music as we sit on the living room floor around the coffee table. She just bit into one of my sorry attempts at these cupcakes.

"You were gonna lie to me to save my feelings, weren't you?" I chuckle.

She nods. "Lord knows I was gonna try." She laughs. "Where's the sugar, honey?" she says with that sweet Texas twang of hers.

"Come on now. They can't be that bad."

I pick one up and take a bite of it. Immediately, I pull a face. It tastes horrible, like dry cement and flour. I drop the uneaten cupcake and spit what's in my mouth out into a napkin.

Lynn's laughing so hard at me she falls over onto her side. My feelings aren't even hurt as I watch the happiness on her face. I'd ruin a hundred dozen more batches just to see this look.

When she somewhat composes herself, she sits up, wiping tears from her eyes. I can tell she's fighting hard to hold the rest of her mirth in. I shake my head as I let out my own laughter.

"I think I used the flour instead of the sugar," I say sheepishly.

She nods and gives me a sad face. "I think you did too. Don't worry, I'll make us some we can eat. You still have more ingredients?"

"I'm certain I have sugar, that's for sure."

She bursts out into more laughter, not able to hold it in any longer. I move closer to her and tug her into my body as I hold her while her body shakes with laughter.

"They say laughter is like medicine," I murmur into the top of her hair.

"Uh-uh, you're the best remedy for all my troubles. The laughter is just included."

"I feel the same way," I say and take her lips in a kiss.

I had a feeling earlier she was thanking me because she's healing. As she looks up in my eyes tonight, I know that's what it was. She's glowing again.

I'm doing the right thing. This is right for her. I can live with that.

CHAPTER 30



The Arena

Lynn

“THAT WAS AMAZING,” I say as the concert comes to an end.

I was so excited when Trev told me we’d be going to the Roman Arena for a concert. The music was fantastic, and this arena has its own magic about it. I can only hope to someday play somewhere that will make my music sound so enchanting.

“I wish it were you up there,” Trev says.

“I was just thinking the same thing. Maybe someday,” I reply and lift my shoulders to my ears, trying to hold my excitement inside.

“It will happen and I’ll be in the front row watching.”

“From your lips to God’s ears, honey. To make that happen, I’d have to be an international sensation. Right now, no one knows me outside our hometown.”

“Not for much longer. You’re going to take the world by storm, gorgeous.”

I remain speechless as I smile up at him. I love his confidence in me. It reminds me of our talk and how he said he helped Brooke come up with a way to get my daddy to allow me to pursue my music.

I wrap my hands around his strong arm as he leads us out of the arena. I've had a ton of fun here in Verona and it's only been three days. I hope our next stop speaks to me as much as this place has.

"Are you hungry?"

"Yeah, I could stand to eat," I respond.

"Good, I have reservations for tonight."

"You're an amazing boyfriend. You know that?"

"I try, darlin'. I do try."

I laugh at his words and give his arm a little squeeze. I don't know what I'm going to do for an entire year without him. Maybe we shouldn't wait so long to come clean with my daddy.

"I'll take one of those," Trev says, pulling my attention back to the present.

I focus as he hands a street vendor with roses some money. A smile breaks across my face. Trev hands me the rose and winks down at me. I lift on my toes to kiss his cheek.

Before I can settle back down on my feet, he turns his face to capture my lips, wrapping his arm around my waist to hold me to him and kiss me deeper. When he breaks the kiss, I turn away, blushing as I place my nose to the rose. Its sweet fragrance fills my head and causes me to smile even more.

"I want a rose garden," I blurt out.

He gives me a knowing smile. "In the front yard? I think that would be great. You've always had a green thumb. You can teach our girls to garden just like your mama did with you."

"Actually, I learned from your mama too. I used to come over to help her to try to get a look at you working around the ranch with your daddy," I say, my cheeks heating even more.

He smiles and shakes his head. "What else don't I know?"

"I can't tell you all my secrets, Monroe. A lady has to keep something to herself."

He lifts a brow at me. “Lady? Where’s the—”

“Trev, don’t you dare finish those words,” I growl.

He throws his hands up in surrender. Then he pulls me into his arms and dips his head near my ear. He allows his breath to fan my skin, raising goose bumps despite the warm night.

“You will always be a lady to the world, but I know better. I’ve had you in my bed,” he says, sending a shiver through me.

He pulls away and looks at me with hooded eyes, allowing his gaze to roll over me. I forget all the things I wanted to say. That look in his eyes promises so much.

I clear my throat. “You said we have reservations, right?”

He gives a small chuckle and holds his elbow out to me. “That we do, little lady. Let’s go before I take you back to the villa and do very bad things to you.”

I stop in my tracks, turning in the other direction, leaving him with his arm held out. Lifting the rose to my nose, I smell it again as I walk.

“Lynn, where are you going?” he calls from behind me.

I look over my shoulder. “I’m heading back to the villa. I’m not as hungry as I thought,” I say innocently.

Trevor roars with laughter. “If you don’t get over here,” he calls.

“Don’t say things to me you don’t mean.”

A second later, he comes after me and lifts me off my feet, causing me to burst into a fit of laughter. He buries his face in my neck and growls. I reach for the side of his face and turn my head to kiss him.

“We have all night for me to give you what you want. Let me feed you so you have enough energy to take me,” he says in my ear as he turns to carry me in the direction of the restaurant.



TREVOR

“YOU HAVE TO TRY THIS. It’s divine,” Lynn sings, holding her spoon up to my lips.

I open my mouth and wrap it around the spoon. A hum leaves my mouth as the flavor bursts on my tongue. The tiramisu is delicious.

However, the really delicious thing at this table is the sight of my woman as she watches my mouth. She sticks her tongue out and licks her own lips. Her eyes are bright with lust.

I reach for my wallet and take out money for our meal. Dinner was nice and romantic, but I think it’s time we take our leave.

I’m not going to take her back to the villa yet. I have other plans for my little star. I grin at her, down my drink, and toss the money on the table.

“Let’s take a walk,” I say as I stand.

She stands and laces her fingers with mine as I lead her from the restaurant. The night air is nice and crisp, perfect for a walk.

We remain silent as we stroll through the quiet streets.

My lips turn up into a smile as I think of my plan for this walk. Lynn is already leaning into me as if a magnet is pulling us together. However, I want her panting and vibrating with need when I get her back to the villa.

Releasing my hold on her hand, I then wrap my arm around her shoulders and tease her skin with my fingertips. She shivers a little and looks up at me with a smile on her lips.

Wordlessly, I drop my arm and place my hand on her bare back. The light blue dress she has on allows me to rub my

thumb back and forth on her skin. She wraps her arms around my waist and snuggles in close.

When I look down into her eyes, I can see her anticipation building for me. All night, I've been placing a touch here and a touch there.

The midthigh dress has made it easy for me to caress her soft skin and watch her breath hitch or goose bumps rise across her flesh.

"Trev," she whispers as she looks into my eyes with lust in her gaze.

"What's up?" I say as if I don't already know the effect I have on her.

"I'm ready to go back to the villa. You're driving me crazy."

"You sure? It's such a nice night for a walk."

I try to hold back my laugh. She glares at me. I give a crooked smile and wink at her.

"Don't be a jerk. You know you're making my panties wet, touching me like that."

I slide my hand to her backside and give it a gentle squeeze. Swiftly, I back her into the alcove of a closed shop, out of the sight of passersby and bunch her dress up in one hand. With the other hand, I reach to finger her from behind.

"Lynn," I groan when I find her nice and wet for me.

"I told you," she whispers against my neck as she lifts on her toes to bury her face there.

"Time to get you home, darlin'," I croon in her ear.

CHAPTER 31



*F*eel My Passion

Trevor

THIS IS the last night I'll have her all to myself. When we arrive in Puglia, we'll be staying with a family. I've been building her need for me for what I believe will be our last night of passion while in Europe.

Knowing it might be a long time before I can have her again makes me want to show her all the things I haven't taught her yet. I want Lynn to feel me for weeks. While we're flying back home to Texas, I want her to throb in memory of me.

"Trev," she whimpers as I pin her to the front door of the villa with my hips as she tries to unlock it.

Reaching for her throat, I tilt her head back with my thumb. Wasting not another minute, I crush my lips to hers. Our tongues collide and dance together.

I catch her lower lip between my teeth and pull it. She moans and finally gets the door open. We stumble inside, not breaking the kiss.

She turns to face me, wrapping her arms around my neck. I grab her ass and lift her onto my waist. I nip and lick at her full lips as she moans and grinds her hot pussy against me.

I was semihard through dinner as she kept giving me that look through her lashes. Now I'm ready to come in my jeans.

While we continue to devour each other, I slide the straps of her dress down. I'm not going to make it into the bedroom. I don't even bother trying to.

Instead, I head for the chaise lounge in the sunroom. The stars above illuminate her gorgeous body as the top of her dress falls away when I place her down on the lounge.

Quickly, I tear my shirt over my head. Lynn reaches for my jeans and opens them as I cup the side of her face and lean in to kiss her sweet lips once more.

There's a fire burning in my veins just for her. I pull away from our kiss to look down at her pretty face. She bites down on her lip as she pulls me from my jeans.

Reaching into my back pocket, I pull out a condom and bite into the packet. Keeping my eyes on hers, I roll the condom on, then push my pants down and tug them and my underwear off. Lynn kicks her shoes from her feet and leans back to push her dress down her waist. I drop to my knees and pull the fabric away to toss over my shoulder.

"Trev," she says softly.

"Hang in there with me, darlin'. I'm going to take you to new places tonight."

"I'm right here with you. I need you."

She opens her legs for me. I reach for her waist and tug her to me, burying my face between her thighs to worship her sexy body. She cries out and arches into me.

"Oh God, Trev. That's so good," she whimpers as she reaches for her breasts and squeezes them.

Our eyes lock and I hold her gaze as I feast on her. She tastes so good, I can't help pushing in deeper, needing more of her. I hum and groan as she begins to rock her hips against my face.

Grabbing her thigh in my tight grasp, I latch on to her clit as I massage her mound with my thumb. Her cries of pleasure cause my chest to swell. A smile comes to my face when her stomach caves and she begins to shake and convulse.

I pull back to watch her fall apart, shoving two fingers into her sex to drag her orgasm out. I flip my hand palm up, using my fingers to beckon her juices as she twists and turns to get away.

However, I'm not giving in just yet. I want her soaking wet for me. I reach for her breast and roll her nipple between my fingertips. My lips part as I watch in awe as her body responds to me.

"You're so perfect, baby. This body was made for me."

It was. As I think of how she's grown into a woman, I can't help thinking that she's become my perfect woman. I love her breasts, the flare of her hips, her ass, and the way her tight little pussy fits around me.

I couldn't have asked God to design a more perfect woman for me. She climaxes against my fingers all over again. I know we both need me to be inside her.

"Turn around," I command as I stand and move to straddle the lounge with my long legs.

She does as I say without hesitation. Her ass lifts in the air, causing me to groan. Her juices have her lips and thighs glistening back at me. I reposition her so her little feet rest under my thighs.

"Come here," I say as I guide her hips down on my length.

My cock is long enough for her to rock on and for me to thrust up into her with little effort on either of our parts. I allow her to take as much as she wants as she adjusts to the fit. Her pussy is already tight again, despite our lovemaking last night.

I've noticed that before. She snaps right back after sex, snug and wet as ever each time. I bite my lips as I watch her begin to cream all over me.

"Fuck," I growl through my teeth as she begins to roll her hips.

I slap her ass and watch it ripple on my length. Between the sounds of her moans and her wet as fuck sex, I grow

harder and my eyes roll back. Feeling her adjust, I hold her hips still and begin to thrust up into her.

“Trevor, oh shit. You’re so big, baby. That feels so good,” she cries out.

I grin to myself and readjust to sit on my knees on the lounge. Lynn takes over as she begins to bounce back on me. The sound of our hips slapping and her whimpers fill the space, bouncing off the glass walls.

I throw my head back and look up at the stars. My grasp on her hips tightens. Sweat rolls down the bridge of my nose, but if I let her go, I might lose my hold on my restraint.

I’m not ready to come. I stick my tongue out to capture the bead of sweat instead. Lynn begins to tighten around me. I pound into her harder and reach for her breasts.

She looks over her shoulder at me and I nearly come from the look in her eyes. Her brows knit as if she can’t believe what’s happening. I glide my hand down her front, reaching to rub her clit as I pound into her tight, clenching, rippling, wet pussy.

“That’s it. Take this dick, darlin’. It’s yours. Bounce that sexy ass on me and take all you want and need,” I groan. “Yes.”

She begins to keel and moan nonsense. I wrap my hand around her braids and tug her head back. Our eyes lock and we say everything without saying a word.

She laces her fingers in my sweaty hair. I crush her lips with mine as I pump up into her. I press my forehead to hers and breathe her in.

“I love you so much,” I breathe into her mouth.



LYNN

TEARS COME TO MY EYES. I can't help feeling like this might be our last time. It's so intense and sensual. His hold on my body is so tight, as if he's afraid to let me go.

He feels so hard inside me. He's so deep, stirring my emotions with each thrust. This isn't like any of our other times. My thighs begin to shake and my belly heats, I drop back onto all fours and whine my hips as he pushes into me with long, deep strokes.

He pauses as I come all over him. Pulling out, he backs up and flips me over. Lifting my legs over his forearms, he then pushes back into me.

He's so deep in my belly as he kisses me feverishly. I kiss him back with just as much fervor. This time, his strokes are slower, shorter, as if he's taking more care with how he enters me.

"Harder, Trev, I can take it," I whimper into his mouth.

He snaps his hips into me harder and stills. My face heats as I feel him spill his seed into the condom. I wipe the sweat from his face.

He kisses me hard. "Let me catch my breath and I'll go get some more condoms," he murmurs.

"Do we need them? I trust you. You know you're the only person I've ever been with."

He kisses me hard. "I wouldn't be any kind of real man if I take you without one. I'm clean, but STDs are only one reason for condoms.

"You get pregnant, we'll have a lot more than your daddy to worry about. We're not there yet."

I nod. "You're right. I just wanted to feel you."

"You will feel me one day. I promise you that," he says in this sexy tone that makes my sex squeeze around him.

He groans and moves to stand up, holding his hand out for mine. I place my hand in his, savoring the warmth that travels between us.

He tugs me up and leads me into the bedroom, where we make love for the rest of the night. I say make love because he holds my gaze the entire time. Not once am I able to question his love for me.

CHAPTER 32



Wild Heart

Lynn

SO FAR, Puglia has been as enchanting as Verona. Once again, Trevor took me out to a romantic dinner. *Grotta Palazzese* was a breathtaking cave restaurant. The food was okay, but the view and ambience were the real prizes.

We arrived early morning and spent the day exploring before heading to the vineyard we'd be staying at for the rest of our trip. Trevor had our luggage sent ahead so we could enjoy the day. The heat was the only thing that took away from the magic of our exploring.

Trev's face remained flushed most of the afternoon. That didn't keep the smile from his lips though. I get this feeling he's up to something. Puglia isn't a random choice to end our trip.

Although the views, the beaches, the caves—all kept me on sensory overload. I couldn't have chosen a better location to end this trip. Trevor made spending time in the turquoise water a magical experience.

By the time we made it to the vineyard, I was too exhausted to fully digest that we wouldn't be sharing a room. It wasn't until I woke alone in the middle of the night that I began to ache with longing to have Trev by my side with his strong arms around me.

“Good morning,” Trev says when he lifts his head as I enter the dining room.

I give him a smile. “Good morning.”

The two young children of our host wave at me with beaming smiles on their faces. They’re adorable with their dark hair and light-brown eyes. The family doesn’t speak much English, from what I gathered last night.

Trev stands and pulls out the chair beside him. I round the table and sit as he pushes my chair in. I look up at him and smile. He dips his head to peck my lips.

The food smells delicious. My mouth waters and my stomach growls. Matteo says something in Italian, causing Trev to smile and laugh. I look at Trev questioningly as he retakes his seat.

“He said he can see why I’m in love with you. You’re a beautiful young woman,” he translates and leans in to kiss my temple.

“*Grazie*,” I say with a blush.

Matteo gives me a smile and points at the food for me to eat. Trevor picks up my plate and loads it with pancakes, sausage, and fresh fruit. After I pour some syrup over it, I dig in.

A moan slips from my mouth. It tastes so good, fresh and flavorful. The syrup is amazing.

“You have to try the jam,” Trev says.

He slathers some on a biscuit and holds it up to my lips. I bite into it and my eyes widen. It’s almost as good as my nanna’s jam. I nod my head and cover my mouth.

“So good.”

“Told you.”

I go back to eating my food and the table falls silent for a few as everyone devours their own food. Matteo clears his throat after a moment, catching Trevor’s attention.

Matteo then fires off something I can't follow. Trevor seems to understand him quite well. He responds immediately, with a twinkle in his eyes.

Again, I look to him to translate for me. However, he shakes his head and goes back to eating. My curiosity is officially piqued.

I caught the words brother and ranch. I'm not sure what any of the rest was. Shaking it off, I shrug to myself and finish my breakfast.

"Ah, Trevor, *il mio giovane amico*," a man who resembles Matteo croons as he walks in.

"Leonardo, it's good to see you," Trevor says and stands to greet the man.

"I was surprised but happy to receive your father's call. It is always good to hear from him," Leonardo says as he pulls Trevor into a tight hug. "I hope my brother and his family have treated you well."

"Yes, they have been very hospitable. This is my girlfriend, Lynn. Lynn, I want you to meet Leonardo."

I stand and hold my hand out. Leonardo waves me off and tugs me into a hug. I'm taken by surprise at first but return the friendly hug. It's like being pulled in by an uncle you haven't seen in a long time, but the embrace is still warm and welcoming.

"Are you guys ready to go?"

I look to Trev with my brows knit. I have no idea what Leonardo is talking about. I thought we were going to explore again. All Trevor said last night before I went to my room was to dress in jeans and comfortable shoes today.

Trev gives a huge smile. "We're ready."

"Where are we going?"

"Trust me," is all he says as he plants his palm on the small of my back.

Because I do trust him, I silently follow him and Leonardo out to a pickup truck and climb in with them both. As we head out of the vineyard, I'm able to take it in better than I did last night.

I stare out of the passenger side window with a smile on my face. Trevor takes my hand and laces his fingers with mine as he sits next to me on the large bench seat. I look to him and he gives my hand a gentle squeeze.

My heart begins to race with excitement. I don't know what he's up to, but something in me knows it's going to blow me away. My heart swells with love for this man.

"I always want to see you happy," he murmurs against my temple.

My heart squeezes. "I know and I love you for it."

Wrapping his arm around me, he tugs me in close to his side. I sigh and snuggle in closer. Taking my hand in his, he plays with my fingers as we ride along the country road.

There's music playing low. I can't understand the words, but it still speaks to me. I begin to hum as I close my eyes and feel the sun coming in through the windows.

When we come to a stop sometime later, Trevor runs his hand up and down my back. I open my eyes and sit up. I hadn't noticed I fell asleep for a bit.

It takes a second for my eyes to focus and the fog to fall away. When I catch my bearings, I gasp and turn to look at Trevor with wide eyes. We're on a ranch, not just any ranch, but a ranch with horses.

"Are those Murghese horses?" I ask.

"That they are. I have one of the few ranches that breed and raise them. We're committed to increasing their numbers once again. Beautiful breed. Highly intelligent horses," Leonardo says proudly.

"What are we doing here?" I say to Trevor.

"My father mentioned wanting to come out to Leonardo's new ranch a few months before break. I thought of you and

wanted to bring you out to see if maybe your horse is here. So we're here for you to meet a few friends and maybe ride a couple while we're at it."

"Oh, Trev, I haven't been on a horse since..."

"I know. You don't have to, but I think Pook would be proud of you if you did. You love horses. Besides, I have a good feeling about this."

I allow his words to sink in. I was able to get the music back. Maybe I can find my will to ride again as well. He's right. I do feel like my horse might be here or at least some connection to the horse meant to be mine.

"All right, I at least want to take a look. I can't promise I'll ride though."

"All I ask is that you try."

My heart swells to the point of bursting. I know what he's doing. Trevor is working to return me to Texas whole. I love him for it and hope that I don't disappoint him.

We climb out of the truck with Leonardo and head for the stables. Leonardo leads us down to the end. My heart races with each step.

"These are our unclaimed stallions," Leonardo announces as he stops and strokes the head of a gray horse.

He's pretty, but my feet keep moving as if they have a mind of their own. I stop before the stall with the black horse, who's looking right at me. I lock eyes with him and move forward.

Placing a hand on the side of his head, I take the breath I hadn't known I was holding. He releases a slight snort but seems to settle beneath my touch.

I'm so emotionally overwhelmed that I collapse forward and place my forehead to his. This is the one. This is my horse. It's like something clicks into place within.

"Baby, you okay?" Trev asks as he places a hand on my back and begins to rub.

I can only nod. However, the stallion seems to become agitated. He snorts, backs away and begins to buck within the stall.

“Ah, *Cuore Selvaggio*, we haven’t broken him yet. I don’t know if this is the one for you.”

“He’s perfect,” I breathe.

“She’s no stranger to breaking horses,” Trev adds.

Leonardo looks at us warily. I can see the wheels turning. My daddy used to get that same look when I wanted to help Pook with her wild horses.

I was smaller than my sister and younger but determined. I also have a gentle but firm hand with horses. It’s like I speak their language.

I turn to look back at the horse as he lifts on his hind legs. He’s so beautiful. His pectoral muscles have a heart-shaped gray patch. Murgeses are known for their black or dark-gray coats. Some have white hair mixed evenly throughout, giving them what’s called a blue roan coat.

This horse has a shiny black main and tail. His body is a lush black, but that heart shape is blue and beautiful. He’s quite impressive.

“What’s his name?”

“Wild Heart,” Trevor says with a smile. “That’s what *Cuore Selvaggio* means.”

I look to Trev with wide eyes. I have to have this horse. My heart sinks as he doesn’t seem to calm down. I know Leonardo isn’t going to allow me to ride him, no matter how much I want to bond with him.

“Maybe you will like his brother. *Fumo* is a much tamer horse. I can have him saddled for you,” Leonardo says.

Smoke, that sounds like a nice horse, but I can’t pull myself away from Wild Heart. I don’t know how to describe this pull between us.

“Would you like to ride *Fumo*? That means—”

“Smoke, I understood that one.” I shrug. “I guess, but can I have some time here?”

“Of course,” Leonardo says.

However, I don’t miss the wariness in his voice. Ignoring him, I focus back on Wild Heart. I coo at him, trying to get him to relax.

Trevor hands me a few carrots one of the workers brings over. It takes a moment, but the horse settles and comes to take a carrot from me.

“Good boy, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to get so emotional. You can relax, I’m okay,” I whisper.

He settles right down and allows me to run my hand down his neck. I spend a few minutes with him before Leonardo returns to get me so I can head out for a ride on Smoke.

At first, I stand staring at the horse. Almost as if frozen in place. This was our thing. Pook and I would ride together for hours. My sister taught me how to care for the horses and how to love the equestrian life. I became a better rider because of her.

It feels so odd not to have her here, mounting her own horse. I can hear her voice in my head. I go to shake my head and turn away, but I can’t move at all. I feel so heavy.

“You can do this, Cakes. You’re my little sister. There’s nothing you can’t do and this isn’t even the hardest thing you’ll do in your life.”

“Come on, get on that horse and show me what you got. Let’s go, times a wasting and we don’t have time to waste, now do we?”

I swipe at the tears I didn’t realize were falling. Pook said those very words after my very first fall. I was lucky not to break anything, but I didn’t want to try again. I wanted to call it a day and go back to playing with my dolls.

I was so happy when I didn’t quit because that day was one of the best rides of my life. Trevor, Cliff, and Tom had stopped by and they allowed me to ride with them to the lake,

where we all had a picnic. I believe that was the day my crush on Trevor started.

I shake the memory away and blow out a breath while rubbing my suddenly sweaty palms on my jeans. I swipe the tears that haven't stopped falling. Leonardo must think I'm a mess.

"No, Pook. We don't have time to waste," I mutter under my breath.

With a sage nod to myself, I mount the horse and breathe. From the moment I settle in the saddle, it's like taking my first breath in months. I close my eyes and feel the faint breeze against my skin.

It's as if my heart blooms and I return to a place I didn't know I left behind. I press my palm against Smoke's neck and give a gentle stroke. However, I can't resist looking back toward the stable where I left Wild Heart.

He would have been perfect for this. I know I would have reconnected with riding if I got to ride him. I shake the thought off and watch as Trev mounts his own gorgeous horse on my left side.

Leonardo climbs onto a horse of his own as well, like a salesman taking us out on a test drive. We start on the trail slowly. I'm grateful to be left with my emotions and thoughts as everyone remains silent, although I can feel Trevor watching me as he rides behind me.

Leonardo leads us out to a clearing. It's a wide-open space where I can allow Smoke to stretch his legs out.

Come on, Cakes. You can do better than this. I'll race you. You win; you can have anything you want.

In my mind, I know her voice isn't real, but I also want to win to have her back. So I take off. Riding as fast and as hard as I know how.

In the moment, if I have to race time, space, or the universe itself, I'm going to do it and win. My hair blows behind me and the wind whips against my face. It's not until I

get across the clearing that I realize how crazy my thoughts are.

I'm only racing myself. I don't know if I want to laugh or cry, so I do both as I continue to ride. Everything falls away. My sorrows, my thoughts, the sounds of the birds and the hooves of the other horses behind me. I stretch my arms out at my sides and just feel.



TREVOR

IT ALL HAPPENS SO FAST. One minute I have a smile on my face as I watch Lynn take off and ride like the wind. I don't bother to chase after her; I want to allow her her moment while I talk business with Leonardo.

I want that horse for her. Wild Heart belongs to her. It's not even the coincidence between his name and the fact that Pook used to call us wild hearts. That horse has been waiting for her.

I saw it as I watched them find each other. I'm not leaving here without buying him for her. I can see Leonardo is weary to part with the untamed horse, but he can name his price. I'll meet it.

“About *Cuore Selvaggio*,” I say, ready to negotiate.

However, that's all I get out. Lynn cries out as *Fumo* bucks, releasing a cry of his own. Lynn slips off and falls to the ground. All else forgotten, I race across the clearing to get to her.

I dismount before my horse comes to a full stop. Lynn isn't moving and Smoke has trotted away. I drop to my knees beside her and brush her braids from her face.

“Lynn,” I call out as I cup her face. “Lynn, baby girl, open your eyes. Please, darlin', speak to me.”

CHAPTER 33



*I*m Right Here

Lynn

I HEAR the beeping sound before I open my eyes. My head is killing me and my left arm hurts something terrible. When I force my eyes open, I'm a bit confused at first.

I try to figure out the last thing I remember. Smoke... I was riding Smoke in the clearing and then...

"There was a snake," I murmur through my dry lips.

"What's that, darlin'?"

I turn my head to find Trevor sitting in a chair watching me. He looks tired and stressed out. Looking around, it dawns on me that I'm in a hospital. I groan and reach for my head.

"What happened?"

"Smoke threw you off. You weren't holding the reins. You hit your head pretty hard and broke your wrist. They had to give you a few stitches," he says soberly.

"I'm sorry," I say as tears come to my eyes.

"You have nothing to be sorry for."

"Yes, I do. I know better. I got caught up in the moment and wasn't holding on like I should have been. That snake came out of nowhere."

“I’m the one who’s sorry. How are you supposed to play with a broken wrist? You’re supposed to be in Nashville and then headed to New York when we get back. I totally screwed everything up,” he says with a frown.

“If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t even want to go sing on anyone’s stage. I’d still be locked in my room.”

“This was so selfish of me.”

“Uh-uh. Don’t do that. Trevor Monroe, you are the least selfish person I know. You’ve been hurting yourself, but you’ve been the strong one, not just for me, but for Cliff too. You think I don’t hear you comforting him when he calls?”

“Brooke was your sister. She was going to be Cliff’s wife. Where in all of that do I have a right to be hurt? What kind of friend would I be if I couldn’t make sure the two most important people to her were okay?”

“This ain’t about me. I shouldn’t have made it about me. Making things about me is how...”

“Oh no, Trev. Don’t you dare. If you say that, then it’s my fault as well.”

He shakes his head, then purses his lips and releases a heavy sigh. There are so many mixed emotions at play on his handsome face. Guilt begins to settle in my stomach.

“Trev, you can’t keep beating yourself up and holding it all in. I’m so sorry that, in my own grief, I didn’t see how much you’re hiding and going through.

“But this”—I hold up my casted wrist—“isn’t your fault. I don’t need to be able to play for those auditions. My voice still works just fine. I’m sure I can find someone to play the music for me.”

“You shouldn’t have to. I wasn’t supposed to let anything happen to you.”

“I’m a big girl now. There are going to be times when you’re not there to protect me. Don’t be so hard on yourself.

“All the good you’ve done for me far outweighs this one situation. Right now, all I want is you here with me. So we’re

just fine.”

“I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere.”

I reach out my hand to him. He takes it gingerly. I roll my eyes at him and tug him closer. Puckering my lips.

He gives my dry lips a peck, then frowns. “Let me get you some water,” he murmurs.

I snicker and shake my head. After he pours the water and lifts the straw to my lips, I take a healthy sip. Something dawns on me.

“Shouldn’t we get me discharged? We need to pack and get back. I don’t want to miss our flight.”

He gives me a look and his face pales. My heart jumps right into my throat. This is bad. I know it’s bad.

“Darlin’, we missed our flight back to Paris. They’re not going to discharge you to me.”

“But how did we miss the flight? It wasn’t until tomorrow.”

“Lynn, you’ve been out since yesterday. The nurse said that if or when you woke today, it was most likely they would keep you at least another night to observe you.

“I... I had no choice. I had to call your mama and daddy. Moses is on his way as we speak.”

“Aw, hell,” I breathe.

“Tom and Elise rushed over to cover for us. We all came over to see the horses. That’s the story.”

I cover my face with my hands. “I feel so stupid.”

The hospital bed dips and I feel his strong arms go around me. I can’t believe this has happened. We didn’t even tell my parents about the detour to Italy. Now my daddy is on his way here. This is terrible, this is so very terrible.

“It’s all going to be okay. Why don’t you just lie down and relax? I’m not leaving.”

“Okay, but will you hold me for a little while?”

“If that’s what you want.”

I scoot over in the bed. Trev kicks off his shoes and then shifts to lie down beside me. I snuggle in as close as I can get to him and absorb his warmth.

“That’s much better,” I breathe. “I’m going to miss you so much.”

“You can call me anytime,” he says.

“I’m going to get on your nerves,” I giggle.

“Never. You call me anytime you feel like talking. No matter what you want to talk about.”

Although it’s nice to hear, I know he has a life back at college. I couldn’t possibly intrude on it like that. This next year is probably going to be the hardest of my life.

I sigh when he buries his face in my hair as he strokes the baby hairs at my temple. Before I know it, my lids get heavy. It doesn’t take long before Trev is snoring lightly beside me. I smile and curl into him as best I can and fall out as well.



TREVOR

I WAKE with a sharp intake of air. I hadn’t meant to fall asleep. I look down and Lynn is staring up at me, watching me. I smile back at her and cup her face.

“How are you feeling?”

“Better. I’ve just been watching you.”

“Am I keeping you from getting comfortable? I should get up,” I say as I think about her injuries.

“You’re fine. You don’t need to get up. I slept some. Having you close is relaxing me.”

I look over at the tray of food. It’s still covered, but the Jell-O cup is empty. I sit up to lift the lid. Seeing the food is

untouched, I turn to look back at Lynn.

She has her nose turned up and a frown on her face. I chuckle and lean to peck her lips. “You should at least try to eat something. You haven’t eaten since breakfast yesterday.”

She cups the side of my face with her good hand. “I would much rather kiss you than try to eat that mess. Come here, sugar,” she purrs.

I lean in and take her lips. I was so worried about her when she wouldn’t wake after her fall. I thought I lost her.

As all those emotions come back, I push my fingers into her hair and kiss her with all that I am. I pour all my love and passion into the kiss. She begins to fall back against the bed and tugs me down with her.

Careful not to crush her or injure her wrist or head, I willingly go with her. She releases a moan and I pull my hand from her hair, moving it to her throat.

I nip at her lips and pull away to look down into her eyes. She reaches to push my hair out of my face, her eyes sparkling at me. I kiss the tip of her nose and smile.

“I love you,” she whispers.

“I love you too, darlin’.”

I dip in for one more kiss before I get up to return to my chair. We shouldn’t get too comfortable like this. We’re going to need to start acting like nothing more than friends and neighbors.

However, Lynn has other ideas. She slides her fingers into my hair and holds me in place while we kiss. Not able to resist her, I cup her breast and deepen the kiss. Just the one last time, I think to myself.

As soon as I have the thought, someone clears their throat. I jump away from Lynn and turn to find none other than her daddy glaring at me. I quickly climb from the bed, my gaze jumping from Moses to my daddy.

“Sir. I... I can explain.”

“Vernon.”

“I’ve got him. Cakes, I’m happy to see you’re okay. Trev,” my father calls my name sternly.

Feeling like a chastened little boy, I follow my father out of the room. I take one last glance over my shoulder at Lynn, only to have her father slam the door closed in my face.

“That’s going to end badly, son.”

“How long were you two there?”

“Long enough for me to know I might not have a friend any longer.”

“I’m so sorry, Daddy. I’ll fix it.”

My father sighs. “This is Moses. I don’t think it’s gonna be an easy fix, Trev. He hasn’t been in a good headspace.”

“I love her. I have to fix it.”

He sighs again. “Let’s get you back home. Your cousin could use you and your mama is worried about you.”

“Worried? I’m fine.”

“She’s your mother. I couldn’t tell you what’s going on in her head when it comes to you kids. One day, it’s... I’m concerned about Trev.

“The next day, we get a call that Cakes is in the hospital and you’re with her. The story of my life. She says something’s up with one of you and I just brace myself. One day, you’ll see.”

CHAPTER 34



*I*n Trouble

Lynn

“GIRL, have you lost your darn mind? What kind of bull junk you got going on here?”

“Daddy, I—”

“Lynn Darlene Galveston, I wasn’t born yesterday and my birthday isn’t April first. So why are you trying to sit here in my face with these lies you’ve been trying to sell me and your mama?”

“Daddy, I—”

“No, you weren’t there for your sister that night because you were with that boy. Say it ain’t so,” he snaps.

I sit thinking of which lies I need to fess up to. I don’t want to admit to anything that could get Trev in trouble with me. However, in my heart, I want to come clean about it all.

I wish Trev was still here so we could do this together. My heart aches as I lie in this hospital bed, feeling so small and stupid.

“I wasn’t with her because she didn’t want me with her. She was on her way to see her boyfriend. She didn’t want me tagging along,” I say.

It’s not the truth, but it’s not a lie either. It’s what we told him the first time he asked. Trevor blurted the words out

before I could stop him.

“How long?” he snarls.

“How long what?”

“How long have you been lying to me?”

“I haven’t been lying. I came on this trip for Pook. We tossed some of her coins in a few places. We placed her school lock on the love lock bridge. I went to all the places on her list.

“Trevor and I are new. I truly did come to Europe for my sister and to find my music again. I have a notebook filled with songs to prove it.”

“What about his girlfriend? You said he was in a relationship with someone back at school. So why on earth would you fool around with a boy who’s seeing someone else?”

I clam up. I forgot I told that lie. I knew it was going to come back to bite me.

“Haven’t I taught you better? No daughter of mine is going to play some sidepiece.

“Daddy, wait. Please.”

“Wait for what? No real man fools around with one girl while away on some island while having another girl he’s selling dreams to. No, I’m not having it.”

“It’s not like that,” I murmur.

“So then you’ve been lying to me? If you’d lie about the girlfriend, how do I know I can trust anything you say? How do I know I can trust sending you to New York?”

“What are you saying?” I whisper.

“Maybe you’re not ready for such a big step. If you’d lie to me now, how can I know you’re not lying when something important is going on in your career that I need to know to keep you safe?”

“You know I don’t do that lying mess. I’m already questioning a lot of things. It’s the boy or New York. You

decide.”

“But Daddy—”

“It’s over, Lynn. It ends now. If you want to go to New York, this whole thing with Trevor ends.”

My lips tremble as tears roll down my cheeks. I don’t know what to say or do. I don’t know if I’ll ever get a chance like this again, but am I willing to give up my love for my career?

Will Trevor understand? Will he wait for me? We were going to wait a year to tell my daddy about us anyway, right?

“Can’t we talk about this after you calm down?” I try.

“Why? So you can ruin your life for some boy who claims to love you. Little girl, they all love you until they get into your pants.”

“But Daddy, this is Trev. He isn’t like that.”

“It. Is. Over.”

The finality in his words breaks my heart. I cover my face and begin to sob. This can’t be happening. It just can’t.

CHAPTER 35



Separated

Lynn

I LIE IN MY ROOM, staring up at the ceiling, lost in thought. I miss Trevor so much. My daddy won't allow me to see him, talk to him or anything.

It's like I'm a prisoner in my own home. Maggie and Elise have come over a few times to keep me company and to try to lift my spirits. That's how I know Trev is planning on heading back to school soon.

My stomach aches from thinking about it. I wish I could at least see him one more time. It feels like there's so much unfinished business between us.

I have things I want to say, so much I want to become clear on. My daddy can't run my life forever. I'm going to make it big and then I can date and love whoever I want.

He can't dangle his connections and my music over my head for the rest of my life, but is Trev willing to wait as long as that takes? Tears begin to well as I think about how bad I messed things up. We only had to wait one year. Now, I don't know how long this is going to stretch out.

"Cakes," my mother calls as she knocks on my bedroom door.

I turn to look at it, not even bothering to wipe away the tears that have slipped free. Mama has tried talking to my

daddy, but he's too stubborn to listen to anyone. It feels like I'm banging my head against a brick wall.

"Come in," I croak out.

She pushes the door open and sticks her head in. Her sad brown eyes meet mine and she rushes in the rest of the way, shutting the door behind her and then coming to sit on my bed. She holds her arms open and I rush into them, needing this hug so bad.

"Mama, I can't breathe. This hurts so bad. Why is he doing this?"

"Oh honey, your father is a bit lost right now. In his mind, he's protecting you the way he feels he should've protected Pook. He doesn't see he's holding on too tight."

"What am I supposed to do? I love Trev. A part of me is willing to give the music up for him. I just... I don't know what to do."

"Now, I don't think you should give up on your music. Boys come and go. If things don't work out, you would have lost this opportunity and that won't come around as easily," she says softly.

"I know, but I know I'll never love anyone the way I love Trev. I just know I never will."

She sighs as she rubs my back. "Listen, I came in here because your nanna wants to see you. Maybe some time with her will help you to clear your mind."

"What about Daddy?"

"You leave your father to me and your nanna. Do you really think that man is going to keep you from your grandmother and live to speak on it?"

I give my first laugh since I've been back home. I can see my daddy's mama going upside his head. Maybe she can talk some sense into him.

My chest fills with hope. Why didn't I think of her before? I just need to explain and Nanna will help me. I pull away from my mama.

“Will you give me a ride over?”

“You pack a bag. I’ll get on my bra and shoes. And don’t worry, by the time you return, I’ll at least have him give you back your car keys,” she says with a wink.

I give her a weak smile. I don’t have the heart to tell her by then; it will be too late. Trev will be gone so Daddy won’t need much persuading.

“Thanks,” I whisper instead.

“I love you, Lynn. You’re a good girl. Trevor is a good boy. It will all work out.”

“I love you too. I hope you’re right.”

MY MAMA PULLS UP to my nanna’s just after noon. Nanna is standing on the porch, wiping her hands on a dish towel. This is my first time at the new house, I’ve only seen the plans for it.

It’s pretty from out here. Not as big as the old house, but a nice size if you ask me. I hop out of the car and run right into her arms.

She smells of apples and vanilla. A scent that has comforted me since I was a little girl. I squeeze a little tighter, needing the comfort of her embrace as well as her welcoming scent.

She rubs a hand over my hair. I took my braids out and washed my hair. But I already know Nanna will give me a wash and press before I leave her house.

“I’ll come pick you up when you’re ready. Take your time. You don’t have to rush back,” Mama says as she places my bag down on the porch.

“You ain’t coming in for some pie?” Nanna says to her.

“No, ma’am. I need to get back before your son runs our workers into the ground.”

Nanna frowns. “You’d think I didn’t raise the boy right. Old stubborn goat.”

Mama chuckles as she pulls me into a hug. She releases me and palms the side of my face. There's a mixture of pride and sadness in her gaze.

"Lord knows I love him because he'd be on his own if I didn't." She sighs. "But look at what he blessed me with. Can you fault a man who's able to cocreate perfection?"

She kisses my forehead then whispers in my ear. "You're going to be fine. This is just a hiccup in your story."

I wrap my arms around her to give her another hug. I know she'll do her best to talk to my daddy. However, he's so angry with me I'm not sure how much it will help, Nanna might be the only one who can get through.

I watch as my mother climbs into her car and drives away. Nanna stands beside me with her gaze fixed on me. I'm almost too nervous to look at her. I don't know why.

"Go on and get your bag. I got some pie and ice cream inside. Made you some fried chicken, mustard greens, mac and cheese, and corn bread.

"You can set up your new room however you like. We can head to the store later. You'll have to drive though. These old eyes ain't what they used to be."

I give her a smile and grab my bag up. I'm already feeling a little better. After showing me to my new room in her new house, Nanna takes me to the kitchen where she fixes me a bowl of sweet potato pie and vanilla bean ice cream.

I note the apple and blueberry pies she has cooling still. I get my baking from my nanna. She has always shown me so much patience.

I hum as I dig into the delicious pie and ice cream. It tastes like heaven. I think Nanna has outdone herself. I turn to ask Pook if she tasted this.

When I see she's not there, my shoulders sag. I shake my head. For that one moment, I forgot. This was something we used to do together.

My chest tightens and I gasp, reaching to rub the ache. Not having Pook or Trev around has only caused me to regress. That hole in my heart has torn open wider than ever.

“I miss her too,” Nanna says as if reading my thoughts.

“How do you know?”

“You sat in your usual spot, leaving hers to your right. When Trev would come along with you two, he’d been on her other side.

“You’d always take your first bite and turn to her. Then you’d say something and the two of you would fill my home with laughter. I still remember the day that laughter took on a masculine tone.

“I’ve watched Trevor grow into a young man. I’ve also watched as he started to peek around your sister to stare at you. If you ask me, Moses just feels like a fool for missing it.”

I take in a sharp inhale. “Nanna, I messed up. I messed up so bad,” I sob.

“Tell me all about it. What really happened?”

I swallow back my tears and tell her the story from start to finish, leaving out all the sex. However, when I get to the end, there’s a knowing twinkle in her eyes.

“Your daddy is right about one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“You’re too young to focus solely on a boy.” She holds her hands up to stop me as I go to cut in. “I like Trevor. He’s a sweet young man. I don’t doubt that he cares for you. In fact, I think he does, deeply.

“What I’m trying to say is, if you have to choose. Which, knowing my son, he’s not going to back down from that. You need to think about your future.

“Your voice is extraordinary. You play that guitar like nobody’s business. God has blessed you with tremendous talent.

“This isn’t your run-of-the-mill opportunity you’ve come into. Can you live with giving that up? Or will you someday begin to resent Trevor as that music builds inside you?”

I look down into my melting bowl of ice cream and pie. My mouth feels bitter and sour. My mother said pretty much the same thing.

I love Trev more than anything, but I don’t know if I’d be happy if I didn’t at least see how far I could take things with my music. If I fail, that’s a different story, but it doesn’t feel right not to try.

It’s almost like I’d be failing Pook. I don’t think I could live with that. Picking up my spoon, I begin to stab it into my bowl.

“The truth hurts, don’t it?”

“Yeah, it does.” I sigh and scrub my hand over my face. “I just need to talk to him.”

“Things have a way of working themselves out. Allow life to take you through *your* doors and as you do, you will find your way on your path.”

“Thanks, Nanna. I needed to hear that.”

“Well, come on. Let’s head to the store. We can have supper when we get back.”



TREVOR

“I’LL BE RIGHT THERE,” my mama says excitedly.

I walk into the kitchen as she hangs up the phone. She has a little grin on her lips as she turns and finds me walking to the icebox. I haven’t had much of an appetite, so I grab a pop and close the door.

“Oh, there you are. Come on, I need you to drive me into town. Brad, Ann, come on now. Get your shoes on. We’re

leaving.”

I pull the pop from my lips and lift a brow. My mama just smiles at me and hands over the keys to her van. I don't get to ask any questions as she ushers everyone out of the house in a hurry.

I head into town once everyone is belted up. I can't help but be a little curious as my Mama sits in the passenger seat, humming to herself.

“Pull over right here,” she says as we get to town.

I pull in front of the shop she points out and settle in to wait for her to go inside and do her shopping. She pauses as she sees I'm not getting out of the car with her and my siblings.

“Trevor, come on now. Get your tail out of this car.”

“Did you need my help with something?”

She rolls her eyes at me. “If you don't get out of this car, so help me,” she growls.

“All right, all right. I'm coming,” I grumble.

I follow her into the store, my attention on the phone in my hands. Cliff wants to hang out before I leave for school. I want to head back as soon as possible.

Moses has been impossible. Maggie and Elise have told me that he won't allow Lynn to see me. I can't stay here knowing she's so close yet so far away.

“Hey there, Gloria.”

I snap my head up, knowing that voice too well. I look to my mama and see the mischievous look on her face as she moves to embrace Nanna Galveston.

“How are you doing, Agatha? Fancy seeing you here,” my mother sings innocently.

“Why, Trevor Monroe, don't you look handsome as ever. Come on over here and give me a hug,” Nanna Galveston says as her eyes twinkle.

I go to pull her into my embrace. Her familiar scent of apples and vanilla brings me more comfort than I can express. I've spent enough time in her home to feel like she's my own grandmother.

"It's good to see you, Nanna," I say as she gives me a squeeze.

"She's in the lamp section. You take these. I can give you tonight and the morning," she says and presses a set of keys in my hand.

I look down at my hand and then up into her eyes questioningly. She gives me a warm smile. With a wink and a conspiratorial whisper, she says, "I didn't sell the house. It was going to be Pook and Cliff's wedding gift. I haven't been able to check on the place on account of being busy with getting settled into the new place.

"Would you mind taking these candles over there for me and making sure nothing untoward has happened to the property? I don't think you should turn on the lights. Don't want to draw too much attention and all. I trust you'll do the right thing. Um-hmm."

"Yes, ma'am, I can do that for you."

"Brad, Ann, let's give Mrs. Galveston a ride home," my mama chortles.

"But..."

"My little Babycakes has my car keys and I left you two a little surprise in the trunk," Nanna says.

I smile and pull my mama's keys from my pocket to hand them over. I then pull her into a hug and kiss her forehead. Looking at her and Mrs. Galveston, I give them a huge smile.

"Thank you," I say.

"We have your back, son. That bigheaded son of mine can't hold on to her forever. No one can get in the way of true love, no one," Mrs. Galveston says with conviction.

I take the bag of candles and watch as they all leave. I turn to head toward the lamps. My breath catches as my eyes land

on Lynn, looking at the lamps with knit brows and her lips pursed.

I walk over to her wordlessly, smiling. I brush my pinkie against the back of her hand as I walk by. A gasp leaves her lips and she looks up over her shoulder at me.

“Hello, darlin’,” I murmur.

“Trev,” she breathes and throws her arms around my waist.

I cup her face and kiss her repeatedly, not wanting to let her go. I haven’t been eating or sleeping. Right now, as I have her in my grasp, I can’t help but wonder if I’ve even been breathing.

“Hey, baby girl. I’ve missed you so much,” I say against her lips.

Suddenly, she stiffens and tears away from me, looking around wildly. My heart sinks. This isn’t the reaction I was expecting.

“I’m sorry. I have to be careful. If someone tells Daddy we were together, he’s going to take New York and Nashville away. I still don’t know if I want to give that up,” she whispers.

I think through her words but don’t ask what she means. She’ll never have to give anything up for me. I hope she hasn’t been worrying herself about this.

However, she has a point. We can’t be seen together. I think fast, not willing to miss out on this time.

“Your nanna just left with my family. She left you with the car. I’ll head out and meet you behind the bowling alley. Come pick me up from there.”

“Where will we go from there?” she asks, her soft brown eyes searching mine.

I hold up Nanna’s house keys. “The old house. I’ll explain in the car.”

I tug her in for one more quick kiss. With a smile, she takes off, only looking back once as if to ensure I’m real. I

give her a smile and wink. She returns the smile with a wobbly one but turns and rushes out of the store.

I wait a few moments then leave out of the store and make a beeline for the bowling alley down the road. When I get there, I circle the building and come up behind it.

Lynn is already there, waiting in Nanna's little silver car. I go to the driver's side to take over since she has that cast. She climbs over into the passenger seat. I slip inside and buckle up. Lynn looks around cautiously. I pull out and headed down the back roads to get to her nanna's old house.

"What's going on?" she asks as we drive.

"I think your nanna and my mama are working together, so we can have some time together."

"Oh my God, I think my mama is in on it too. I've been dying in that house."

"You're not alone. I've been sick to my stomach, not getting to talk to you at all. I'm sorry, Lynn."

"This isn't your fault. If anyone is to blame, it's me this time. I piled onto our lies and made things worse."

"Let's talk about something else. I don't want to spend our night rehashing who's to blame. We're here. I'll find a solution, but for now, I just really want to spend time with you."

"Okay," she says.

I glance at her out of the corner of my eye. She's biting her lip nervously. Quickly, I lean over and kiss her cheek. I can't wait until I can get my hands on her and really kiss her. I've missed her soft lips so much.

"You're really here," she squeals.

"That I am, darlin'. That I am."

CHAPTER 36



*W*ill You Wait?

Lynn

MY NANNA IS SO SLICK. When I asked her about the basket of food she placed in the trunk of her car, she told me she wanted to feed a few friends. I thought nothing of it and shrugged it off.

I had no idea she was packing a meal for me and Trev to share in her old place. I thought she sold this place. Now, as Trev and I move around the kitchen to warm up our dinner, I'm so grateful she didn't.

"So she knew about the engagement too?"

"I'm guessing so. She said this was going to be her wedding gift to them," Trevor replies. He pauses for a moment. "Are you okay with being here?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I think Pook would have been okay with it too."

"This looks good, you want to sit in here?"

"Sure, we already have the candles lit in here," I say and take the plate he's handing me.

I wait for him to round the kitchen island and sit on the stool beside me. We both dig in with the silverware Nanna packed inside the basket for us.

We release moans at the same time. Once again, Nanna is just showing off. She put her foot in this.

“Oh my God, how is it still so crispy?” Trevor groans as he chews on a piece of chicken.

“I know, right? And this mac and cheese. I don’t know if I’ll ever make it like this.”

“You do and you’re gonna have one fat husband. I can’t wait.”

I place my fork down. “Trev, we should talk.”

He takes a bite of his corn bread and a fork of greens then nods at the food. As if my words register once he’s done chewing, he turns to look at me, a questioning look on his face.

“What do you want to talk about?”

I wipe my hands and face with my napkin and turn on my stool to face him. “Daddy is making me choose between you and everything I’ve been dreaming of. It could take more than a year before I’m able to do what I want with my love life.”

“And I’ll be right here. As long as it takes, I’ll be here,” he says emphatically.

“Are you sure about that?”

“Lynn, I’m not about to tell you to choose me over your music. That’s never going to happen. I’m not that selfish. I love you and I want to see you happy.

“There’s no reason you can’t have me and a career. Like walking, one step has to come before the other. I’m willing to be your next step.”

He sighs and reaches for my hand to take in his. With his other hand, he lifts my chin until I’m staring right into his eyes. They look so bright in the candlelight.

“Things with your daddy are going to take some time, but I’m willing to tough that out. When I say I love you, I mean it, Lynn. I love you and I will wait as long as it takes.”

“But it’s going to be so hard. He’s monitoring my calls. How will we communicate?”

He leans in and kisses my forehead. “We will figure it out. Get burner phones or something. Where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

I nod and turn back to my food. I want to believe his words, but my sister’s untimely demise keeps me from being able to hold on to his words with any real conviction. He places a warm hand on my back to rub it as he returns to eating.

I finish my own food and find myself humming as I do. This food is truly good for the soul. I’ll have to thank Nanna for everything.



TREVOR

AS MUCH AS I want to let our conversation from earlier go, I can’t. Lynn still doesn’t get how much I love her. I’m willing to wait ten years for us to be together if necessary.

A year, two years, ten will never change how I feel about her. I don’t have it in me to take her dream away from her. I know we’ll figure this out if we work together.

“What are you thinking about?” I ask, then kiss her bare shoulder as we sit in the tub, surrounded by candlelight.

She looks back over her shoulder. I peck her irresistible lips. She gives me a blinding smile.

“I was thinking about this being our future. A nice bath at night, basking in the love we have and taking a moment to just be.

“You can share with me how things went on the construction site and I’ll tell you how the tour is going or about songs I wrote in the studio that day.”

“You can sing to me while I wash your back,” I say as I take the sponge and run it across her back.

“By then, I won’t have this stupid cast and I can wash yours too.”

I place another kiss on her shoulder and laugh. “I’m not complaining. You keep that little hand right where it is. I’ll take care of you.”

With my words, I slide a hand down her front. I lift my other hand to squeeze her breast as I latch on to her neck and suck on it. She moans and tilts her head to give me better access to her smooth skin.

“Trevor,” she whimpers as she reaches for my hair with her good hand.

Releasing her breast, I slide my hand down farther beneath the water. I slip two fingers into her tight heat. Lynn lifts her hips and rides my fingers as I pump them inside of her.

I move my lips to her ear. “I want you to come for me, beautiful. I miss seeing you come apart for me.”

“Oh my God, Trevor,” she cries out, turning to look into my eyes.

I crush her lips with mine and drink from them. I kiss her like it’s one of our last. Being apart has made me desperate for her.

I miss waking to her next to me. I miss holding her in my arms as we went to bed at night. This night is truly a gift I intend to cherish.

As our tongues dance together, I grow harder, wanting to take her here and now, but I have concerns about her wrist. I wait until I feel her squeeze around my fingers and her body convulses, then I gently push her up and stand to exit the tub.

I’m at full mast as I collect her body from the tub and carry her into the bedroom. I place her on the bed we made together earlier and climb in beside her. She stares up at me lovingly as I hover at her side, looking down at her gorgeous face.

“You’re so beautiful,” I murmur.

“I bet you say that to all the girls,” she says coyly.

“Not a one as beautiful as you.”

She reaches for my face and begins to trace my features with her fingertips. I smile, causing her to sink the pad of her thumb into one of my dimples. I place my hand on her side and start to stroke her soft skin.

“You’re very handsome yourself. Not hard on the eyes at all.”

“I could stare at you all night.”

“What if I want you to do more than stare?”

“I’d be happy to oblige. Just tell me what you want.”

“I want your touch.” She pauses and her cheeks begin to glow.

“Come on, what else?” I coax.

“I... I want to ride you and feel you inside me.”

“Now, what kind of gentleman would I be if I ignored the little lady’s wishes?”

“So I’m a lady tonight?”

“I hope not,” I croon and reach across her body for my wallet I placed on the nightstand earlier when we undressed for our bath.

I remove the condom from my wallet and toss the leather folder back down. Lynn takes the foil packet from my hand and pushes me onto my back. Keeping my gaze on her, I place my hands behind my head.

She moves her small body between my legs and palms my shaft. I can feel her hand shaking as she lowers her head and takes me into her mouth. Once I begin to groan, she relaxes and bobs her head with more confidence.

“Fuck,” I groan out as she lifts her head and allows her saliva to cover me.

Then she begins to circle her small hand as she pumps me at the same time. She lowers her head and hollows her cheeks,

covering more of my length. I can't hold back from pumping my hips any longer.

However, when she slips and chokes, I pull from her mouth and look her over with concern. The shy smile she gives me as she runs the back of her hand across her lips sends my heart racing.

Sitting up, I palm the side of her face and kiss her hard. I could die a happy man in this moment. However, when she pushes me back again and lifts the foil packet to her lips to bite into it, I know I'm not done with this life yet.

Lynn rolls the condom onto my length, then straddles my hips. I reach for my cock with one hand and her waist with the other. Then I guide my way into her tight, wet, warm pussy.

My eyes roll back in my head. All I can do to keep from flipping her onto her back and pounding into her is hold on to her waist and dig my fingers in.

She looks like a goddess riding me with her head thrown back. The moonlight comes in, illuminating her brown skin as she bounces up and down on me. She reaches for her breasts and squeezes them, causing me to bite back a groan as I watch her.

"You feel so good," she drags out in that sweet voice of hers.

"Do I? Because your pussy is so wet for me."

She's so wet the sound of me moving in her pussy fills the room, mixing with our moans and groans. She drops her head and looks into my eyes, biting down on her lip.

The desire and lust in her eyes are enough to send me over, but I don't want to ruin this for either of us. I want her to enjoy the ride and I want this to last for as long as it can. However, when she stops bouncing and begins to grind her little pussy on me, I know if I don't take control soon, this night is going to end before it gets started.

I lift and palm the back of her neck, consuming her lips in a hard, demanding kiss. She whimpers in my mouth and runs

her hand through my hair. Her hand with the cast resting on my shoulder.

Wrapping her waist with one arm, I feel my muscles flex as I tighten my hold and guide her body over mine. The candlelight dances over us as I rock us both while she drips down my balls. I palm her breast with my free hand and flick her nipple, groaning as I stare up into her eyes.

“Oh God,” she calls out, throwing her head back.

I lean in and latch on to her neck, sucking and fucking the shit out of her as I pull her down on my cock over and over. Our sweat-slick skin rubs together and yet I don't feel like we're close enough.

“Trev,” she moans, all while making a ton of other sexy noises.

I push my hand into her hair and tug her head back. Then I tilt my head and kiss, lick, and suck her throat. A grin comes to my lips as she ripples around me and starts to convulse.

As she melts against my chest, I flip her onto her back. Reaching for her hands, I lock our fingers together and lift her hands above her head. I lift to look down in her eyes.

“I love you so much,” I breathe.

Taking my time, I work my way in and out of her tight body. I can feel my face contort in sheer bliss as my muscles tighten and tense. Lynn claws down my back until she cups my ass tight in her hands.

“I love you too. Harder, Trev. Please.”

I release her hands and shift her legs over my shoulder. Pinning her legs back by her thighs, I lift up on my toes and pound down into her.

The way she screams for me washes over me like a blanket of fire. My blood heats in my veins and my spine tingles. I know I'm not going to last much longer.

“Fuck. Is that hard enough?” I grunt out.

“I can take more,” she moans.

I begin to pound into her so hard the sound of our skin slapping almost drowns out her keening and cries of pleasure. As she comes around me once again, I'm unable to hold back. I take her lips as I come so hard my head and eyes hurt.

“Oh. My. God. That. Was. Amazing. Wow,” she breathes.

CHAPTER 37



*N*umb & Devastated

Lynn

THE LAST FEW days have been awesome. Trevor and I meet at the old house every afternoon. Nanna has been covering for me and keeping my daddy out of my hair.

However, we only spent the one night together. Trev didn't want to push it. I agreed with him. I don't want to tempt fate and have my father find out about what we've been up to.

I sing at the top of my lungs as I drive down the road to Nanna's old house. I'm so happy my face hurts from smiling so hard. Trev put off returning to school so we'd have this time together.

I nearly squeal as I pull into the driveway of Nanna's old place and see Trev's truck parked out front. I can't wait to jump into his arms and inhale his comforting scent.

His cologne has become like a welcoming mat. It envelops me and gives me the feeling of love and home every single time. I sigh at the thought of it and how soon I'll be wrapped in it.

Parking Nanna's car behind Trev's truck, I jump out of the car and rush inside. My heart is racing in anticipation. I leap up the stairs in a single bound.

"Trev," I sing as I burst through the front door.

However, I skid to a stop and my stomach drops. I knit my brows in confusion. Trevor stands between his daddy and mine, with his head hanging low.

“Y’all take me for a fool,” Daddy seethes.

“Wh... what’s going on?” I stammer out.

“That’s what I’d like to know. I drove by yesterday and saw Mama’s car. I was curious, but I was in a hurry, so I couldn’t stop. I called her last night to see if everything was all right.

“I could read the bull junk between the lines of the crap she tried to sell me. My gut told me Vernon and I should come for a little visit today.

“Lo and behold who do I find here? The only reason I haven’t broken my foot off in his tail is because his daddy is my best friend and I used to wipe his little heinie.

“You know why I’m so darn mad at you two? Do you have any idea why I’m infuriated?”

“No,” I murmur.

“Because you two keep undermining me and acting like sneaky children. You’re two little liars, and you, little girl, are acting like a fool for a boy. A boy you told me already has a girlfriend,” he snarls. “I can’t trust either of you as far as I can throw you.”

Trevor frowns and opens his mouth to say something. I look at him with pleading eyes and shake my head. He shuts his mouth, but his frown deepens to a scowl.

If he tells Daddy he doesn’t have a girlfriend, it will only make this worse. Trevor balls his fists at his sides and works his jaw. My heart sinks because this is the last thing I want to happen.

“Daddy, I’m sorry. I—”

“I’m done talking, Lynn. When we get home, you’re going to start looking through those college acceptances. You can forget about that music business. It’s done. I meant what I said.

“Now wait a minute,” Trev bites out.

“Trev, we should go. You’ve done enough.”

“No, Daddy. This ain’t right. Her music is how she breathes. Moses, if I’m the problem, you don’t have to worry about me. I love your daughter too much to get in the way of her dream.

“I’m gone. This sneaking around is over. Don’t take this from her.

“I should’ve come to you when I first knew I wanted to date her. So much was going on and I wanted to be face to face when I told you I want Lynn to be my forever. I blew that.

“I see that now. But please, don’t do this to her. Don’t take her dream away, Moses. Don’t break her heart like that.”

“Humph,” my father grunts and rolls his eyes.

“But Trev,” I gasp.

“We made our bed, darlin’,” he says and shakes his head.

“This isn’t fair. I’m losing everything I love. My sister is gone. Now, I either have to give up the only man I will ever love or walk away from the one thing I’m great at. Where’s the sense in any of that?” I sob.

“Lynn,” Trevor says in warning.

I shake my head and turn to run out. Hot tears are falling down my face faster than I can wipe them away. I make it into the car and pull off to rush back to Nanna’s.

I’m so mad at Trev. It’s as I grumble to myself while sobbing and trying to see that I notice my daddy’s truck parked off to the side of the house. In my rush to get to Trev, I hadn’t seen it.

I shake my head and swipe at my tears. I have a million thoughts running through my head. I thought my heart was broken in Italy. This hurts so much more.

I don’t know how I get back to Nanna’s. By the time I park in front of her new house, my face is covered in tears and I have big old snort bubbles as I sob uncontrollably.

I rush into the house, trying to head to my room to lock myself in. However, Nanna is waiting for me with a glum look on her face. I know, instantly, she's about to tell me it's time for me to go home.

"I'll get my stuff," I whimper.

"I'm so sorry, Babycakes."

"It's not your fault. We shouldn't have been sneaking around. I know Daddy. I should've known better."

"You're a young woman now. You should be allowed to fall in love and make mistakes. None of this is right."

Her eyes are filled with tears. I can tell she has more she wants to say, but she clamps her lips shut as the sound of a car pulling up greets our ears.

I should've known he'd come for me. My shoulders sag. I don't even have any more fight left in me.

I'm devastated. It's like I'm freezing from the inside out and I'm beginning to feel numb.



TREVOR

I PUNCH my steering wheel repeatedly. I can't believe what happened. When Moses and Daddy came in, I had called out to Lynn before realizing it wasn't her coming into the house.

My heart broke as soon as I saw them. The look in Moses's eyes told me all I needed to know. It was over. We fucked up. Again.

I can't allow Lynn to lose her dream. I can only hope that my plea reached Moses and he won't take this from her. In time, maybe he'll forgive us. Or we can just wait a few years until he doesn't hold all the cards.

"Fuck," I bellow into the truck.

This just doesn't feel right. Ending things like this leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. As if feeling my pain, the sky opens up and it begins to pour.

Moses's last words to me fill my head. "I didn't do this to y'all. Y'all did it to yourselves. You know me, Trev. This ain't how you handle me."

"Yes, sir," was all I could say.

I start the truck and pull off. As I drive away from the house that we've spent the last few days playing house in, I glance back at it one more time. I'm no quitter.

"This ain't ending like this," I mutter to myself as I turn my gaze from the house in the rearview to my own eyes.

I have one more move. There's a way. "This could work," I say to myself and nod my head with determination.

CHAPTER 38



*N*ot Giving Up

Lynn

I LIE in my bed at my parents' house, sobbing into my pillow. I'm so lost and confused. Did Trevor mean what he said, or was he just trying to placate my daddy?

A shiver runs through me as I think of never being together again. A part of me loves Trevor even more for understanding what my music means to me. However, his words and my daddy's keep ringing in my head.

We made our bed. I've been lying and broke my father's trust. I put Trev in this position. It makes me sick to my stomach and I wish I could take it all back.

At first, we just didn't want to hurt my parents by telling them why I wasn't there to help my sister. Things just snowballed from there. I'd never lied to my parents, but it's like I couldn't stop once I started.

The rain outside continues to pour down like a soundtrack to my mood. I try not to think back to that day it rained and I lost my virginity to Trev. I don't want to taint those memories with this pain and sadness.

My phone rings on my bed beside me, but I don't want to talk to anyone. I ignore it and continue to sob. However, it stops ringing and starts up again.

I answer the stupid thing before my daddy hears it and comes to take it. When I look at the screen, I see it's Trev. I jump up and rush into my closet to sit at the bottom of it to answer.

"Hello," I whisper.

"Hey, darlin'. I'm by the gazebo. Can you come out?"

My heart races. I thought he was done with me. Without thinking, I nod as if he can see me.

I need to talk to him. I can climb out the window and get there. Realizing he can't see me, I whisper into the phone.

"Okay, give me ten minutes."

The gazebo is behind the stables. Not close enough to the house for us to be seen, but close enough for me to get there quickly. I end the call and climb out of the closet, tugging a hoodie out to throw on.

Rushing to the window, I then push it up. A sigh of relief passes my lips when it goes up without making a loud sound. I poke my head out and look both ways before I duck back in and start to climb out.

The rain soaks me through the moment I step out into it. I don't allow that to deter me. Instead, I race toward the gazebo. As I bend the corner and it comes into view, so does Trev.

He stands in a gray sweatshirt and blue jeans. When he sees me coming, he takes off his baseball cap and shoves it in his back pocket. I can see from here that his blond locks still got wet despite the cap.

I slow my pace as I get about two feet away from the steps. I climb the stairs and stand before Trevor, my head down as I knit my brows. He reaches for my hand and rubs his thumb back and forth across my knuckles, causing me to glance up at him.

"I shouldn't be here, but I needed to talk to you," he starts.

"Yeah, I figured."

“Look at me, Lynn,” he says sharply. “What was that? What happened?”

“You’re blaming me? How could you tell him we’re done?”

“I told him that so... No, wait. You answer me first. Why does your daddy think I’m seeing someone else?”

“I might have told him that to throw him off while we were in Paris.”

He curses under his breath and sighs. “Lynn,” he groans.

“I know. I’m sorry. I know it looks bad, but fixing it would have made things worse.”

“How?” He bites out. “How could it get much worse than this? Your daddy hates me and believes I’m someone I’m not.”

“What difference does it make? You abandoned me. You told him we’re done,” I shout at him.

Done with the conversation and feeling the cold biting at my damp skin, I turn and storm off the gazebo to go back home. I feel him hot on my heels, but I don’t stop even as he barks my name. Not until he grasps my arm and turns me to face him.

“I would never abandon you,” he says tightly before crushing his lips to mine.

He kisses me passionately as he presses my body into his. I reach to wrap my arms around his neck, placing the fingers of my right hand into his soaked hair.

“There’s only one way to fix this now,” he breathes against my lips once he breaks the kiss. “Marry me, Lynn. Be my wife.”

A gasp floats from my lips as I look up into his eyes. His long lashes have drops of rain clinging to them. However, I don’t doubt the sincerity I see in them.

“Trevor, what?”

He palms my face and kisses me tenderly. “I said marry me. Your daddy wants to see you safe and secure. Be my wife.

Let me show him I'm serious about you."

My mind races and my thoughts get all jumbled up. He can't be serious. My daddy would kill us. I'm not ready to get married. I'm only eighteen.

"I just graduated high school. I'm about to take off to start a career as a singer. We'd be doomed before we even started."

"But we wouldn't be forced to be a part. In a year, we can start our life together. I'll have our house built by then. And—"

"And what about you finishing school? Slow down, Trev. We can't allow him to force us into anything rash. Besides, now, it's really starting to feel like he's right."

"What do you mean?"

"It feels like we're lying and sneaking around behind his back."

Trevor jerks his head back as if I've slapped him. I ball my hands into the front of the sweatshirt he's wearing. He shakes his head as if to clear it.

"So I want to do the right thing and stop sneaking around. Make you my wife and tell your daddy you're the only one for me, but you feel like we're doing just the opposite?" he says incredulously.

I lift my hands in the air and look around us. "This isn't exactly how we go about gaining his trust. I did just sneak out my bedroom window."

Trev places his hands on his hips and looks down at me exasperatedly. "Then you tell me your suggestion, darlin'."

I sigh. "I don't know," I admit honestly. "Mama put her foot down before Daddy grounded me. She told him I'm going to Nashville and New York. Which only made your rejection more confusing for me.

"I... I don't think I'm ready. Maybe all of this is happening for a reason. This could be a bad time. Let's give it a while. Maybe in a year, we'll be able to see things differently without my father's influence."

He shakes his head before I can finish my words. He palms my cheeks and runs his thumbs across my wet skin as we stand there as if the rain isn't coming down on us. Trev places his forehead to mine and breathes me in.

“I don't think that's the right thing to do. It don't feel right. Lynn, baby, marry me.” He kisses me. “Marry me, Babycakes.” He kisses me again. “Come on, darlin'. You're the one for me. Be my wife.”

He kisses me again, and this time, it feels like he's trying to pull a yes from my lips. He begins to sway us as if dancing to a song only he can hear.

My breath hitches and I'm tempted to say yes. However, there's something holding me back. I love him, I truly do, but this is too soon. If I say yes, it will ruin us.

“I'm sorry, Trev, but I can't. I love you. I do. I... I just don't want to rush into anything we'll regret. You don't even know how your daddy is going to react to you not going into the draft.”

“I don't care. I'm a grown-ass man. I don't need my daddy to plan my life for me,” he growls.

“Oh,” I say and drop my head.

“Oh, Lynn, baby, no, no, no. I didn't mean it that way.”

“I should get back. It's cold out here,” I mutter.

“Darlin', wait.”

“I have to get back—”

He rushes around me and tugs me into his embrace. He buries his face into my wet hair. Reluctantly, I wrap my arms around his waist.

“I'm sorry. I'm losing my mind trying to figure this out. I don't want to rush you.

“Take all the time you need. I'll finish school and sort out my own mess. You go do what you need.

“If you need me, you have my number. Don't ever think you're bothering me. I love you, Lynn.

“I’m not giving up on you. I will always do what’s right for you. I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Trev. I’ll see you next summer.”

He stiffens a bit and pulls away to search my face with his gaze. He nods to himself and plants a kiss to my forehead. Then he takes a step back, releasing me.

I run for my house, allowing the rain to wash away my tears. I don’t know if I just made the right decision. While it feels like the right thing to do, on the other hand, I feel like I just opened the door to disaster.

The snake that spooked Smoke and sent me flying off the horse comes to mind. Something about the thought causes me to sob uncontrollably. I go to turn back, but he’s gone.

“What did I just do?” I sob.



TREVOR

I TREK BACK to my family’s ranch. I don’t pay much mind to the rain pounding down on me. My mind is too consumed by what just happened. I’m confused and lost.

I love you too, Trev. I’ll see you next summer.

Did we just break up? Did she not know I told her daddy we were over so she could go to New York? How did I fuck this up so bad?

“Trev.”

I look up as my name is sobbed out. Cliff is sitting on the porch looking lost and torn up. I hadn’t even noticed him there as I walked up the steps.

“Cliff? What’s going on?”

“It’s my daddy. I don’t think I can do this. I’m losing everything, everyone.”

“Wait, slow down. What are you saying? What’s going on with Uncle Travis?”

“He’s gone,” Cliff sobs. “He had a heart attack right at the dinner table, right in front of me and Mama.

“I should be with Mama making arrangements or whatever, but I couldn’t do it. I ran out once they pronounced him dead. I don’t think I can handle this. First, Brooke, now this. What do I have left?”

I move to sit beside him on the porch bench. Suddenly, my problems seem so small. This summer has been hell on Cliff. He can’t seem to catch a break.

“We’ll get through it together. You’re gonna make it. I promise,” I say as I wrap an arm around him and tug him into my chest.

Cliff and I were born a month apart. Me being the oldest, but we’ve always been as tight as brothers. My uncle Travis has always been a sounding board for me.

I’m going to miss him. Not for the first time, I wish I could start this day over and fix it all. Instead, I’m left feeling the heaviness of loss.

“This can’t be happening,” Cliff mutters. “Why does God hate me? I knew Brooke was too good for me. I was willing to accept that. But, Daddy... what did I do so wrong?”

“Come on now. None of this is your fault. You get all that right out of your head.

“Life happens. We have to take the good with the bad and hope that in the end, we get some semblance of what we desire.”

“I don’t know what I would do without you, cousin. This shit is about to drown me. I thought I was going to start breathing again.”

He shakes his head against my shoulder. I give him a squeeze. He doesn’t have to say anything. I’ve felt his pain whenever we talk or see each other.

“It will get better,” I reassure him.

“Yeah, but I have this feeling like it won’t get better until after it gets a lot worse.”

I have nothing for his words because, for some reason, they ring true. There are so many unknowns for us. My father, being the oldest, owns the family ranch, but Uncle Travis has always had a hand in running the place.

Cliff has been working under him since we graduated high school. I can’t imagine what he’ll do now. Cliff loves this ranch, but I can’t imagine continuing to work it will be easy.

Still, this is Cliff. He wouldn’t want to start something fresh and new like I would. That’s not him.

CHAPTER 39



The Struggle

Trevor

Four months later...

I TAKE a sip of my beer with a frown on my face. This party is the last place I want to be. We won the game, but even at 8–1, this season hasn't felt right to me.

I'm not as excited as I used to be. Not that I'm not playing amazing. I need to put all this pent-up anger somewhere.

I haven't spoken to Lynn in months, not since that night. She came to my uncle's funeral but stayed at her daddy's side. I didn't get a chance to say a word to her as I remained with Cliff and was dealing with my own grief.

I've wanted to call, but I also want to give her space to do her thing. She's the one who said she'd see me next summer. I'm respecting her wishes. Doesn't mean I have to like it.

"Hey, Trev," Corinne says as she comes over to stand with me and my teammates.

I groan. If she's here, that means my ex is somewhere around here too. I don't know why I thought I'd catch a break tonight. Donna has been on my ass all semester, wanting to get back together.

I'm not interested. Corinne has been coming to campus more and more. I'm not sure what that's about and I honestly don't care.

“Hey, Corinne,” I say to be polite like my mama raised me to be.

“You guys were great out there. The game-winning touchdown, you were showing off,” she says with a wide grin.

“That my boy was,” our QB says as he comes over and clamps a hand on my shoulder. “I’m hoping the Cowboys are watching. Wouldn’t that be awesome? We both get drafted there and take this show on the road.”

I slide my gaze to Patrick and give him a smile. I still haven’t told anyone this is it for me. Now more than ever, I know it is. Cliff has been struggling back home. My cousin needs me.

After graduation, I’m headed home to help out. I think having me there will help Cliff to heal and move forward. It will give him someone to lean on, if nothing else.

His mama’s health hasn’t been the greatest in the last two months. That’s why I asked him up this weekend. He needed the break.

I glance across the room and find him with red cheeks and nose, talking to some guys. He’s wasted. I shake my head and look back at Patrick.

“Yeah, that would be something.”

I feel bad as soon as the words leave my mouth. His eyes light up and I can almost see him dreaming it up. He’s a shoo-in for the draft.

“You looked amazing out there. I could totally see you and Patrick going in the first round. Top three picks, in fact. It’s going to be so awesome,” Donna purrs as she comes over and stands beside me.

I fight not to roll my eyes. I’ve heard this out of her mouth for the last four years. It’s one of the reasons I broke things off. Don’t get me wrong, Donna is pretty. She’s very pretty with her dark-brown hair, green eyes, and curvy body.

She’s attractive until she opens her mouth. That’s when you want to gnaw your arm off to get away from her. The

mean, catty, and insensitive shit that has come out of her mouth over the years have been astonishing.

Donna wasn't like that when we met. I mean, I knew Corinne from back home. That's actually how I met Donna. Donna had spent a summer with Corinne and we'd flirted a little.

The next year, I ran into Donna at freshman orientation. I had forgotten all about her to be honest. I had even brushed her off, given the fact that Corinne was her cousin. I hadn't been the biggest fan of hers in high school.

However, after a few drinks and the high of my freshman year as a football star, still wet behind the ears—Donna pounced. The next thing I knew, we were dating. I've broken up with her plenty of times and she always finds a way to worm her way back in.

I look down at my beer and place it on the nearest surface. I won't be enabling that cycle tonight. This time, I'm done with her once and for all.

"There's still plenty of season left. Anything can happen," I mumble.

"Not if you're taking care of yourself," Donna purrs and runs her hand up my chest.

I take a step back and swipe her arm to knock it away. She frowns and that fake smile falls from her face. This, this right here, is why Lynn was such a breath of fresh air.

Donna is just the prototype for the girls I've dated while in college. They have stars in their eyes and can't help showing what they really want. I'll gladly wait things out with Lynn—at least I know her love is real.

In two months, my parents will know I don't intend to declare for the draft. Then and only then will I tell anyone else. I've been holding off disappointing my daddy yet again.

If I tell him now, he'll have time to talk me out of it. Not a chance. I'll wait until January, the day after the deadline, and then I'll tell them. This is what I feel is best for me.

Just as Donna goes to pout at me, I look across the room one more time to check on Cliff. He stands as my eyes land on him. He stumbles a few steps and looks like he's about to fall on his ass.

"Where are you going?" Donna calls after me.

"I need to get my cousin out of here," I grumble and keep moving without looking back.

I make my way over to Cliff and catch him under the arm before he plants right on his backside. I toss his arm over my shoulder and allow him to lean his weight on me.

"There you are," he slurs. "I don't like these girls. They're not my Pook.

"She smelled so pretty. I miss her. She would have lit this room up with that smile. Don't mess things up with Cakes. Give her a call, Trev."

"She wants space," I mutter.

"That's an excuse and you know it. Ain't a darn thing wrong with checking in. You were friends first."

"I was her sister's friend."

"More bullshit. I lost the love of my life, thinking I had all the time in the world. You ain't got that much time, Trev. In the blink of an eye, it can all change and be gone."

I keep him moving out of the party to get him back to my apartment. I hear him, but I'm terrified of making things worse between us and her daddy. Moses hardly speaks to my daddy these days.

"I hear you, bro."

"Do you? It all means nothing if you have no one to share it all with. The pain, the good times, the grief. You need someone to share that burden with. Babycakes is your one like Pook was mine.

"God, I loved her. She was so pretty and smart. Her daddy was so stubborn. It took a while, but I got through. Don't give up, Trev. Don't allow him to scare you away."

“I won’t.”

“Oh God, I’m gonna be sick,” he groans.

We stop and I help him over to the curb. We just barely make it before he empties his stomach all over the place.

“Well, this night just got fun,” I mutter to myself.



LYNN

I SIT LOOKING at my menu as I wait in this fancy restaurant for Elise to come back from the bathroom. She’s here in New York for a visit. A much-needed visit on both our parts.

Elise has been having trouble at home with her family. She finished her degree earlier than expected and now her family has been applying pressure for her to work for the family business, something she’s not sure she wants to do.

I get it. I understand what she’s going through more than she could imagine. In my father’s head, Pook and I were going to go to school for a skill we could bring back to the ranch.

Brooke went to law school. Daddy thought I would go for something in business or veterinary school. None of that has worked out the way he thought it would.

Sometimes, I think he was open to the idea of Cliff because he knows the ins and outs of ranching so well. He could have passed the ranch down to Pook and Cliff would have been there to help her.

Not to mention, Cliff loves being a rancher. It was a win for everyone. Or so Daddy thought.

“Hey there, Cakes,” is crooned smoothly, pulling my attention away from the menu and my thoughts.

I look up with furrowed brows. Then, a gasp leaves my lips. I can’t believe my eyes.

“Cody?”

“Hey, sugar.”

I stand from my seat. He pulls me into a tight hug. I hadn't known how much I needed this hug until this moment. It's the hug of someone who's in this big, lonely city trying to pretend they're okay.

We release each other and I take a step back. He looks so different in his business suit. His hair is cut differently as well. I think they call the style a crew cut. It works with his golden-brown locks and hazel-brown eyes. The slight, neat beard is a nice addition as well.

“What are you doing here?”

“I came over to ask you the same thing. I was here having dinner with my mentor. On our way out, I saw you sitting here alone and came over.”

“Oh, I'm not here alone.”

“Hey, sorry about that. There was a bit of a line,” Elise says as she returns to the table.

Cody turns and they both freeze as they stare at each other. I give an amused smile as I watch them take each other in. Cody cleans up nicely, and from the look on Elise's face, she notices that fact too.

“Cody?”

“Hey, Elise.”

“Do you want to sit with us for dinner?” I ask.

“I only had appetizers and drinks with my mentor. Why not?”

I flag down our waiter and request another place setting or table. He graciously says he'll bring over a seat and place setting for Cody. While we wait, we all make small talk.

“Thanks for letting me join you. I had planned to go back to my dorm and study for an exam I could take in my sleep I've already studied so much,” Cody says once we are all seated.

“No problem. If it weren’t for Elise, I’d be home miserable,” I reply.

“Really? How’s the music going?”

“It’s going. Just not as fast as I thought it would. There’s always something. To be honest, most days I’m bored out of my mind waiting for my phone to ring with some kind of news.”

“I keep telling her it will all pick up as soon as they figure out what to do with all that cuteness and that powerhouse voice. They have no idea how to market a cute little Black country singer,” Elise says.

“I sure do hope they don’t try to change you. You’re perfect the way you are,” Cody says as he smiles at me.

“Thank you.” I blush and duck my head.

“Speaking of change, this is a new you,” Elise says to Cody.

Cody smooths down his tie as his cheeks turn pink. I notice then his nails are manicured and polished clear. I look him over again. He has changed a lot.

“I like your new hair,” Cody replies. “It suits you.”

“Thanks,” Elise says, fingering her wavy brown-and-blond-ombre bob.

I went with her this afternoon to get it done. She chopped off all her long locks to piss her mama off. Although very pretty on Elise, this cut is going to get stuck in her mama’s craw.

“Have you made any friends?” Cody says to me. “Like, do you have anyone to introduce Elise to while she’s here?”

“Not a single one.”

His face lights up. “Oh, what are you guys doing tomorrow? I would love to introduce you to a few of my classmates. I mean, they’re nothing like our circle back home, but I think they’re pretty cool.”

“I’m down if Elise is.”

Cody looks at Elise hopefully. I shrug to let her know I'm okay with it. In all honesty, I've been miserable.

I've thought about returning home and starting something else. If not for Elise and Maggie, I would have. They have been my support system, just as they promised.

"I mean, I'm cool with that. I know you could use someone to get your mind off Trevor."

"Elise," I hiss.

"You and Monroe broke up?" Cody asks, turning from Elise to scan my face with his eyes. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. It's complicated. I don't know where things stand. We haven't spoken," I murmur.

"My offer still stands if you need someone to talk to. Are you guys heading back home for the holidays?"

"Ugh, unfortunately, that's the plan. That's the last place I want to be right now."

Cody rubs the back of his neck. "I have to stick around here until the last minute. I'm not sure I'll even make it back in time for Thanksgiving. Which sucks because all my friends are heading out."

"I'm only going back because Cakes is going home. If I had a place of my own to stay here, I'd hide until the New Year."

"Really?" Cody says with a bit of excitement that I catch before he reins it in and clears his throat.

I look between the two, wondering if Elise gets that Cody is totally crushing on her. They would make such a gorgeous couple. His next words confirm my suspicions.

"My roommate won't be needing his room until the New Year. You're more than welcome to come stay with me. That is if you don't mind sharing an apartment with me for a few weeks," he says with a deep-red blush.

"How much?" Elise chirps.

Cody shakes his head. “It’s my Christmas gift to you. No charge at all. It’s better than being alone.”

“Okey dokey, we’ll swing by so I can take a look at the space tomorrow and then I’ll let you know,” Elise says.

“Cool, I’ll invite everyone over for drinks. You can see the place and meet my friends. This is great. It feels good to have someone from home around.”

“Yeah, I guess having you guys around does make me feel a lot better,” I say.

“Maybe taking the job I was just offered won’t be so bad,” Cody croons with a slight smile.

“You were offered a job?” Elise and I squeal in unison.

“Yeah, six figures,” he replies and scratches the back of his neck.

“What’s stopping you?” Elise asks.

“I still have a year to go of school and New York would have to become my home base. I’m already so darn homesick. I’m also not sure if this is the direction I want to go in.”

“New York looks good on you though,” Elise says and bites her lip.

She then glances at me and her slight smile falls. I lift a brow at her, but she shakes her head at me. Right then our waitress arrives.

Um. Interesting.

CHAPTER 40



*B*etrayal?

Trevor

Six weeks later...

“IS CAKES COMING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS?” Cliff asks as we walk into the jewelry store with my mama.

She’s looking for a gift for Ann for Christmas. I can’t believe how tall she and Brad have gotten in the few months I’ve been away. I’ll be happy to be back home soon.

I can’t believe my little brother and sister are headed to junior high next year. My parents are sending Brad to football camp for the summer and they got him a quarterback coach as his Christmas gift. I know he’s going to love that.

“Agatha said she came in this morning. Olivia Billings picked the kids up from the airport,” my mother says before I can answer.

“As in Cody Billings’s mother?” I ask with narrowed eyes.

“You know any other Olivia Billings?” she says with a lifted brow.

“No.”

“Well, they flew in together. I think it’s nice Cakes has friends in New York. I don’t think she’s been adjusting well from what Agatha and Darla say.”

“She got the deal though, didn’t she?”

“She sure did. They’ve just been stalling or something. She’s been a bit down about that.”

“How do you know all of this?”

“Trevor Paul Monroe, bless your heart. Do I or the Galveston women look like we’re going to stop talking to each other over two grown-behind men squabbling? We talk about you kids all the time.”

“Isn’t that Cody over there?” Cliff says, pointing with his chin.

I look over at the counter to see the clerk placing a jewelry box in a bag for Cody. She then hands it over. “Good luck. She’ll love your choice. Stop fretting, sugar,” the clerk says and winks at him.

“Thanks for all your help,” he says.

When he turns to leave and spots me, he stops in his tracks. I fold my arms across my chest. I have a million questions.

Why the fuck did he and Lynn fly in together? Is that why she hasn’t called me once since she’s been in New York? My stomach begins to feel sour.

Cliff was right. I should’ve sucked it up and called her by now. We left things so up in the air. With Uncle Travis’s death, I didn’t get to fix things before heading back to school.

“Um, hey, Cliff. Hey, Trevor. You guys doing some Christmas shopping?”

“No, we’re looking for Halloween costumes,” I grumble.

“Uh, right.”

“How are you doing, Cody?” My mama says warmly as she glares at me.

“I’m fine, ma’am. Been busy with work and all.”

“Oh, yes. I heard you were offered a permanent position with your internship. That’s so wonderful.”

“Yes, ma’am, it is. I’m excited. I didn’t know about staying in New York, but I’m glad I decided to take the job. I see the potential to grow with the company. My boss has been giving me so much responsibility I didn’t have as an intern.”

“That’s great. It looks like you’re happy and flourishing. You don’t forget us little old country folks while you’re off doing big things,” my mama chortles.

“I won’t, ma’am. I’ll never forget where I’m from. It’s been a slice of home that’s grounded me in New York.”

I growl. I actually release a growl. Cody blanches and takes a step back.

“Trevor, what the devil has gotten into you?” my mama chides.

“I’m gonna go. I still have a few things to pick up. It was good seeing y’all. If I don’t see you again, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.”

I almost tell him to bite me. However, from the look on my mama’s face, I have to reel my temper in. Cliff places a hand on my shoulder and gives it a squeeze.

“What was that all about?” Mama asks.

“Cody had a thing for Cakes. He sort of stepped on Trev’s toes in Paris,” Cliff informs her.

I glare at my cousin. I told him that in confidence. Shaking my head, I move to the display of engagement rings. I try not to fume as I realize it’s the same area where Cody had been standing as the clerk handed him his purchase.

I’d fucking kill him. My nostrils flare, my face heats, and my chest burns with rage. I need to see Lynn and talk to her before I lose my shit.

“I’ll be right back,” I mutter.

I turn and storm out of the store, leaving my mama and Cliff staring after me. When I step outside, I pull out my phone immediately. Taking a deep breath, I press to dial Lynn’s number with a shaky finger.

It rings a few times before the line picks up. I stop my pacing the moment I hear her sweet voice through the line. It's like a breath of fresh air to hear her.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Cakes. How are you doing, darlin'?"

"Hey. I'm okay. Having pie with Nanna. How have you been?"

"I'm missing you something awful. That's how I'm doing. I want to see you.

"Can you have dinner with me tonight? We can drive a town or two over. I'm not trying to cause trouble. I just need to see your face."

"Trev, I don't know. I want to see you. I really do, but I have plans with friends. If I cancel to be with you, my daddy will find out.

"Besides, I'm doing my friends a favor. I understand what they're going through. I want to help them out as much as I can."

"Okay, not tonight. Let's not do this behind your daddy's back either. I can come by the house and sit with you there. No more hiding."

"Wow, are you sure? That's big."

"Darlin', I've missed you so much. These past few months have shown me I can't live without you. I'm willing to do anything to spend time with you. I'm positive."

"Well, all right. Nanna says to come over to her house for dinner Saturday evening. Daddy will be here and you know Nanna's not allowing him to throw her dinner guest out of her house."

"Thanks, Nanna. I'll be there."

"You're welcome, sugar. I can't wait to see that handsome face and those dimples."

"Trev, I have to go. See you then."

“I love you, baby girl. I’ll see you Saturday. I hope to hear from you before then.”

“I love you too, Trev. I can’t wait. I’ll call you in the morning.”

“Sounds good. Later, Cakes.”

“Later, Monroe,” she chuckles before she hangs up.



LYNN

“NOW DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR NANNA?” Nanna says as I hang up with a smile on my face.

“Yeah, I guess you were right. I just don’t get why he hasn’t called until now. I was sure he was angry with me or something,” I say into my bowl as I return to sitting.

I had been pacing the entire call. I wanted to call Trevor as soon as the plane landed, but I didn’t know if he would answer. It would have broken my heart if he hadn’t.

“It was good to hear his voice. I can’t wait to see him. Do you think Daddy is going to lose it?”

“I don’t care if he does. My son is being a stubborn old goat if I’ve ever seen one. I want to see you happy.

“Trevor Monroe makes you happy. I know that. Your mama knows that, and his mama knows that. Gloria has already purchased you a wedding gift.”

“Really?” I say and begin to squirm in my seat.

I wonder if I’m chasing a pipe dream. Maybe I should be here planning my wedding to the man who asked me to be his wife. I love Trev and I miss him so much.

Nanna covers my hand with a knowing look on her face. “Yes, she did, but don’t let that rush you. You two have plenty of time to get there. Nothing needs to be rushed.”

She pats my hand and gives me a bright smile. I squelch the panic that begins to rise. I know our moms are pulling for us, but I still don't know if I'm ready. I don't want to rush into anything and have it blow up in our faces in a year or two.

"Thanks, Nanna. You always know just what to say."

"You're welcome, Babycakes. Now tell me all about New York and this big fancy record contract you've got going."

"Ugh, I don't know about big and fancy. I've been in limbo for months. I hate all the waiting. I do a song and we wait.

"I rerecord that song the way they ask me to and we wait some more. I'm starting to think Elise is right. They don't know what to do with me."

"And Nashville didn't work out?"

"No." I shake my head. "Daddy didn't like something about it. Someone or something rubbed him the wrong way. My gut told me to follow his instincts on that one."

"Stubborn as all get-out, but his instincts have always been sharp."

"Yeah, I know."

"He's not using his instincts with Trev, Cakes. He's using his broken heart."

"Yeah, I know that too."

CHAPTER 41



*F*riendly Advice

Lynn

I KNIT my brows as I stare at Cody. He's watching Elise as she makes her way to the restroom. When she's out of sight, he turns to me quickly.

"I want to ask you something," he rushes out.

"Okay."

"I... I sort of got Elise a Christmas gift. She's been so much fun to hang out with. I wanted to give her something that says... you know. 'Thanks for being my holiday roommate,' but also, 'Um, hey. I... I like you a lot and I want to do all the things we've been doing as a group but as a couple.' Would you mind giving me your opinion?"

I chew on my lip. Elise likes Cody, but there's a little problem. Her family wouldn't approve.

That's why she asked me to come on this date with them. She's too embarrassed to tell Cody why she always invites me along when he asks her out. She sort of fell for him over Thanksgiving break.

"What? What's wrong?" he asks nervously.

I shake my head. "It's nothing. Show me what you got for her," I say.

He wipes a hand across his forehead then looks toward the restrooms before hurriedly pulling out a small jewelry box. My heart leaps into my throat. Elise isn't ready for...

"Oh, it's earrings," I say as I release a breath.

"You hate them."

"No, no. Those are gorgeous. She's going to love them. Do you plan to give them to her before you guys head back to New York?"

"I was thinking of giving them to her on the flight. My boss is sending his private jet for me. I want to impress her."

Cody didn't want to totally miss both Thanksgiving and Christmas with his family. He was able to get away for a few days, but he'll have to return just before Christmas. Elise tagged along because she didn't feel comfortable staying in the apartment alone, no matter how much Cody told her it was fine.

"You're such a nice guy, Cody. I wish you guys all the best. Give them to her. I think she'll love them."

"Yeah?"

I nod. "Yeah."

He leans across the table and pulls me into a hug. I give him a squeeze and pull away as I see Elise step from the bathroom and begin to make her way back to us.



TREVOR

I'VE BEEN in such a good mood since talking to Lynn earlier. I can't wait until Saturday to see her. I'm not going to lie. I hope I get to pull her aside to kiss her lips and hold her in my arms, if even for a single moment.

"You're walking like your ass is on fire," I tease Tom.

“It’s the holidays. The bar will be filled with girls who aren’t from around here. I want to get there before all the prime choices are snatched up,” he replies.

I shake my head and Cliff scoffs on my other side. Tom has been single for a while. I can’t begrudge him for wanting to hook up. Hell, I haven’t had sex since the last time I was with Lynn at the house.

If I can get her to myself, I plan to make up for lost time. A smile comes to my face as I think of the sounds she makes in the throes of passion. I can’t wait to look deep into her eyes as I thrust into her.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” I bite out as I stop in my tracks before the restaurant we’re walking past.

The smile falls from my face and my nostrils flare. I would never lie to Lynn like this. I had truly wanted to see her and spend time with her—I guess that was just me.

“What? What just happened?” Tom asks, placing a hand on my forearm.

“She lied to me. She said she had plans with friends.” I point through the window. “That’s not plans with friends. That’s dinner with fucking Cody Billings. What the fuck?” I snarl.

I’m looking at her sitting in a fancy restaurant at a table with Cody. I can’t believe my eyes. Hurt doesn’t even begin to describe how I feel.

“Trev, I’m sure there’s a logical explanation for this. Calm down,” Cliff says.

Cliff’s words are lost on me as I watch Billings pull out a small jewelry box and open it, facing Lynn. She stares for a moment. I wait with bated breath for her reaction.

Then she nods her head. Billings leans in to pull her into his embrace.

“Whoa, hold on now. You back away from this window. We don’t need a repeat of what happened in Paris,” Tom says, pulling me away from it.

I spin on my heels and storm off in the direction of the bar we were heading to. My fists are clenched at my sides to keep me from turning around and beating the shit out of Billings. Did he wait for my girl to get to New York to steal her from me?

What the hell is Lynn thinking? I love that woman with everything I am. How could she do this?

“Trev, I don’t believe that was what you think.”

“I should go back there and find out,” I bite out.

“Aw, hell naw. I’m not bailing your ass out of jail tonight. I want to go to this bar and have a good time. Let’s have a beer. You can calm down. Then tomorrow, we’ll find out what all that’s about,” Tom says.

“He’s right, Trev. I’ll buy the first round,” Cliff says.

I grunt and make my way into the bar. A group of our old high school friends releases a cheer from the back corner. I head over in that direction with a scowl on my face.

I KNOW I’ve had way too much to drink. I can’t get the image of Billings with Lynn out of my head. After my first few drinks, I went from wondering what I did wrong to trying to drown my thoughts completely.

Maybe I’ve been going about this all wrong. If I stay single and focus on football, I can play for ten years and start my construction company after that. The more I mull the thought over, the more it sounds right.

“Why do I even bother coming out?” Cliff slurs beside me.

“Because you need to be around people. You can’t tuck yourself away. You still have so much to do,” Roger says to him.

I grunt in agreement. I’m happy to have someone here to tell him what I’ve been telling him for months. Cliff has been spiraling out since his daddy died.

“That’s not true. I died the night she did. I have nothing left.”

“Look who just walked in,” Blaine croons.

I turn my head lazily. A groan leaves me as I see Corinne walk in with Donna. Turning back to my drink, I toss it back.

I should toss some money down and leave now, but I’m not drunk enough and Tom is my ride. Instead of leaving, I head to the bar for another beer and two shots of whiskey.

Once I have my drinks, I head off to the other side of the bar to be alone with my thoughts. I don’t miss that Corinne has sidled up next to Cliff. I blink and shake my head.

I should get up and go save my cousin, I should, but I can’t. Those last two shots may have done the job I was looking for. The pain isn’t searing as much.

I’m starting to feel numb. I prefer it this way. I asked Lynn to marry me and she said no.

Billings asks her and she gives him a yes? What the fuck? Am I not good enough for her?

I begin to mutter to myself as I sit in the booth alone. For a while, I think I’m going to be left to rant and sulk to myself. However, as I should’ve known, Donna slinks her ass right over and slides into the booth beside me.

“Hey, Trev,” she purrs.

“Donna.”

“What are you doing over here all by yourself?”

“Need some space to process,” I mutter.

“Need a listening ear?”

I’m almost tempted to take her up on that offer, but it doesn’t feel right talking to her about Lynn. I laugh drunkenly as I think about how Lynn wouldn’t like Donna. I could see Lynn losing her temper with her real quick.

“Nope. I’m good. I don’t want to talk about it.”

She places her hand on my thigh, close enough to brush my cock. I look at her and lift a brow. A voice in the back of my head warns me to run. This is how she always gets me.

However, some guy drops to one knee across the bar and proposes to his girlfriend. I see red all over again. I stand, pushing Donna to get up.

She stands with a bewildered look on her face. I grab her by the elbow and lead her toward the exit. She stumbles along beside me, but I'm too angry to care or slow down.

“Where are you staying?” I bite out.

“I have a room at the...”

I tune out, not listening to a word she says once I realize she's staying in a hotel. That's perfect. I can fuck this bitter feeling away and forget all about Lynn, as she forgot about me.

CHAPTER 42



Clear Head

Trevor

I WAKE with a sharp intake of air. My head feels like someone took a sledgehammer to it. I palm my face and groan.

Immediately, I know I'm not home in my own bed. The buzzing sound that woke me sounds again, gaining my attention. I groan again and reach for the device from the nightstand.

When I see the name of the caller, a scowl comes to my face. Then, it all comes back to me. Lynn and Billings at the restaurant.

The betrayal raises the bitterness within once again. However, I want answers from Lynn. She owes me that much.

As I have that thought, my focus goes to where I am. I turn to look at the bed I just sat up from. Lying there fast asleep is Donna in her bra and panties.

I bare my teeth and berate myself for being an idiot. Looking down at myself, I note my shirt is gone. I still have my jeans on, but my shoes and socks are gone too.

I was blackout drunk last night. What the fuck did I do? I run a frustrated hand through my hair and bite out a curse.

Shame fills me. I may have been angry with Lynn last night, but I didn't want to drag anyone into that. Nor did I

want to sleep with someone else without talking to Lynn to get the truth and gain some real closure.

“Great, just great, Trev,” I growl to myself.

I get up like the bed is on fire. I need to get dressed and get the hell out of here. I don't want Donna to get any ideas of us being in a relationship again. Still, as I get dressed, my conscience starts to eat me up.

I don't want to leave without a word, but if I stay, she's going to cling to me. Deciding not to be a complete asshole, I notice a legal pad next to Donna's phone on the hotel room desk. I move to it and grab up the pen next to it.

Blowing out a breath, I think my words over carefully. I want her to know I'm sorry about last night. I didn't mean for it to happen, but I'm done with this relationship.

If things are over with Lynn, I still don't want Donna. I let my anger get the best of me and that was a huge mistake. She deserves better.

I finish the letter quickly and drop the pen back down. Glancing at Donna once more, I sigh then leave the room.

Way to fucking go, Trev.

CHAPTER 43



*K*idding Me?

Donna

I WAKE with a smile on my face and turn toward the other side of the bed. My eyes fly open as I find the sheets cool and the bed empty. I can still smell his cologne.

I sit up and look around. Trevor can be so stubborn. I should have known he wouldn't be here when I woke. I didn't mean for him to wake before me.

I growl and punch the bed. Nothing is going the way I want it to. I'm starting to think I might need to find a new target.

"What the fuck," I hiss into the empty room.

I push a hand into the front of my hair and stare at the empty bed beside me. I used the little money my mother left me to pay for four years of college for a degree I'll never use.

I loathe the idea of asking my dad for a damn thing. Collen doesn't have a choice. I couldn't be his guardian and land a husband. No man would want to be saddled with a one-year-old—my little brother or not.

Kids change everything. I thought my father's trophy wife was going to put him out once my mother died and she found out about Collen. Nope, one look at my little brother and all was forgiven as far as I know.

Anger fills me and I jump out of bed and storm over to the desk where I left my phone. I go to snatch the device up, but the legal pad grabs my attention.

I read the note Trevor left me and lock my jaw. The more I read, the angrier I get. I'm out of money, out of time, and he thinks he's going to just drop me.

"Ha," I scoff, rolling the bitter taste in my mouth. "It's too late, Monroe. I've invested too much time in you. This isn't over."

I go to crumble up the note and toss it in the trash. Then I think better of it. This might come in handy. I tear the letter from the pad and tuck it away in my purse.

Then I retrieve my phone to call in a favor. I'm not a fan of my dad's, but his country-ass family has come in handy. I spotted Corinne's potential usefulness early on.

"Hey. How did it go?" she says as soon as she answers the call.

"Not at all as planned. Did you get it? Can we move to plan B?"

"Oh, I got it. Like taking candy from a baby, but Donna. That girl I told you about from Paris?"

"The best friend's sister. What about her?"

"I don't think they broke up. If they didn't, you can forget about Trev. It's not going to happen."

"You let me worry about that. Besides"—I grin into the phone—"kids change everything. You just do what I asked and I'll handle all the rest."

"Okay, I just wanted to give you a heads-up. How soon can you get here? We can't wait too long."

"I'm on my way," I hang up and head for the bathroom for a quick shower.

I hold my head high. I always get what I want. From that summer when I first met Trevor and saw him in action, I knew he was what I wanted. No matter what I had to do.

“The dealer still has cards, baby. We’re not over until I say we are,” I purr to myself as I step into the hot shower.

I will not be denied or tossed aside. I want a wealthy husband and I’d prefer for him to be breathing and able to get it up when I say I do. Not some old perv who smells of Bengay.

“Donna Alice Monroe. I love the sound of that,” I squeal.

CHAPTER 44



*Y*ou're Wrong *Lynn*

AS I SIT on my bed in my room, I blink back the tears as I stare down at my phone. Trevor hasn't answered one of my calls. It's been two days since he called me. I've tried him each day since.

It feels like the last five months all over again. Elise has been trying to cheer me up. She and Maggie gave me a makeover and we did a little photo shoot.

Then we recorded me playing a new song. All of which Elise posted to my Myspace account, saying the new look was perfect for the song and showed the world the direction I should go in. All of that helped to keep me from obsessing over Trev and why he hasn't answered my calls or tried to call me back.

My phone rings and my heart fills with hope. However, as I see the number on the screen, I know it's not Trev. It's a New York number.

When I left New York, my career was more up in the air than it's ever been. No one has any answers for me and I'm starting to feel like this will be over before it so much as begins. My heart sinks and I answer the phone in a melancholy mood.

"Hello."

“Is this Lynn Galveston?”

“Yes, this is she. How can I help you?”

“This is Amanda. Marv asked me to give you a call. Can you hold the line for him?”

“Sure. Of course.”

“Just a moment. He’ll be right with you,” Amanda says.

I hold for the record exec who signed me. Marv is in his mid to late thirties. He has a welcoming smile and a pleasant, calming voice.

“Lynn, how are you, my girl? How’s Texas treating you?”

“Hey, Marv. It’s all right. I’m happy to be with my family.”

“Well, I hope you don’t get too comfortable. I listened to that song you posted. Now, that’s what we’re talking about. You look great and the song is amazing,” he croons smoothly.

“Really?” I say more excitedly.

“Absolutely, I don’t say anything I don’t mean. You’re all the buzz around the office. Bernie has them mocking up an album cover and an entire campaign as we speak. This is it, kid.”

“That’s so awesome,” I breathe.

“I was hoping you would say that because we’re going to need you back here in New York ASAP. Sorry, love, but the vacation needs to be cut short. They’re bringing in the big guns to get this one out there while it’s hot.

“So what do you say? Can you get that gorgeous face back here like yesterday?”

Cody comes to mind. He and Elise are heading back later tonight. I hope I can catch a ride on his boss’s private jet with them. Being that it’s the holiday, I know flights are probably packed.

“I need to make a few calls. Can I get right back to you?”

“Yes, yes, just make sure I know what’s going on in the next hour,” he says, not once offering to get me back.

I roll my eyes. I'm learning so much about the music business. The more they spend, the more I owe. It's better not to ask for things.

"I'll call you back as soon as I have an answer."

This is a bittersweet moment. The first thing I want to do as soon as I hang up is call Trev. My heart sinks as I know he's not going to answer.

I wish I knew why. I shake the thought off and dial Cody to see if I can hitch a ride on his flight. His phone rings a few times before he answers.

"Hey, Cakes, what's up?"

"Hey Cody, are you busy?"

"I'm out ice-skating with Elise," he replies happily.

I smile. They didn't invite me along. I figure Elise followed my advice and finally told Cody where her reluctance was coming from.

If he's willing to still pursue her with all the details, he's a keeper. I shake my head and smile wider. I'm happy for them.

"I need a favor. The label needs me back in New York ASAP. Can I fly back with you guys? Will that be a problem?"

"Not at all. I'll send a car for you. Can you be ready by six?"

"Yeah, I'll be ready. Thanks so much, Cody."

"No problem. Anytime. My boss totally won't care."

"I appreciate this so much."

"You know how I feel. Anything I can do. I'll see you later."

"Later, Cody. Tell Elise I said hi. Have fun," I say and hang up.

I release a long breath. Now to tell my parents I'm leaving. I'll miss dinner tonight at Nanna's, but I get the feeling Trev isn't going to show.

I push those thoughts down and get to making calls and packing. This could be it, the moment I've been dreaming of. I can't wait to tell Elise she was right.

"I'm going to be a star," I sing as I pack.



TREVOR

I WASN'T GOING to come to Agatha's for dinner. I've thought about it over and over and almost didn't. However, I won't be able to rest if I don't get some closure.

"Hey there, handsome," Nanna croons as I step into her kitchen.

This may be a different house, but her warmth still permeates the place. It still has the welcoming vibes I've become accustomed to since I was a boy.

Although, when she looks into my eyes and cups my cheeks, I almost feel ashamed. She gives me a sad look. Instantly, I know Lynn isn't here.

"She's not here, is she?" I murmur.

Nanna shakes her head. "No, she had to head back. The label needed her to return. They're ready to work on her album."

I drop my gaze to the floor and nod. I feel the bile rise in my throat. I'll never know why she chose Billings over me.

"I'm happy for her. First, an engagement, then her music dreams take off. She deserves to be happy."

"You proposed?" Darla, Lynn's mom, gasps as she steps into the kitchen. Moses is right behind her, glaring at me.

"No, ma'am. Well, not this time. I'm talking about Billings," I murmur.

Moses folds his arms across his chest. "You talking about Cody?" he snorts. "That boy ain't engaged to my baby. Why

on earth would you think that?”

I shrug. “I saw them at dinner the other night. It looked like he gave her a ring.”

Darla and Agatha burst into laughter. Moses shakes his head and gives an actual smile. I look at them all in confusion.

“What am I missing?”

“Boy, I never thought I’d say this to you, but you’re an idiot. Cakes has never looked at Cody Billings as more than a friend. That much even I can see. Now you... you, I might have to bury in an unmarked grave to keep that girl away from you,” Moses says and shakes his head.

“You’re the reason she’s been walking around with a long face. I thought it was about the music, but she still looked crestfallen once the call came.”

“Trev, she’s getting on a private jet right now with Cody to go back to New York. You should call her to clear things up. I promise you, you didn’t see what you think you did,” Darla says gently.

I turn to look Moses in his eyes. He only glares back at me. Clenching my fists at my sides, I make my decision and go with it.

“Mr. Galveston, sir. You’ve been like family to me all my life. I’ve looked up to you. Protected your daughters like they were my own sisters.

“Like my own daddy, there’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you. The night Pook... that night. Cakes was with me.

“Pook was going to talk to you about us. She knew I had feelings for Cakes and Cakes had feelings for me. We were at the cabin eating our cupcakes like we always do.

“I hadn’t touched her. We kissed for the first time that day. That’s it. Still, when I saw your hurt and anger, I took that on me.

“I didn’t want you angry with Cakes. You all had enough on your shoulders. If I could take the burden for y’all, it was the least I could do.”

“Trevor,” Darla says with a shaky voice.

“Hold on, ma’am. This is what I should have done before taking Cakes to Paris. I love your daughter.

“I hadn’t intended for all the lies. I didn’t take her to Paris to take advantage. I genuinely thought it would help her heal. And it did.

“Falling deeper in love with her, that just happened. Sir, your girls have been two of the most important people in my life. Most days, I’m lost without Pook, and now, without Cakes, I’m plain devastated.

“My food don’t taste right. I haven’t won a game this season that hasn’t felt like some hollow feat. I sit in class staring into space, not hearing a word my professors say. It’s a wonder I’m passing.

“I say all this to say. I know I messed up. Lynn and I made a lot of mistakes, but I would really love your blessing to date your daughter in hopes that the next time I ask her to marry me, she says yes,” I finish, feeling my face flame.

“Finally, you understand. Now that’s the man who I know you are. You and I will talk some more, but Darla is right.

“You need to talk to Cakes. No use in having my blessing if she doesn’t want to talk to you,” Moses says, finally giving me a genuine smile.

“Thank you, sir,” I mutter and tug my phone from my pocket.

I call Lynn’s phone and it goes straight to voice mail. Closing my eyes, I groan and palm my face. I need to talk to her. She can’t leave like this again.

“You might still be able to catch the plane before they close the door and take off,” Moses says, staring down at his watch. “Want me to take you?”

“No, sir. I have my truck outside. Nanna, I’ll take a rain check. I was looking forward to dinner and your pies,” I say as I put my phone away and turn to dash for the door.

“You’re family. My door is always open to you Monroes.
Be careful, honey. Drive safely.”

CHAPTER 45



*B*link of an Eye

Lynn

AS WE SIT on the jet, waiting for takeoff, I press my fingers to my temples and rub. The jet is stunning and full of luxury. The gold embroidered *Ms* on the seats makes me wonder who Cody's boss really is.

Whoever this guy is, he's from money. This isn't just some rented jet. Cody has stepped into a bright future. I'm proud of him.

"Are you okay? Do you need anything?" Cody asks from across the plane where he's sitting with Elise.

"I'm fine."

"You sure?" Elise says with concern in her voice.

"Um, I don't think so. Can I be honest with you guys?"

"Sure, I'm here to listen whenever you need," Cody says.

"You already know the deal with me. What's going on, honey?" Elise says.

I blow out a breath. My stomach begins to twist in knots. I look down into my lap as if I'll find clarity there.

"I don't know if this is the right thing. What if all the waiting was a sign? What if I've been making mistakes one after the other and this is where I belong?"

What if I'm failing Pook?

That's the one question I'm unable to voice. A series of events all started after Brooke's death. I can't help wondering if I'm missing all the signs leading me to the best version of my life.

"Is this about Monroe?" Cody asks.

"No. Well, yeah, sort of. I feel like I'm standing at this crossroads, and what I do today will shape our lives together. I left him to face my daddy on his own. That could mean the end of us forever," I say softly.

"Or you can be off to become a famous singer and your ex-boyfriend already ruined things by not answering your calls. Don't get me wrong, I love you guys together, but so much has happened. Maybe leaving is for the best."

I rub my chest. Her words make sense to my head, but my heart aches. Something isn't right. I just can't put my finger on it.

"I guess you're right," I murmur.

"Or... you can step off the plane and turn your phone back on. Give him one more call. We'll wait."

"Really, Cody? I don't want to be a burden or cause trouble with your boss."

"He's cool. He's big on family and you're mine. So he'll be happy to help out."

"Thank you so much, Cody."

I unbuckle my seat belt and rush for the door that's still open. Once off the plane, I jog down the stairs as fast as I can. I need to hear his voice. I can't fly away without hearing his voice.

I dial Trev's phone and pray he answers me. We can fix things if we can talk. I know we can.

I bite my thumbnail as the line rings. Just when I think it's going to go to voice mail, the line is picked up. I close my eyes and breathe.

“Hello, darlin’,” he croons.

“Trev,” I sigh.

Then the line drops. I look at the phone and frown. Did he hang up? Was the connection bad? I try to call him again, but it goes straight to voice mail.

I hang up without leaving a message. Then I try again and again. I get nothing.

“Excuse me, Miss Galveston. I’m sorry, but we’re preparing for takeoff. I’m going to need you to board the plane,” the private stewardess says from the top of the stairs.

I’m completely heartbroken. My shoulders sag as I head back to my seat. I fight the tears burning the backs of my eyes.

“Did you reach him?” Cody asks.

“Yes and no. The line dropped. Then it went to voice mail when I tried to call back. I think it’s really over,” I say as I fight not to sob.

Elise moves quickly to switch seats and sit next to me. I burst into tears the moment she pulls me into her arms. She tightens her arms around me.

“It’s all going to be okay,” she whispers.

I want to believe her, but something in my heart tells me that’s not true.



TREVOR

I’M PUSHING this truck harder than I ever have. I need to get to her. Swallowing hard, I can’t help wondering how far I took things the other night.

I send up a prayer that Lynn will forgive me. Ducking to look out the windshield, I see the storm clouds rolling in. Big fat raindrops start to fall, causing me to curse.

I shrug it off. Nothing is going to keep me from catching that plane before it takes off. I press down harder on the gas, needing to get this thing to move.

My phone rings. I glance toward it, wondering if I should answer. Snatching it up, I see it's Donna. Not in the mood to go back and forth with her, I toss the phone back down. However, it misses the cup holder and tumbles to the floor.

I bite out a curse and ignore the darn thing. I'm almost there. My heart races as I feel like I'm closing in on the only thing I want.

My phone begins to ring again. When I glance over, I see it's not Donna this time. It's Lynn. I grimace.

My gut tells me I can't allow another of her calls to go without answering. Looking at the road ahead of me, the path is clear.

My arms are long, I should be able to snag the phone quick. Quickly, I fuss with my seat belt and lean over to grab it. I breathe a sigh of relief as my fingertips touch the device.

I grab it up and answer. "Hello, darlin'." I can't hold in the smile on my lips.

"Trev," she breathes.

Just as I open my mouth to say something, bright blinding lights fill the cabin of the truck. I turn toward the light and my eyes go wide. It all happens so fast.

I drop the phone to grip the steering wheel, trying to avoid the collision. I know I'm too late. My body tenses for impact. The horn from the other truck blares.

"No," I bellow.

I close my eyes as the truck slams into mine. My stomach feels like it's about to pitch as my vehicle starts to roll. Glass shatters all around me.

The truck flips a few times before settling. My head is pounding and my body feels like I was run over by the truck and crushed. I groan and one thing passes through my lips before I black out.

“Lynn, baby, I love you.”

CHAPTER 46



Goodbye
Lynn

A month later...

I'M MOVING FRANTICALLY around my new condo, which the label helped me secure. This place is over the top. I still can't believe it's mine. Three bedrooms, three baths, a gym, and everything state of the art.

Things have been going so well. I've finished my first album and all the songs have been approved and locked in. All the artwork has been finalized as well.

My first single, the song I posted to Myspace is a hit and has been charting all month. Life would be great if not for the bomb that's been dropped on me today.

All this time, I've thought Trev was ignoring my calls. I was under the impression he was radio silent because he didn't want to talk to me. Boy, was I wrong.

Cody, Elise, and my family have kept Trevor's accident from me for four whole weeks. I've been a mess since Maggie allowed it to slip this morning as we talked about her joining me here for a while.

I've been racing around to make arrangements to head back home since. Marv is frustrated. This isn't really the time for me to take off.

He's not happy, but he's giving me a few days to handle this "family emergency." I'll take that. Hopefully, I'll be back home tonight—if I can get the heck out of here.

I swipe my tears as I toss things into my suitcase. For a whole month, Trev has been in the hospital and I knew nothing. I'm so pissed at everyone. I know they mean well, but someone should have said something.

"Um, Cakes." I look up at Elise and glare.

She's been staying with me at my new place. If I didn't love her, I would have asked her to leave this morning after I spoke with Maggie. She holds her hands up in surrender.

"This came for you. I thought you'd want to see it," she says, handing over a letter.

I swipe under my nose angrily. Why couldn't she do the same with the information about Trevor and his car accident? I mean, not one of them thought this was important enough for me to know.

I snatch the letter and my hands start to tremble as I see it's from Trevor. I rush to pull the letter out of the envelope, my hands shaking in the process.

I scan the sheet of paper, dropping to my knees as I get to the end. I didn't think I could feel any more pain and hurt than I already have in my life, but this, this is enough to cut me to my core.

"Oh, Cakes, what's going on?"

I shake my head, unable to speak. I don't have words for this. He promised me forever. What did I do so wrong? How could he break my heart like this?

Elise takes the letter from me and murmurs as she reads it aloud to herself.

"I'm sorry to do this, but I want to consider your feelings and be honest with you. This is never going to work. We're not right for each other.

"I never meant to lead you on and give you false hope. I've known for a while this thing between us isn't going anywhere.

I tried to get that through to you.

“I probably should have sat you down and talked to you, but I don’t know if that would have done any good. So this is goodbye. Please accept my wishes. Don’t call, don’t text, don’t contact me anymore.

“I want to make this a clean break and think this should be our last encounter. I wish you well and hope you find what you’re looking for. Trevor,” Elise finishes reading.

“What the fuck?” she growls. “This reads like you two are fucking strangers. This doesn’t even make sense. He gets out of the hospital and this is the first shit he decides to write and send to you? Un-fucking-believable.”

I shake my head. “It’s okay. I’ll respect his wishes. I’m not going home after all.

“I’ll block his number and let my family know I don’t want to hear about him or know anything about his life.”

“Lynn, something isn’t right,” Elise tries.

“No,” I bellow. “That’s his fucking handwriting. It’s over. He doesn’t want me. Let it go. I am.”

I curl into a ball on the floor and hold myself tightly. I’ve lost more than a boyfriend. I’ve lost a friend, a dream.

What did I do? Why has he become so cold? Will I survive this? Because it doesn’t feel like it.

“Daddy was right,” I sob into my knees as I lie on the floor.

As much as I wish I could turn back time, I don’t think it would matter. To think I was going to give all this up for him. Now I’m nothing to him, not even good enough to say those words to my face.

Elise comes to sit beside me and starts to stroke my hair. “I’m so sorry, Cakes.”

“Promise me something,” I whimper.

“Anything, you know that.”

“Promise me. Promise you won’t try to contact him or fix this. I want to forget about him. I’ve hurt enough.”

“We won’t even mention his name anymore. Consider him erased.”

“Thanks, Elise.”

“I’m here for whatever you need. You’re stuck with me, kid. I love you like my own.”

“I love you too.”

CHAPTER 47



Setting Up Options

Donna

Four months later...

I'VE BEEN WORKING Trevor Monroe since freshman year. Only death would have set him free from me. Too bad he didn't get that lucky.

He fucked up his draft chances, but I still have hope. I was so focused on him getting to the draft I hadn't been listening to Corinne when she talked about the Monroe oil and livestock wealth. This still could work.

Thank goodness for insurance plans. One drunk night and my future is set. Trevor will never know what hit him. I'm almost positive the baby will look just like him. The Monroes have strong genes. I've thought this one through.

"I wonder what team he would have ended up on. I would have loved to live in LA. Oh, maybe New York or Atlanta would have signed him," I muse to myself.

I would've done any of those places. Anywhere but here in Texas. Although, the ranching and oil business seems to have done well for this family by the looks of this place.

Maybe when Trevor finishes rehab, he can land on a team next year. He's such a great player. They could still want him, right?

Ugh, three or four years and then he could retire from football and take over this place. Gah, but all this mud and horse shit is bound to work my last nerve. Maybe there's a way to make this work and never have to step foot in this place.

"There's a lot of money to be had," I murmur and pat my belly.

"Donna?"

I roll my eyes as I hear the country twang in his voice. Don't get me wrong, Trevor has it too. It's just Cliff seems to be a bit too country for me.

I turn to him with a sweet smile. "Hey, Cliff, how are you, sugar?"

"I'm fine. What are you doing here?" he asks and looks around as if someone's going to jump out from someplace. Then his eyes drop to my belly and grow wide.

At five months, I'm starting to pop. This is the perfect time for me to reveal to Trevor that we're having a little one.

"I came to meet Trevor's family. He and I need to have a talk."

Cliff rubs the back of his neck. "He's not the greatest company these days—"

"I'm not worried about that. I have just the thing to cheer him up." I place a hand on my little bump and stroke it.

"Um, okay, if you say so."

"I'll see you later then, Cousin Cliff," I sing and wave, dismissing him.

"All right then, see you later," he says and scurries off.

I turn to look back out at the horses and turn my nose up. Nope, this ranch life isn't for me. I'm so glad Trevor has talent. I'm more suited to be a football wife and I'll do anything I have to to secure that future.

"Even tell a few lies," I say under my breath with a smile.



TREVOR

“HEY, Trev. Can we come in here and color with you?” Ann asks as she and Brad peek into the living room where I’m sitting.

“Sure, come on in here,” I say, instantly feeling bad.

Everyone’s been walking on eggshells around me. Not that I’m not giving them reason to. Yeah, I have a bad attitude these days.

It seems like Lynn has blocked my calls and I have no idea why. Initially, after I came to, I asked everyone not to say a word. I wanted her to focus on her music, not me.

Things have really taken off for her. I didn’t want to be a distraction in all of that. The Lynn I knew would have dropped everything to make sure I was all right. I had planned to call her myself once I was out of the hospital and able to talk to her without a ton of beeping machines to give me away.

If not for my injuries and rehab sessions, I would have been on a fucking plane to find out what the heck is going on. No one will tell me anything. I’m annoyed as hell and pissed off at the world.

Every time I turn on the radio or TV, I hear her voice or see her pretty face. I’m so proud of her. However, I know her too well and something ain’t right.

It’s in her eyes. She may smile for the cameras, but it never reaches her eyes. I know it’s not because of her daddy keeping us apart. The Galvestons won’t give me any information, yet they seem to be as baffled as I am.

“Here, you can color my Thor,” Brad says, pulling me from my thoughts and handing me the page he ripped from his coloring book.

I hate the cautious sound of his voice and the wariness I feel coming from them both. I glance at Ann and she's peeking at me through the curtains of her blonde hair. I release a sigh and tug them both into my sides as best I can.

I kiss the top of each of their heads. Ann giggles as I'm able to tickle her. Brad wraps his arms around me and gives me a tight hug.

I feel like shit. I need to get myself together. My moodiness is taking a toll on my family.

"I have an idea. I haven't been on my walk today. You guys want to come with me?"

Once a day, I go for a walk on the ranch, pushing myself to go farther and faster than the day before. When I do see Lynn, I want to be strong enough to lift her in my arms and hold her tight.

I need to be able to stand in the front row where she can see me cheering louder than anyone else. As it stands, I get fatigued and stiff after a half hour. I'm not going to complain because I'm lucky to be alive.

I've seen pictures of my truck. I know someone up there is watching over me. As I have that thought, I make the silent promise to be and do better.

"Yeah, come on. We'll help you do your stretches too," Brad croons excitedly.

I get the feeling coloring was Ann's idea and Brad was only going along to hang out with me. I laugh to myself as I look into their sparkling eyes. I wish I could help them take their time in life and remember to enjoy it.

I sigh. No matter what happens when I finally get to Lynn, I want to see her happy. I want the life we dreamed of, but most of all, I want her to feel happy and loved.

My phone buzzes, grabbing my attention from my thoughts. I snatch it up to look at the incoming text from Cliff.

Cliff: *Holy shit. Incoming trouble.*

Me: *What?*

I wait for him to reply. However, as he types, my world falls apart.

“Brad, Ann, why don’t you two go outside and play for a bit? I’ll tell you when to come back in,” my daddy calls into the room.

I look up and my blood boils. Standing between my pale-faced parents is none other than Donna. A pregnant Donna.

Lynn, baby, I didn’t think I slept with her. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for us to end this way.

CHAPTER 48



E mpty

Lynn

Present...

“YOU GUYS SOUND SO perfect for each other. Are you sure that letter was from him?”

“Maggie and Elise used to say the same thing. But I know his handwriting. He wrote that letter. Then his girlfriend was pregnant and they got married.”

I shrug my shoulder. All of the pain returns with a vengeance. I still have that letter.

Any time I start to feel homesick and think I might step foot in Texas, I pull it out and read it. It’s my reminder of how cruel life and love can be.

“Well, here’s what I’m thinking. You need to go home. I’d prefer you have some closure other than that letter, but I’m not going to tell you to disturb a man’s union and home.

“What I will suggest is a full makeover and the best wardrobe you can pack. We’re not going to Texas for him, but if you happen to run into him, thoughts of what he let get away should plague him for the rest of his life,” Matthew says and grins.

“You know, I don’t know what I would do without you. You’re the best.”

I stand and he tugs me into his warm embrace. His warmth is comforting. I'm grateful for the day Cody introduced us. How did Cody put it?

A gift from his boss. Well, Matthew has been the best gift ever. I'm going to need my support system to make it through this.

I'm not the same. My heart hasn't been wild and free in years. One thing I know for certain, I'm going to run into Trevor Monroe. I just hope I survive the encounter.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Blue Saffire, award-winning, bestselling author of over sixty contemporary romance novels and novellas, writes with the intention to touch the heart and the mind. Blue hooks, weaves, and loops multiple series, keeping you engaged in her worlds. Blue writes for her own publishing company Perceptive Illusions as Blue Saffire as well as Royal Blue.

Blue and her husband live in a house filled with laughter and creativity, in Long Island, NY. Both working hard to build the Blue brand and cultivate their love for the arts. Creative is their family affair.

Blue holds an MBA in Marketing and Project Management, as well as an MED in Instructional Technology and Curriculum Design. She is also an NLP Master Practitioner.



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This series has lived in my head for so long, I'm so happy to see this book come to fruition. It's even better than I had imagined. I love Trevor and I can't wait for you to see how his HEA happens. I wanted to try my hand at a romantic drama and here it is. I know, I know. There was a lot of drama. LOL. We're headed back to our regularly scheduled program.

Again, thank you for your support and patience. It's important I take care of me and I've been doing so. Books used to come before me. Now, it's me than these books. I find I love them more this way. Thank you for your emails, inbox messages, and comments on social. Your encouragement goes a long way.

I thank my husband for always having my back. I appreciate you so much for not allowing me to give up. Thank you for listening when I get stuck and for ignoring me when I want to trash the whole thing. LOL. You're the best.

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Next! Let's get Trev that happily ever after.

THANK YOU

Wait, there is more to come! You can stay updated with my latest releases, learn more about me, the author, and be a part of contests by subscribing to my newsletter at

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If you enjoyed *Wild Hearts*, I'd love to hear your thoughts and please feel free to leave a review. And when you do, please let me

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