

A RESISTING LOVE NOVELLA

# Ryder

AMAZON BESTSELLING AUTHORS

CHANTAL FERNANDO

DAWN MARTENS

Ryder  
A Resisting Love Novella

Chantal Fernando  
and  
Dawn Martens

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**CHANTAL FERNANDO AND DAWN MARTENS**

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You can find us on Facebook under 'Author Chantal Fernando and Author Dawn Martens'

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# Chapter 1

Ryder

The door buzzes and I stifle a grin. It must be the girl I met last night at the club. Shania? Shanae? Something like that. Performing there has its benefits, and women throwing themselves at me is definitely at the top of the list. She couldn't have arrived at a better time because I could definitely release some tension right about now. I glance over at the couch, maybe we'll start there. I pick up my jeans from the living room floor, not bothering to button them up, and answer the door. The sight that greets me douses any sexual thoughts or ideas I may have had.

"Well, isn't this a surprise," I drawl.

My cousin Tenielle raises her finely arched brow. "Nice to see you, too, Ryder," she says sarcastically.

I grin, already moving forward to embrace her.

"Come here, give me a hug. When did you get back from Europe?" I ask her.

"A couple days ago," she says as she jumps in my arms and hugs me tightly. When she pulls back, I notice two things. One, she has her suitcase with her, and two, she's not alone. I glance over at the girl she's with and realize that she's fucking hot. Her amber colored eyes are currently staring at my bare chest and I think she likes what she sees. I'd be lying if I said the feeling isn't mutual. She also has a much smaller suitcase with her, bright pink and covered with black skulls.

"Ryder, this is my friend, Lexi. Lexi, this is my cousin Ryder," Tee introduces. I glance over at Lexi and take her in. Honey coloured curly hair, golden almost cat-like eyes, and a body made for sin. She must be about 5'6, shorter than my cousin who I know is about 5'10, and she has the perfect hourglass shape figure. Her lips are painted a bright red, but the rest of her face is makeup free. She's wearing a snug pair of denim cut offs, a black strapless top, and pink converses. She looks... cute.

"Are you gonna stand there staring all day, or are you gonna invite us in?" Tee asks dryly. I step back to let them pass, catching a delicious cherry scent when Lexi walks by me.

I glance over at my cousin's bags, then back at her. She gives me her best charming smile, the one that gets her anything she wants.

I know how this one works.

While Layla makes you want to protect her, her older sister, Tenielle, makes you want to hide your valuables and cup your balls. She's one of the hardest girls in my life to protect because she's so damn independent. It frustrates me, but it also makes me proud as hell. She's wearing baggy ripped jeans with a white net top. Black combat boots with lots of buckles are her shoes of choice, and from the looks of it they are the same ones I saw her wearing before she left for Europe a few months back. Her long hair, which was previously black, is now dyed blonde. She has a hoop in her nose, a tongue ring, an eyebrow ring, and various tattoos scattered all over her body. Most people would look at her and think that she's a musician or something, but no, this crazy woman is a lawyer. Yes, a lawyer. That being said, she's yet to find employment in her qualified field. She's too busy travelling the world and breaking hearts.

"So, dad said you just bought a new apartment when I spoke to him last," she glances around, and smiles like she approves. "Lexi and I need a place to crash for a week. Please, Ryder? You won't even notice we're here. Thanks, cuz!"

"I didn't say yes, Tee," I tell her dryly, but I already know my resistance is futile.

"Yeah, but we're family so you can't kick me out." She grins and bats her eyelashes at me. The woman is evil.

"You could stay with your parents? Or Layla?" I suggest in a hopeful voice. I love my cousin to death but living with her may drive me a little insane. I know she wouldn't want to stay with her parents, she and her mother don't exactly see eye to eye. Tee is a free spirit but her mother would rather she stayed in Perth, close to family. I really wouldn't mind her friend spending a little time in my apartment, though.

"I'm avoiding mum and her lectures, and I don't want to interrupt Layla with that man of hers. I haven't even met him, so it would be awkward! That means that you're the lucky one who gets me."

Saying that, she walks off and starts exploring the apartment. I look at Lexi, who has a slight smile on her face, clearly amused by Tenielle's sass.

"Is it okay if we stay? I assumed Tenielle had already asked. Which is apparently not the case," she says dryly.

Fuck, her voice is sexy. Husky and just a little rough. I clear my throat, realizing that I have been standing here staring at her for a few moments too long.

“No worries, of course you guys can stay. You’ll have to share the guest room, though.”

“That’s fine. We’re going to start looking for places straight away,” she says simply.

“It’s no problem, really,” I tell her. My eyes stray behind her, where I notice a guitar case on the floor next to her suitcase.

“You play?” I ask, intrigued. She nods slightly, ducking her head. “I’m impressed. You’ll have to let me hear you sometime,” I say excitedly. Women that play instruments are sexy.

“I’ve heard about your band. Tee says you’re ‘the shit’,” she tells me, her heart shaped cupid bow lips turning up.

I smile smugly. “You should come by and listen to us.” I would love showing her what I do best. Well, what I do second best.

“I think I just might do that,” she says as she absently toys with a lock of her hair. I’m so turned on by that husky voice, it does things to me.

“Do you sing, too?” I ask, curious. She blushes, but I have no idea why. “I guess I’m alright, but I don’t like to sing in public.”

I nod, remembering my own first time on stage. I was nervous as hell but that only lasted for the first song. “Stage fright?”

She shrugs. “Something like that. I’d rather be in the background, playing an instrument. I get nervous as hell singing in public. I did it once, and never again.” She shudders like she’s remembering the moment.

“I’d love to hear you sing, if you’re not too shy. I’m only one man,” I say with a grin. She rolls her eyes and scrunches her nose, which I find completely adorable.

“I’ll think about it,” she says thoughtfully.

“I’m very patient, Lexi,” I say, my eyes not leaving hers.

We both just stare at each other in silence for a few moments. I notice her amber gaze stray to my nipple ring and her breath hitches. Oh yeah, she definitely likes that. I unconsciously take a step closer to her and I watch as she does the same.

“This is going to sound weird, but…” she starts to say, but a knock on my door interrupts her. I throw a scowl in the direction of my door,



annoyed by the interruption.

“Hold that thought,” I say quickly. She nods. I walk the few steps to the door and pull it open, hoping to get rid of whoever it is. I take a step back when a scantily clad blonde jumps into my arms and fuses her lips to mine. I detach her from me as soon as I can, but by then the damage is done. Shit. I totally forgot about the girl coming over. I glance behind me to find Lexi gone. Fuck.

“What are we waiting for, Ryder?” Shania or whatever her name is purrs in my ear. Instead of getting me excited, the sound makes me cringe.

“Change of plans, my cousin is over, so you need to leave,” I tell her in a whisper, gently pushing her towards the door, and closing it shut after she’s past the threshold.

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## Chapter 2

### Lexi

I sit on the guest room bed and watch my friend unpack all of her things like she'll be staying here for a couple of months rather than just a week.

"We need to start looking for a place ASAP, Tee," I tell her. After seeing Ryder with that mysterious blond, clearly we're in the way by being here. I should've known he wouldn't be single. He's too gorgeous to be anything but taken. But seriously, I haven't been this attracted to a man in a long time. Not that it matters, since he's clearly unavailable. I inhale deeply and relax on the bed.

"Yeah, Lexi, we'll start looking tomorrow. Today I just want to relax, I'm tired as hell." I nod in agreement, exhaustion finally catching up to me. We'd flown to Perth after spending a week in Melbourne. Before that we were backpacking in Europe. Now we're back for good or until Tee's wanderlust gets a hold of her again.

I met Tee in Greece and we bonded instantly. She was the new girl at the bar I was working in and I had to show her the ropes. I couldn't believe she was from Perth, too, because most of the Australians I had met over there were from Sydney or Melbourne. The rest is history. I can't really explain it, but we just get each other. She told me she wasn't going to Perth without me, so here I am.

I've heard a lot about Ryder from Tee. From what she said, he's loyal, protective, loving, and incredibly talented. He's a family man, but also a player; he gets around. Apparently, he's a talented musician, well known locally as a bad ass guitarist and front man for his band 'Morning Alliance'. Naturally, that makes him a favourite with the ladies. Whatever moment I thought we had was obviously a figment of my imagination. A girl can dream though, right?

I put my guitar case safely under the bed where Tee won't accidentally step on it. That guitar is the only thing I have from my father, who left us for another woman when I was five. My mother passed away three years ago and I've been nomad ever since. I'm alone. I've been travelling for the last three years, playing music, and taking random bar

jobs wherever I go. My mother's insurance money is still sitting in my bank account; I only use it when I really need to.

Truth be told, I haven't missed Perth much in the last three years. I can only hope that I don't run into my ex-boyfriend. If I never see him again, it would be none too soon.

"I'm gonna jump in the shower, Lex. You can put your stuff in these drawers, and I left half the cupboard for you. Make yourself at home, okay?" Tee says, motioning to the drawers.

"Okay," I say, opening my suitcase and starting to put all my things out. A quiet knock on the door causes me to raise my head. "Yeah?" I call out.

"Can I come in?" It's Ryder.

"Sure. It's your house," I reply dryly. He opens the door and hesitantly walks in, taking a quick glance around before bringing his gaze to me.

"Sorry about before, darlin', it was..."

"You don't need to apologize, Ryder," I say, cutting him off. I pick up a handful of clothes and start to fold them.

"I know. It's just..." He drums his fingers on his thigh, and sighs. I decide to put him out of his misery.

"Ryder, it's fine," I assure him.

"We're cool?" he asks, searching my eyes. I have no idea why we wouldn't be, so I nod. I'm graced with an easy smile. Tee walks in, dressed in a plush white towel, and nudges Ryder with her hip.

"Why are you in my room?" she asks as she steps inside and heads for the chest of drawers, pulling out lacy red underwear.

Ryder groans, and looks heavenward. "I'm not going to last a week!" He glances over at Tee and grimaces when he sees the underwear in her hand. "For fuck's sake, Tee, at least pretend to wear granny underwear or something while you're here! I'm heading out. I'll bring us all dinner." He shudders and walks out the door, slamming it behind him.

Tee flashes me an evil grin. "This is gonna be a fun week!"

I disagree.

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## Chapter 3

### Ryder

I'm sitting on the hood of my truck in front of Kidd's house. The band usually meets here because Kidd has a huge garage where we used to practice when we were just getting started. His house has become our home ground. Kidd, Jet, and Sax walk out the front, greeting me with a handshake and a tap on my shoulder.

Jet is my baby cousin. My dad's brother Finn cheated on his wife, Elena, with a stripper who ended up getting pregnant. Because of this, Jet isn't always well received by our family. Aunt Elena won't even look at him. Fuck, the way I see it, it's not Jet's fault Uncle Finn couldn't keep his dick in his pants. Jet has the Crawford family gray eyes and thick head of dark hair. At twenty-one, he is the youngest in the band.

"Hey, Ry," Jet greets, leaning his wiry body against my truck.

"Hey, cuz," I say, mussing his hair playfully. I love Jet. The kid hasn't always had it easy.

"Did we get it?" Sax asks, rubbing the back of his neck with his palm. Saxon Tate is about two inches shorter than my 6'2, but a little more muscular. His brown hair is spiked up with product; fuck knows how long that takes him every day. His eyebrow ring suits him, and the women flock to him like crazy, although for some reason he rejects pretty much all of them. He has a noticeable scar on his other eyebrow that looks like a small knife cut.

"Yeah, we did!" I tell them, and then laugh at their cheers and coos.

Kidd grins. He looks nothing like his younger brother Sax, with his blonde hair and leaner build. Kidd is twenty eight, four years older than Sax.

"Fuck, can't believe we got it," Sax says, chuckling.

"What? No faith in Morning Alliance?" I tease. We all know we have put our heart and soul into this band.

"I have faith, bro, but come on. Us, an opening act? That's huge!"

It is. We're finally going places. Not that I don't love playing our weekly gigs at various pubs and clubs around Perth, but this is taking a huge step up. Jet starts talking about some chick he hooked up with, and my

mind wanders to Lexi. What is it about her? I want a taste of her. Anything I can get.

I'm losing my mind.

"What's wrong?" Jet asks, his brow furrowing.

"Tee's back, and she moved her and her friend in with me," I tell him, laughing when he cringes.

"Is her friend hot?" Jet asks, waggling his eyebrows suggestively.

My grin is answer enough.

"Really?" Sax asks, interested. I've seen Sax hook up a few times, but Kidd told me he's still in love with his ex, AJ.

"Yep," I tell him.

"Are you gonna hit that?" Jet asks, giving me a crooked grin.

"I sure as hell hope so," is my honest answer.

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"Ryder, this really isn't necessary," Sasha says, adding more purple lipstick to her pouted mouth.

"Really? Because I think otherwise," I say as I put my feet up on her coffee table.

"I'm in my twenties now, Ry, you don't need to baby me," she says with a musical giggle. My cousin has been hurt before, and now she tends to date a lot. I come over every now and again to see how she's doing or just to hang out. I love my cousins and I try to visit all of them whenever I get the chance.

"You will always be a baby to me, Sash," I tell her. She shakes her head as she sits down next to me, her thick long black hair tumbling around her.

"How are you doing, Ryder? No special woman in your life?" she asks nosily. Our family is always in each other's business, we're all pretty much used to it by now. "You need to forget Nikki, Ry. She and Kade are solid," she adds in a soft voice.

"You going to change out of that mini dress? Or continue to give me a heart attack every time you move?" I counter, ignoring her question. Nikki isn't a subject I want to breach. I thought that one day when I was ready to settle down she would be mine, but I was wrong. End of story. Life goes on.

Sasha playfully rolls her eyes at me and tickles me under the chin.

“You need to relax, cuz,” she says with an encouraging nod.

“You need to wear more clothes, baby girl,” I say, once again glancing over her sparkly black dress and red high heels. She just grins and throws her arms around me. Doesn’t anyone take me seriously in this family?

“Come on, Ry, it’s just a first date,” she tells me, trying to put me at ease. The truth is, I’m worried about Sasha. Layla is taken care of and Tee can take care of herself, but there is something about Sasha. She’s fragile and needs nurturing. Her beauty is obvious, just like the other girls in my family, but Sasha’s heart is still wounded. There’s something she’s not letting go.

Something or *someone*.

“When you going to drop by and see Tee?” I ask her.

“Tee said she will drop by tomorrow,” she assures me. “I can’t believe she didn’t tell any of us she was coming home!”

I can only imagine what Sasha and Tee will get up to together, and the thought makes me shudder.

“I spoke to Tee on the phone today, and I hear this Lexi girl is a total babe,” Sasha tells me, her purple lips curving. I clear my throat. “She is, isn’t she? Are you gonna ask her out? I’ve heard she’s a cool chick, Tee told me she has no family or anything. She and Tee have been inseparable since they met,” Sasha says thoughtfully.

Lexi has no family? The thought saddens me. It must be lonely, I don’t know how I would survive if I didn’t have my family at my back.

“There’s a family function coming up anyway, so we can all catch up then,” Sasha announces, pulling me out of my thoughts.

“What family function?” I ask, my eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

Sasha puts her hands on her hips. “Jet’s birthday, remember?”

“Oh shit, yeah, I forgot. That’s gonna be a bucket load of fun,” I say sarcastically. Sasha huffs in agreement. There’s a knock on the door and I stand up, ready to hand out threats to the latest man that’s caught my baby cousin’s eye.

I don’t want to see her hurt again.

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## Chapter 4

### Lexi

Tee and I are playing band hero and laughing our asses off when Ryder finally gets home, his hands full of bags of food. I'm on guitar, and Tee is banging away on the drums. Tee presses pause when the food arrives.

"Yay! What did you bring us, Ry?" she asks, walking over to him.

"Pizza and some groceries. Mostly drinks and snacks for you guys," he says, placing everything down on the kitchen table. That's really nice of him. Tee pulls out two plates and loads them with pizza, bringing one over to me.

"Thanks," I say, feeling a little awkward. Here we are, gate crashing his house, and he's buying us food and treating us like guests. The pizza smells delicious; pepperoni with cheese dripping off the sides. My stomach growls loudly before I take a huge bite.

"What's the plan for tonight?" Ryder asks us as he picks up his own slice.

"I'm going out," Tee announces.

"Where?" Ryder asks, standing straighter.

"Just out," Tee replies, her dark brown eyes narrowing.

"Where?" Ryder repeats harshly.

"A guy I met asked me out to dinner," Tee tells him, picking at her pizza.

"You just got here yesterday. When the hell did you have the time to pick up a guy?" Ryder asks.

Tee just shrugs. I laugh at the look on Ryder's face. He looks like he wants to strangle her. I see him exhaling deeply. Then he pins those mysterious gray eyes on me.

"Looks like it's just me and you tonight then," He grins, like he's pleased about that.

I gulp.

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Tee gets dolled up and leaves the house, but not before asking me a million times if I wanted her to stay home. I tell her it's fine, I'm just going



to have an early night anyway. Tomorrow we're spending the day looking for apartments. Fun, I know. Tee kisses me on the cheek, and before heading out I hear her call out to Ryder to keep an eye on me. I laugh out loud when I hear Ryder complaining about her outfit, or lack thereof. He's so protective of his family, it's adorable. I have a quick shower and change into my pajamas. About ten minutes later, Ryder taps on my door and walks into my room, taking a seat on my bed.

"Wanna play?" he asks, gesturing at my guitar. His eyes light up animatedly.

"Okay, but only if you sing," I tell him.

"You drive a hard bargain, queen of hearts," he says, chuckling, as he picks my guitar up.

"Queen of hearts?"

"Your new nickname," he says proudly.

"How the hell did I get that nickname?" I ask, confused.

"It's a secret," Ryder mock whispers, passing me the guitar.

"Can you play any Three Doors Down?" Ryder asks.

"Yeah, how about 'Here Without You?'" I offer. It's one of my favourites.

"Perfect!" he beams.

I start strumming my guitar, and almost melt when he sings the first few lines. His voice is perfection; deep and soulful, husky. It gives me goose bumps. After we finish the song, Ryder looks at me, his brows drawn.

"You are fucking amazing on that thing!" he finally says.

"Thanks," I say, blushing. "But I'm not so great compared to you."

He smiles, dropping his gaze. "What kind of music do you like?" he asks, directing the subject away from his talent.

"A bit of everything really, but mainly R&B," I tell him honestly. He actually cringes, causing me to laugh.

"R&B, really? I think I need to educate you a little while you're staying here." I roll my eyes. "One more song?" he asks. I nod, starting to play the intro of a Mario song.

"Not an R&B song though," he clarifies quickly. I laugh.

"Okay how about Incubus 'Love hurts'?" I ask. Ryder looks impressed.

"Good choice, that one I can do," he says, his lip curling up.

And that's how I spent my evening. Talking, playing music, and letting Ryder's beautiful voice take over me. Around eleven I yawn.

"Tired?" Ryder asks gently.

"Just a little," I say, yawning again.

"Come on, let's get you in bed," he says. I squeal in surprise when he lifts me up into his arms like a baby and carries me onto the bed.

"This is unnecessary," I say dryly, though my body reacts to being so close to him. I'm sure my pulse is racing.

"I had fun tonight, Lexi."

"I did, too" I say honestly.

"You're seriously talented, you know that, right?" he tells me in a soft voice, his eyes locked with mine.

"Coming from you, that's a huge compliment," I respond, looking away from his intense stare.

"A humble musician, never thought I'd see the day," Ryder muses out loud. I scrunch my nose up and give him a little smile.

"And you're seriously fucking cute," he adds. I don't know what to say to that, so I don't respond. He pulls the blanket up and over me, tucking me in. When he brushes away a lock of hair that has fallen on my face, I hold my breath. He runs his finger slowly along my jaw, before we wish each other good night and he turns to leave my room. I notice him hesitating at the door for just a second, before finally walking out.

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"Walk of shame, Tee, really?" I hear Ryder's deep voice the next morning.

Tee sighs. "Ry, I love you, I really do. But I'm twenty four, you know. I'm not a kid anymore."

"I know that, trust me, but can you at least pretend while you're here? I live in an alternate universe where none of my baby cousins have sex, and my universe is fucking amazing. Ignorance is bliss and all that," Ryder says in a dry tone.

Tee laughs. "Okay, for you, I can definitely do that. But just to ease your mind, I didn't have sex last night. What did you get up to? You didn't scare Lexi off, did you?"

I choose that moment to walk out of the room in my pajamas, silk black pants and a black tank top with pink skulls all over it.

“I think it might be the other way around,” I joke.

Ryder shakes his head. “Actually, we had fun.”

“Really?” Tee asks, eyes darting from Ryder to me and back again in suspicion.

“How was your date, Tee?” I ask her, changing the subject.

“What date? I don’t date!” she says with mock indignation, shooting Ryder an amused glance.

“That’s my girl,” he says approvingly, giving Tee a kiss on her temple. I love to watch them interact. I never really had any of this, a large loving family. It was only me and my mother, not that she wasn’t wonderful, because she was. It was just the two of us against the world. We didn’t have a huge support system like Tee does.

“Should we get ready and head off to look at the apartments?” I ask Tee.

She groans. “Yeah, let’s get this over with. I’m going to see Layla tonight and finally meet my future brother in law and my nephew. Are you coming with me?”

“You don’t think that will be weird?” I ask her.

“What? No. My sister is awesome! You’ll love her,” Tee assures me. I nod reluctantly, still feeling like I’d be intruding.

“Wonderful!” Tee beams. “Okay, I’m gonna jump in the shower.”

Ryder and I both watch her saunter to the bathroom.

“Coffee?” he asks me when Tee is out of sight.

“Yes, please,” I say gratefully. I’d kill for some coffee right now.

“You gonna tell me why you call me the queen of hearts now?” I ask him after a few moments of comfortable silence.

“Nope,” he answers, popping the P.

“I’m just going to have to wait until I have something on you and blackmail you with it then,” I say smugly.

“Is that so? Well then, things just got interesting,” he says, looking amused.

“If I get Tee in on it, things will definitely get interesting,” I tease.

Ryder cringes. “Oh, come on, now, that’s playing dirty. Tee already knows more than enough to blackmail me with, but she’s family. She won’t do that to me,” he says confidently.

“True. But Tee thinks of me as her family, so what happens then?” I ask him.

“I’ll probably be free game then,” he says.

“Well then, you’re lucky I wouldn’t do that to you!” I tell him.

“I’m considering myself very lucky as of late,” Ryder flirts.

“Oh yeah? And why is that?” I ask innocently.

“Well, I happen to be living with the most beautiful woman I have ever laid my eyes on. And not only that, but she's sweet as sugar, talented and all-round amazing. The only bad thing about her is her choice of music, but I’m willing to overlook that.”

“Are you always this forward?” I ask him bluntly.

“What the point in being any other way?”

I shrug. “Some people might prefer a little bit of subtlety.”

“Are you one of those people?” he counters.

“No, I’m not,” I say with a smile.

“Good. I tell you what, how about you give me a kiss and I’ll tell you why I call you the queen of hearts?” he asks, his gaze locked on my lips.

I frown. “I don’t think your girlfriend would like that very much.” Ryder frowns at my words, too. He opens his mouth to say something, but Tee interrupts him.

“Lexi, get your butt in the shower!” she says, slapping my ass as she walks by. I shake my head at her and head to the bathroom.

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## Chapter 5

### Lexi

After checking out a few apartments and hating them all, Tee and I hit the grocery store to stock up Ryder's house. We bought enough food to feed an army. I get some steaks, potatoes and salad to make a nice dinner tonight. Tee doesn't cook, much to her mother's dismay, but I'm not too bad in the kitchen.

I'm used to looking after myself. My mother was a nurse, and whenever she'd work the graveyard shift, I'd make my own dinner. We had a trusty neighbour that would check in on me, but still, I spent a lot of time alone.

Tee and I rented out a car as soon as we landed in Perth, it's just easier that way. I suppose I should buy a car since the plan is to settle down for a while. I make a mental note to go look at some cars for sale.

We carry all the bags into Ryder's apartment, and it takes us three trips to get them all in. We put everything away, and Tee pulls out two popsicles for each of us as we sit down on Ryder's comfy couch.

What a tiring day.

"I'm pretty sure that last place had rats," Tee says for the third time. I'm pretty sure it did, too. I shudder, thinking about the sound of them scattering around.

"Doesn't matter, there are lots more places for us to check out," I assure her with false enthusiasm. She just huffs in response.

I hate apartment hunting as much as she does, it sucks almost as much as moving. Tee and I don't have any belongings other than what's in our suitcase, so we're pretty much starting from scratch. Tee could always go home and pick up her stuff, but she's avoiding going back to her parents' house which is a few hours south from here.

As for me, I pretty much gave away everything to charity before I started travelling. I still own my mother's house, but it's currently being leased and the lease isn't up for another year. I'd feel bad making the tenants move out last minute. So, I figured we can get an apartment for a year and then I can move into my house, and if Tee wants to, as well, she is most welcome to.

Later that evening I get dressed up and we head to Layla's house. I wear my favourite pair of skinny jeans and a snug red V-neck top. I put on my black wedges, and pick up my black skull handbag.

"Ready, Lexi?" Tee calls out. She's dressed up in jeans as well, faded and worn, boots and a black off the shoulder top. Her long blonde hair is loose and flowing down her back.

"Yep. Let's go."

The car ride is typical, Tee and I singing along to awesome songs like 'Blister in the Sun,' by Violent Femmes and 'Shoop' by Salt n Pepper. We pull up to a classy looking apartment building. Tee hums her approval. We go up the elevator and knock on the door.

"Coming!" I hear a woman call out, assuming it must be Layla.

A beautiful woman with olive skin and big brown eyes opens the door. "Oh my god!" she screams out, jumping into Tee's arms. Layla is absolutely stunning. I can see a few similarities between her and Tee, but there are lots of differences, too. Layla is wearing a long flowy red dress and no shoes. Her long hair cascades behind her, giving her an ethereal appearance.

"I can't believe you're here! Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"And miss this reception? I think not. I wanted to surprise you, baby sis," Tee tells her with a grin. "Look at you; I can't believe you're a mummy! You don't even look like you've had a kid!"

Layla rolls her eyes. "My ass is bigger, trust me."

"Layla, this is my bestie, Lexi. Lexi, my baby sister, Layla." Surprisingly, Layla gives me a warm hug.

"Lexi, of course. I've heard so much about you. Come in, both of you, I'm so rude making you stand in the door," Layla says.

For some reason I don't think she could ever be rude. She has a wholesome appearance about her.

"So? Where's your man? You know, the father of my nephew," Tee says as she sees the adorable baby boy in the bassinette. She instantly runs over to pick him up, kissing him on his soft cheek. "He's so perfect, Layla!" she says in awe.

"I know," Layla says proudly, before adding, with a scheming grin, "And I'm going to love him so much, no other woman is ever going to be good enough for him."

“You are so beautiful! Yes you are! I’m going to spoil you like crazy,” Tee coos to the infant. He has a thick head of inky jet black hair and Layla’s deep brown eyes framed by the longest lashes I have ever seen. His tanned, olive complexion gives him an exotic look. He’s the cutest kid I’ve ever seen in my life, hands down.

“He’ll be back from work soon. Can I get you something to drink, Lexi?” she offers kindly.

“No, thank you,” I decline, taking a seat on a soft blue couch. Tee puts the baby back down in his bassinette.

“Seriously, Layla, he’s incredible, and so lucky to have you as a mother,” Tee tells her sister softly.

“Tee,” Layla says fondly.

“Just don’t turn into a nag like mum,” Tee jokes, lightening the mood.

Layla bursts out laughing, and I can’t help it when my own lips curve into a smile.

“I’m gonna give Chase the old ‘what are your intentions with my sister’ lecture,” Tee says gleefully, taking a seat next to me and propping up her boots on the coffee table, making herself completely at home.

“Bit late for that,” Layla giggles. Ain’t that the truth.

“Oh, come on, Layla. Don’t ruin my fun, you’re my only sibling, after all,” Tee huffs.

Layla rolls her eyes, obviously used to her sister's drama.

“Why aren’t you staying with me?” she asks Tee with a scowl.

“I didn’t want to intrude. You have your man and a baby and you need your privacy. I thought we could crash with Ryder. His new place is awesome, and I like to annoy him. So really, it’s a win-win situation.”

“Poor Ryder,” Layla says, shaking her head in mock pity.

“Hey! I’m not *that* bad!” Tee replies indignantly. Layla and I both roll our eyes before she stands up.

“Well you're both always welcome here. I’m going to bring you some cupcakes and snacks. Hold on,” she says, walking into the kitchen.

“Looks like I’m living with the wrong sister,” I tease.

Tee nods in agreement. “This is true, Layla is like the perfect housewife.”

Layla walks back in with a tray full of delicious treats.

“This was for Kade, but I’ll make him another batch,” she says, placing the tray down.

“Who’s Kade?” Tee asks.

“Chase’s brother, you’ll love him, Tee,” Layla beams.

“Is he hot?” Tee asks, waggling her eyebrows.

“Yeah, and taken. By Nikki,” Layla says with a smile.

“Nikki? Holy shit. You’re all being taken down one by one,” Tee complains.

Layla ignored her and looks at me. “Lexi, has anyone ever told you that you should be a model?” I choke on my chocolate frosted cupcake.

“Umm,” I blush.

“She gets it all the time,” Tee says, reaching for a cookie.

“You should,” Layla encourages.

“Let her be, you’re making her blush,” Tee adds with a chuckle. I shoot her an evil look.

Layla glances between the two of us and smirks. “Opposites attract, I guess.”

“Yeah, nothing makes Tee blush,” I say. It’s true, the woman never gets embarrassed.

“That’s not true! I remember this one time at band camp when...” Tee yelps when Layla throws a cookie at her.

“That’s a waste of a perfectly good baked treat, Layla!” Tee scolds. I burst out laughing when Tee picks it up from the ground and eats it.

“Did you bring me souvenirs?” Layla asks Tee excitedly.

“Yep. All kinds of shit. Shot glasses, magnets, post cards, and key rings. All the stuff you wanted,” Tee tells her, shoving the rest of the cookie in her mouth.

“Yay! Where are they?”

“At Ryder’s, I sort of forgot to bring them,” Tee says apologetically.

The front door opens and a deep voice says, “Layla?”

“In here, Chase!” Layla calls out. My mouth parts slightly as I take in the man who walks in. Tall, broad shouldered, with jet black hair, bright blue eyes, long thick black lashes, and sensual lips. Layla has hit the lottery. The man is delectable. I glance over at Tee and see her staring at me with a smirk. I blush. Well, hell, I am only a woman.

“Chase, this is my sister, Tee,” Layla introduces. I see Tee eye Chase, and grin. Chase walks over and kisses her on the cheek.



“My little sister did well,” she says, earning her a throaty laugh from Chase.

“I’ve heard so much about you,” Chase says.

“Don’t believe anything Layla says. It’s usually her getting me into trouble,” Tee says with an evil grin. Layla pinches Tee on the arm.

“Ouch! See what I have to deal with?” Tee says, rolling her eyes.

“And Chase, this is Lexi, Tee’s best friend and partner in crime,” Layla says with a smile. Chase gives me a grin, and a dimple pops up. I gulp. The man is sex on a stick.

“Nice to meet you, Lexi,” he says.

“You, too,” I say in a daze.

“Layla didn’t tell me you were back in Perth,” Chase says, frowning.

“Yeah, we just rocked up yesterday, we didn’t tell anyone,” Tee says nonchalantly.

“Are you telling me mum and dad don’t know?” Layla asks in shock. Tee grins.

“Nope, they have no idea. Unless Ryder told them.”

“I doubt it,” Layla muses.

“Nah, he wouldn’t, or they would probably be at his house now. So, you named my nephew Cole, which I love, but if the next one is a girl, you need to call her Tenielle,” Tee tells Layla. Layla bursts out laughing.

“What are you laughing at, Layla? We had a deal! You said if you ever had a daughter she would be named after me!” Tee says, affronted. Layla says nothing but keeps on laughing.

“What are your intentions with my sister?” Tee suddenly asks Chase. Chase’s lip twitches. “I intend to marry her, and spend the rest of my life with her.”

“Yeah? Well, why haven’t you married her yet, then?”

“Tenielle!” I scold.

Instead of being insulted, Chase bursts out laughing. “You can ask your sister that,” he says, mussing Tee’s hair.

We all look at Layla.

“I didn’t want to be a pregnant bride!” Layla whines.

“I see,” Tee says, strumming her fingers against her chin as if deep in thought.

“Do I meet your approval?” Chase asks, amused.

“You’ll do,” Tee says with a shrug. I look at the floor in embarrassment when Tee slaps Chase’s ass.

“Hey!” Chase grunts in surprise.

“Leave him alone, Tee,” Layla mock growls.

“What? It’s not my fault my brother in law is eye-candy,” Tee says innocently.

“I don’t think she and Kade should ever meet,” Chase adds dryly.

“I know, right! It would be a disaster,” Layla responds, shaking her head.

“I must meet this Kade fellow,” Tee muses to herself, lifting up her hands to tie her blonde locks into a ponytail.

“Okay, lovelies, it’s been great but we’re gonna head off. I’ll be back to see my favourite nephew,” Tee announces.

“He’s your only nephew,” Layla says, pointing out the obvious.

“For now. You’ll probably be knocked up again soon, and who could blame you?” Tee tells Layla as she eyes Chase once more. My body shakes with silent laughter. I grab Tee and push her towards the door. We say our goodbyes and head back to Ryder’s.

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I set the food out on the dining table. Thick juicy steaks, a greek salad, corn, garlic bread, and mashed potatoes with gravy. Ryder walks in and groans in appreciation as I’m putting the dessert in the oven.

“Smells so good,” he says.

“Everything is ready if you’re hungry.”

“Are you going to eat with me?” he asks as he pulls out three plates.

“Yeah, just waiting on Tee,” I say.

“I can’t believe you cooked,” he says, grinning.

“Why?” I ask, confused.

“I dunno. You’re best friends with Tee...” he trails off.

“Hey, Tee can cook, she just chooses not to. Probably rebelling against her mother,” I tease.

Ryder bursts out laughing. “Yeah, that’s probably what it is.”

“What’s so funny?” Tee asks as she walks out wearing shorts and a cami.

“Nothing, let’s eat. I’m starving,” Ryder says as he hands us each a plate.

“I’ll cook tomorrow,” Ryder offers.

“You can cook?” I ask, impressed.

“Of course I can cook. My mother taught me,” he says, looking slightly offended that I would think otherwise.

We enjoy the meal together, making small talk and joking around.

“So, what are you doing tomorrow night?” Ryder asks me. Tee is washing the dishes while Ryder wipes down the table. I love the ‘cook never cleans’ rule.

“No plans. More house hunting tomorrow. And I need to go hand in some [résumés](#).”

“What kind of work are you looking for?” he asks, his brows furrowed.

“Tee and I usually just do bar work, but since we’re considering staying for a while I guess I’ll look for a receptionist job or something,” I tell him. I do have a few different qualifications. Nothing fancy, but I can work as a dental assistant, and I have a diploma in business. I can also usually find work giving private guitar lessons.

“Well, you can always get a job at Steele. Layla will see to that,” Ryder says with a low chuckle.

The sound gives me goose bumps.

He continues, unaware of my reaction. “Anyway, about tomorrow night, I was wondering if I could take you out. On a date,” he asks, his eyes searching mine.

“Oh, umm... well... Umm...” I’m usually pretty articulate, I swear. “Don’t you have a girlfriend?” I blurt out.

Ryder frowns and shakes his head. “No, I don’t. Why would you think that?”

“That girl, remember?” I say, blushing profusely.

“Oh. Right. No, I am definitely single,” he says awkwardly.

“I’ll need to check with Tee if it’s okay,” I think out loud.

“What? Why?”

“You’re her cousin, if she has an issue with it I’d have to say no,” I tell him frankly.

“I’ll talk to Tee, okay. How about that?”

“Well, then if she is okay with it, I would love to go on a date with you, Ryder,” I say with a smile.

“Good. You had me sweating there for a moment,” he says with a wry smile. “So, around seven? And look, how convenient, I don’t even have to pick you up,” he teases.

I giggle. “No, I guess you don’t.”

“Lexi!” Tee says, calling me to go into our room. She wants to watch some show about Vikings on her laptop with me. I roll my eyes at Ryder.

“So, tomorrow then,” I whisper.

“I can’t wait,” Ryder says, his eyes zooming in on my lips.

“Me neither.”

“Queen of fucking hearts,” he says under his breath. I’m dying to know why he calls me that. Wasn’t the queen of hearts evil? I’m about to ask him when Tee says my name again, this time louder.

“LEXI!”

“I better go before she wakes up the neighbours,” I say in between giggles.

“I guess you better. Goodnight, Lexi.”

“Night, Ryder.”

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## Chapter 6

### Lexi

“Where are you going?” Tee asks me as she paints her nails a lime green.

“Out,” I evade.

“Out, where?” she asks, her brown eyes narrowing slightly.

“Ryder asked me out to dinner.” I watch as she puts her nail polish bottle down and stares at me thoughtfully for a while.

“Oh, yeah, he asked me for my permission, wasn’t that cute? You know he’s a bit of a man whore, right?” Tee finally responds.

“He can’t be that bad,” I say defensively.

“No, you’re right. He’s not that bad at all. It’s just that my cousin has never been interested in relationships. So, if you’re looking for that with him, I wouldn’t even bother. But Ryder is an amazing man, in fact, I doubt you’ll ever find a better one. Just be careful, alright, Lexi?” she says seriously, her eyes locked with mine.

“It’s just dinner. It’ll be fine. You sure you’re okay with this, though?” I ask her.

“Yeah, you’re both adults. I’ll leave that to the both of you. Besides, no one can ever say I’m a cock block,” she adds with a cheeky grin.

I roll my eyes and glance at myself in the mirror. I’m wearing a tight black dress with a sweetheart neckline, tightened in the middle with a thin red belt. Studded black pumps adorn my feet, and my hair is curly and wild, my fringe pinned to the side with a diamond skull clip; black cat eyeliner with a white shimmer in the inner corners of my eye, and bright fire engine red lips. I pick up my black skull bag and I’m ready to go.

“Where is he taking you?” Tee cuts into my musings.

“No idea. He just said dinner,” I say, shrugging. I’m nervous as hell. This is my first date in such a long time, it’s not even funny. I reapply my lipstick, and take a deep breath. I hope I’m not overdressed. A knock on the door startles me, but I recover quickly and pull it open, coming face to face with a gorgeous Ryder. He’s wearing a black shirt, folded up to his wrists, displaying his colorful tattoos. He’s also wearing dark, snug jeans, which are riding low on his hips. I gulp. His stormy gray eyes are sparkling as he

takes in my reaction. My eyebrows rise when I see he is holding out a single red rose for me. I smile, taking it.

“There are no words for how stunning you look, Lexi, and I write songs,” he whispers, his gaze raking over me.

“I knew you had game, Ryder!” Tee calls out, laughing. Oh shit, I forgot she was here. Ryder cringes at her voice. Mood killer much?

“Let’s get out of here,” he says, taking me by the hand. I stop him for a moment to put my rose in water, and then we head out, calling out goodbye to Tee. He opens the door of his truck for me, and I hop in, mumbling a thank you. When Ryder stops the truck in front of a lake, I blink in confusion. Ryder takes in my expression and chuckles.

“Don’t move a muscle,” he says, giving me a wink. He walks around the car and opens my door, lifting me out of the truck. I can’t help but bury my face into his neck, inhaling his scent, a hint of spicy cologne, and he smells so good that I can’t help the small sigh that escapes my mouth. He puts me down, and pulls out a blanket and some bags filled with food and drink. I smile and shake my head, the man really has thought of everything. I take the blanket from him so he can carry the rest of the stuff and he leads me down a path to a spot just in front of the lake. The view is stunning, the lake lit up by the moon, and we get a perfect sighting of the stars. Ryder lays the warm blanket on the ground, laughing when I kick off my heels.

“I guess I was a little over dressed,” I say with a shy smile.

“No, you look perfect.”

I swallow hard. He is so charming. Ryder sets up all of the food, which turns out to be Chinese from one of my favourite restaurants.

“How did you know I love the food there?” I ask with a small frown.

“I did my research,” he says with a smug look. He pulls out a flask filled with coffee, and two bottles of water. We eat our food while talking, getting to know each other. Ryder tells me about his childhood, his family and about his band. I tell him all about my mother, and my own childhood. I almost moan when Ryder pulls out my favourite dessert in the whole world, a chocolate lava-cake from a posh restaurant called ‘Revere’ and I haven’t had one in three years, since I left Perth. My mouth waters, and Ryder gives me a full on belly laugh.

“How did you...” I stop and remember that I told Tee about this dessert one night in Ireland when I had a huge craving for it.

“I can’t believe she remembered that! I can’t believe you went all the way to Revere just to get it for me! That’s really sweet, Ryder,” I say softly. I lean forward, and gently touch my lips to his. He lets out a deep sigh, before wrapping his arm around my neck and pulling me closer, his lips capturing mine in a deeper kiss. I pull back and exhale deeply, before giving him a lopsided smile. Then I grab my dessert and dig in. I moan loudly.

“This is the best dessert ever. It’s like an orgasm in your mouth!” I say in between bites. Ryder makes a choking sound, putting down his own dessert.

“It’s pretty amazing, but I just tasted your lips, and I have to say they beat this chocolate thing hands down,” Ryder says, his eyes locked on my lips. My tongue peeps out and licks my full bottom lip, and I hear Ryder suck in a breath.

“Lexi?” he says in a strained tone.

“Yeah?” I say, taking the last bite of my dessert.

“Kiss me,” he demands. I oblige, all but jumping on him, fusing my lips to his. My dress rides up my thighs as Ryder runs his hands up and down the back of one. Ryder finally pulls away, panting. I can feel his arousal through his jeans, the outline of his thickness evident. I gulp at his large size. I glance up at him to see him staring at me quizzically, his breathing slowly evening out.

“We just made out for a long ass time, and your lipstick is still perfect,” he says randomly.

“Really? That’s what you’re thinking about right now?” I laugh. He gives me a sheepish smile and shrugs.

“It’s a superpower,” I say with a wink. It’s really just a stain lipstick; it has an insane staying power.

“I was staring at your heart shaped lips and couldn’t help but notice,” Ryder says.

“Is that why you call me the queen of hearts? Because of my lips?” I ask, one eyebrow raised.

Ryder grins, all teeth. “Your heart shaped lips, yes. But it’s also your heart shaped face, but most of all...” he says as he moves closer, gripping my hips with his hands and laying me on the blanket on my stomach. “Most

of all it's this heart shaped ass. It's perfection," he groans and he palms my backside. I giggle as he bends over me and bites the left cheek.

"Ouch!"

Ryder rubs the spot he bit and chuckles, pulling me into his lap. He buries his face in the crook of my neck and shoulder, taking a deep breath and nuzzling me.

"You smell like strawberries and cream," he whispers, kissing a wet trail up from my shoulder to my ear lobe. I shudder. Ryder reluctantly pulls away, and smiles at me.

"We better head back before it gets too late," he says.

"I had a really nice time with you, Lexi. I feel like I've known you forever," he says, his grey eyes staring into mine. I almost stop breathing when he pushes a curl of hair behind my ear.

"The feeling is mutual."

I squeal when he stands with me in his arms, tickling me a little before putting me down. We pack everything up and head back to his truck. We drive home quietly; our hands intertwined the whole way. He opens the door for me and kisses me softly on the temple as I get out.

"That's going to be a hard first date to beat," I whisper. Ryder pulls back, his eyes searching mine.

"If all goes well, hopefully that will be your last first date," he says simply. I gulp. Ryder's lip twitches.

"Come on, let's go home."

We walk to the front door hand in hand.

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Tee is standing in the kitchen, arms crossed.

"What were you guys doing out so late?" she asks, her eyes narrowed to slits. I almost laugh at this picture. Tee is wearing a pink striped robe, her hair in a towel. Her fluffy superman slippers tap the floor impatiently.

"On our date?" I say innocently. Tee stares at her watch and huffs. Ryder walks over to her and playfully pinches her cheeks.

"Go to bed, mother hen, she's home safe and sound," he says, shaking his head.



“It’s not that, I’ve been stuck here alone *all night* and I’m so damn bored!” she says.

“What about your new *friend*?” Ryder asks. Tee rolls her eyes but doesn’t answer.

“Lexi, why do you have grass in your hair?” she asks with a laugh. “Rolling in the hay, huh? First date, Lexi! At least you ended that dry spell,” she teases, and then yawns.

“Good night, you two,” she says, heading to our bedroom.

“Just how long of a dry spell are we talking?” Ryder asks, his eyebrows raised.

“I don’t think this is first date material!” I say, a blush rising up my neck.

“Good thing the date is over, then,” he counters.

“I don’t think it’s any of your business, Ryder Crawford,” I huff.

“Oh, really?” he says with a chuckle.

“This is an awkward conversation,” I muse.

“There is no such thing as an awkward conversation between us, Lexi,” he says with a head shake.

“Really? Cos I could think of some that would be extremely awkward,” I say.

“Lexi...”

“About a year,” I say. A slow, devastating grin appears on Ryder’s face.

“What are you grinning about?” I huff. He walks over to me and rains gentle kisses on my cheek.

“When I have you, you’re going to be blown away,” he brags.

I gape at his audacity. “Good night, my queen of hearts,” he says before heading to his bedroom, chuckling softly.

I’m glad he can’t see my face, because it has turned bright red.

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# Chapter 7

## Lexi

I wake up to the magical sound of Ryder strumming on his guitar, playing the introduction to ‘Under the Bridge’, by the Red Hot Chili Peppers. I practically swoon when I hear him sing the start of the first verse.

He's so talented, I can't help but listen in awe until he finishes the song. I'm blown away by this man. When the song finishes, I casually walk out.

“Morning,” I say as I step into the kitchen in search of coffee.

“Morning, darlin’, sorry if I woke you,” he says as he puts his guitar down.

“Are you crazy? I’d love to wake up to that every morning,” I respond, pouring my coffee. I realize how that must have sounded, so I instantly backtrack, “I mean... you are very talented, and...”

“I get it, Lexi,” Ryder interrupts. He stands up and walks over to me, and I gulp at the sight of him bare-chested, wearing nothing but a pair of black boxer shorts. Oh my. The taut lines of his ripped abs are something I’d definitely like to explore with my tongue.

“Is this okay?” he asks huskily as he stands behind me and grips my hips with his fingers, kissing the back of my exposed neck at the same time. I inhale sharply and nod. Oh yes, it's more than okay.

“I had a good time with you last night,” he says.

“So did I,” I instantly proclaim. Ryder laughs silently, his body shaking with the effort.

“I’m glad. Maybe we can do it again. What about tonight?” he asks as he nibbles on the side of my neck. My core instantly tightens in response, and I lean further back into him with an almost desperate moan.

“So responsive,” he murmurs in approval.

“Oh, yuck! Get a room, you two!” Tee huffs as she walks in. Ryder sighs regretfully and steps away. The fact that I instantly miss him annoys and confuses me.

“So are you two dating now or what?” she asks bluntly. Ryder sighs again, while I blush like crazy.

“Oh, still haven’t had that conversation yet, have you? *Awkward.*” Tee says cheerfully.

“We've only had one date,” I blurt out. It feels like I'm playing down this weird connection Ryder and I have, but the truth of it is, we've only had one official date. I guess hanging out together and getting to know each other in his apartment counts, but still.

I watch as Ryder stares at me, a thoughtful expression on his face.

“So? Its different rules here, you two are currently living together. At least until we find a place,” Tee adds. She slathers butter and vegemite on a piece of toast and takes a huge bite.

I ignore her comments and change the subject. “Are we job hunting today?”

“We don't need too. Chase rang and offered us jobs at his club. We start this weekend,” she says with a grin.

“Really?” I'm not sure if I want to do bar work again, but something is better than nothing for the time being. I decide to hand out my [résumés](#) looking for office work as well.

“Yeah. Awesome having fancy connections, isn't it?” She grins, before walking out of the kitchen and into the hall. I shake my head.

“Lexi, about before...” Ryder starts.

“Ryder, it's okay,” I assure him.

“Let's go out tonight, alright?” he demands more than asks.

“Alright,” I agree.

I just hope I know what I'm getting myself into.

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Ryder takes me out to dinner, and then a movie. We're having a really wonderful night. There's no awkwardness, but I guess living together you get to know people pretty fast. Ryder has been such a gentleman all night, too. Opening doors, pulling out my chair for me, and he's so attentive. It's such a breath of fresh air to find a man like this. Who doesn't want a bad boy, tattooed musician who is tough on the outside, but sweet and gentle on the inside? I can only imagine how wild he would be in bed. The thought makes me squeeze my thighs together. The movie comes to an end, and we head out to his truck. He opens my door and holds his hand out to help me in. My heart melts.

“You are so sweet, you know that?” I praise him.

“Are you sure I just don’t want an up close view of your gorgeous ass?” he teases.

I giggle and shake my head. He walks around and gets into the driver’s side.

“I’d love to stay out all night with you, darlin’, but the band is waiting for me, so I gotta drop you off and then head out to play,” he says with an apologetic smile.

“No worries, thank you for taking me out. Your company is exceptional,” I tell him.

“Exceptional? I’ll have to try harder next time,” he says with a chuckle.

We pull into the car park for his apartment and he walks me up the stairs and to the door.

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The next night is Tee’s cousin’s birthday. She and Ryder guilt trip me into going, and when I see Ryder is bringing his guitar, I'm definitely intrigued.

“You are just as hot as I was told!” a beautiful dark haired girl beams at me. Her skin is like flawless porcelain, a milky cream color. Her almond shaped dark eyes are twinkling as she takes me in.

“I’m Sasha,” she introduces herself, pulling me in for a hug.

“Nice to meet you, Sasha. Tee has told me so much about you,” I tell her with a warm smile. She's dressed in a red wrap around dress and sandals, and she smells like peaches.

“Oh, I bet she has,” she smirks. “Okay, I want to thank you for a few things. First of all, thank you for keeping an eye on my cousin while she was overseas. We all felt better knowing she always had someone with her. Also, I’m loving the fact that Ryder can’t keep his eyes off of you. He deserves a good woman, and from what I've heard about you, you're the best. Tee has good judgment, if she likes you so much then you must be awesome!” she says, her words rushed.

“Um, you’re welcome?” I say awkwardly.

“Oh, you are just adorable,” she muses to herself.

“Sasha, leave her alone,” Ryder says in an amused tone. He walks up to Sasha and wraps his arm around her shoulder affectionately.

“You can’t hog her, Ryder!” Sasha huffs. Tee walks over and jumps on Ryder’s back. “What’s going on here, people?” she calls out cheerfully. Jet walks over, shaking his head at his cousin’s antics. I had awkwardly wished him happy birthday earlier, which was weird seeing as I’ve never met him before. He’s a total sweetheart though, and instantly made me feel welcome. Jet, the youngest in Ryder’s band, turns twenty-two today. The other band members aren’t here though; they’re having a separate celebration for Jet tonight, and this is only for family.

Jet’s father Finn walks over and leans his arm on Jet’s shoulder. If Finn is any indication to go by, Jet will remain a handsome man throughout his life, even in older age. Finn looks at Jet with such affection, such love. Tee told me Finn’s wife Elena refused to come tonight because of some kind of family drama. I find myself feeling slightly protective of Jet, although I have no idea why. I blush when I notice Jet blatantly checking me out, and staring at my chest rather than my face. Ryder notices and elbows Jet in the stomach.

“At least be subtle, son,” Finn adds with a chuckle.

“Dad!” Jet chastises, his face looking slightly flushed. Finn just grins, unrepentant. Jet’s dad is really lovable. I meet Ryder’s parents who are both lovely. Ryder is a spitting image of his father, with his chocolate brown hair and soulful gray eyes. I notice Ryder’s mother watching me thoughtfully, but Tee comes and grabs me before I can ponder it further.

“You alright? We’re a lot to take in. And half the family isn’t even here, my parents included,” Tee says dryly.

“I’m fine, your family is wonderful, Tee,” I tell her honestly. She just huffs in return. We both pile our plates high with delicious food, and sit down to enjoy our meal. Sasha and Ryder join us.

“You okay, Lexi?” Ryder asks me.

“I’m fine, you guys don’t need to worry about me,” I tell them with a chuckle. I take a huge bite of banana bread and groan, it tastes really good. I notice Ryder’s eyes are on me, watching my every movement. I purposely nibble in the bottom corner of my lip, my lip twitching when I see his eyes narrow heatedly.

“Oh my god! The sexual tension between the two of them is intense!” Sasha announces loudly. I cringe, and put down my slice.

“Try living with the two of them!” Tee says, taking a bite of her own food. I watch as Ryder palms his face in exasperation.

“Yeah, why didn’t you come stay with me, Tee?” Sasha pouts. Tee stares at her, passing a silent message between them, before both of them burst out laughing.

“Good call,” Sasha says suddenly, and then they both start laughing again.

Ryder shrugs. “Just smile and nod, Lexi, that’s what I usually do.”

One of Ryder’s little cousins comes running to him and sits on his lap. She must be about five, with a mop of dark curls and wide curious eyes.

“Hey, Kiara, how are you doing, baby girl?” Ryder asks her gently.

“I’m hungry, Ry,” she pouts.

“Here, love, eat some of my food,” Ryder tells her, passing her some from his plate. I’ve noticed that most of Ryder’s cousins are female; it must really drive him insane being as protective as he is. I purse my lips to stop myself from grinning and continue to watch Ryder treat this little girl like a princess. Tee and Sasha are both watching me knowingly. Tee looks thoughtful, and Sasha gives me a thumbs up. I shake my head at them and continue to enjoy my food.

About an hour later, Ryder pulls out his guitar, and I watch as he sings different songs with different family members. There is so much talent in his family, it’s insane. I love the fact that music brings them together, makes them closer. When I see Ryder staring at me, a question in his eyes, I quickly shake my head no. I’m not going to sing in front of all these people. Ryder nods back at me, respecting my choice.

I sit back and enjoy the music.

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“This is the perfect apartment!” I all but squeal at Tee. I love it. It’s modern, in a great neighbourhood, and fully furnished. The rent is a little steep, but considering all the other places we’ve seen, we could care less. The apartment has all white walls with one red feature wall, and all the tabletops are black marble. I love my bathroom, with its bright yellow walls and a huge bathtub. The lounge room has plush black carpet, and a comfy looking red leather couch. It’s just... us.

They tell us the apartment will be ours in three days, and we can’t wait. We head out to a bar for a few drinks to celebrate. The closest bar

happens to be, from the looks of things, a biker bar. We walk in and eye the battered red leather stools and the old pool tables. We both glance at each other and shrug, hell, we've been to worse places. We take a seat and Tee orders two tequila shots and two vodka sunrises. What can I say, the girl knows what I like. I see Tee eyeing a cute guy, who kind of looks like Jax Teller from Sons of Anarchy. I can't blame her, the man is fine. No way near as sexy as Ryder, but sexy enough. I nudge Tee when she stares at him without blinking for a few moments.

"Woman! We are *not* here for that!" I mock chastise. She shakes her head and downs her shot, not bothering with the salt or the lime.

"I know, but come on. That is grade-A ass right there," she says, giggling. I shake my head at her, downing my own shot. I stick the lime in my mouth, sucking out the bitter goodness. Tee nudges me with her elbow, and I glance over to see why. Jax Teller is walking over to us; a grin on his masculine, perfect face, his blue eyes twinkling. He takes a seat next to Tee and gives us both a smile. Tee turns on her charm, giving him a flirty smile.

"What are you two doing at a bar like this?" he asks, signalling the bartender for another drink. The bartender walks over and pours him what looks like a scotch.

Tee frowns. "What the hell kind of a pick-up line is that?" she blurts out. Jax Teller laughs, his whole body shaking with the effort.

"I heard you were feisty," he says, approval in his tone. He looks over at me.

"And you must be the lovely Lexi," he says, nodding his head in greeting.

"I'm afraid you have us at a disadvantage," I reply, earning me another laugh.

"I'm Kade. It's funny you picked this bar, this is my bar. I'm here all the time," he states.

"Wait," Tee says, frowning. "Kade, as in..."

"Your new brother in law," he says, interrupting her sentence. He looks pretty pleased with himself, too.

"How did you know who we were? Stalker much?" Tee huffs at him, turning off her charm, since he's both Chase's brother, and taken by Nikki.

"You kind of look like Layla, if you squint your eyes and turn your head sideways," he says to Tee. "Minus the tattoos and piercings, of course,

and Layla told me about you, Lexi. Honey colored hair, amber eyes and those lips, wow,” he says to me. I blush, clearing my throat.

“And she's shy! That’s just fucking adorable,” he says with a deep chuckle. I take a sip of my vodka sunrise. “Can I get you two a drink?” he asks.

“Sure, tequila please,” Tee tells him. Kade orders us two tequila shots.

“How’s Nikki?” Tee asks him. Kade’s eyes brighten. “She’s good. You’ll have to come by and visit us.” The bartender places the shots in front of us, and we both gulp them down.

“We shall,” Tee says, slamming down the shot glass. Kade stands up. “Wanna play some pool? Don’t expect any family treatment, though,” he says, laughing at his own joke.

“You know, Kade, you were so hot until you opened your mouth,” Tee says, rolling her eyes.

“I’ll play a game of pool with you!” I say, standing up. Kade takes in my outfit and frowns.

“Looks like I’m gonna be getting into a couple of fights,” he says under his breath. I glance down at what I’m wearing, denim frayed shorts and a checkered buttoned shirt. Not too slutty, I don’t think. Kade leads us to the table and racks up the balls. It’s not long before the men start to circle.

“Hey, Kade, who are these gorgeous ladies?” a rough looking man asks.

“They’re family,” Kade snaps, the look in his eyes sending a clear message.

“More? Fucking hell. Can I come to your next family function?” the dude says.

Kade ignores him and turns to me. “You wanna break, Lexi?”

“No, you go ahead,” I tell him, standing up and choosing a cue. After Kade breaks I lean over the table to play my shot. When I hear Kade curse, I glance up from my shot. There are a couple of more men staring, watching Tee and me.

“You girls are gonna be the death of me, I swear,” Kade says to himself.

“Why, you scared of a few bikers, bro?” Tee challenges.



Kade smirks. “If I was, I wouldn’t come to this bar, sweetheart. I do have a pool table at home, and I co-own Steele, I could always drink there.”

“Then why do you come here?” I ask curiously.

Kade pins me with his pale blue eyes. “This is my spot,” is all he says.

“You’re weird,” Tee says randomly.

“How about we make a bet?” he asks, his eyes twinkling.

Tee instantly stands up. “We’re in!”

Kade pulls out his phone from his pocket, “I’m gonna call James, he’s gonna love this,” he says, punching the numbers on the touch screen.

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## Chapter 8

### Lexi

We jump out of the cab, giggling like little school girls. I stumble into Tee, who in turn falls over onto the floor. For some reason, that sets me off laughing even more. We ended up losing the bet, and we had to drink four shots each. You could say we're both a little drunk.

We met Kade's baby brother, James, who is so different from Kade, but just as much of a pain in the ass. Kade and James put us both in a cab, and Kade said he would get our car dropped off at Ryder's house. Kade is a serious trouble maker, I'm pretty sure he hustled us. He and James were laughing so hard, I had no idea what was so damn hilarious.

I help Tee up, and we lean on each other for support. We spend about five seconds looking through her handbag for the house key when the door is pulled open. Ryder.

"You made it home safely, I see," he says, moving aside to let us both in. He looks so sexy, wearing nothing but a pair of black track pants. They're sitting dangerously low on his hips, below the sexy indentation of his masculine Vs. I swallow hard. My eyes stray to his nipple ring, which is so damn sexy I want to lick it and play with it with my tongue.

"Can you stop eye fucking him in front of me?" Tee laughs. I start giggling again. Ryder shakes his head at our antics.

"I knew you two were coming home drunk so I prepared myself," he says with a smile, walking us over to the couch. He hands us both bottles of water and puts food on the table; sandwiches. I suddenly find myself ravenous and start digging in.

"You knew we were coming?" I ask before taking a bite of the chicken salad sandwich.

"Yeah, Kade sent me a message," he says with a frown. "What the hell were you two doing at that bar anyway?"

"Well," I start, "we found an apartment! It's perfect! I'm going to miss this view though," I say, staring at his chest once again. Ryder frowns at our announcement, not looking happy for us at all.

"I'm off to bed!" Tee announces merrily, walking a few steps before tripping over her shoes which she had just dumped on the floor. Ryder sighs heavily, walking up to Tee and picking her up. He takes her to her room and walks out seconds later.

“She usually has a high alcohol tolerance, so you guys must have really gone wild,” he says, shaking his head.

“Oh yeah. We lost a bet, but Tee had an extra few drinks. For fun,” I say with a snort.

“Oh I bet she did,” he says, rubbing his palm across the stubble on his chin. He looks even sexier with that scruffy stubble. I tell him so.

“Well perhaps I should keep it, then,” he suggests. I nod, my eyes wide.

“So, do I need to carry you to bed, too?”

“Oh, I sure hope so,” I say, putting down my now empty plate. Ryder just gives me a devastating smile as he clears up the plates and cups from the table. After he rinses and puts everything in the dishwasher, he lifts me up in his arms and heads to the guest room.

“Can I sleep in your bed?” I ask whilst nuzzling his neck. Ryder stills for a moment before turning to his room. This is the first time I’m inside his room, but I’m still tipsy and can’t think of anything else besides Ryder and bed. Ryder lays me down on his thick black bedcovers and I sink in with a sigh of contentment. He carefully removes my shoes, then leaves the room and comes back in with something in his hands. A makeup wipe from the bathroom. He really is adorable. He starts to wipe my makeup off for me, but I put him out of his misery by taking it from him and wiping it off myself. I jump up, slightly wobbly, and pull off my shorts, my shirt, and my bra. I glance over at Ryder to see his eyes dark, the darkest I have ever seen them.

“Do you have a T-shirt I could wear?” I ask huskily. Ryder nods, but doesn’t move for a moment. He finally reaches into one of his drawers and pulls out a soft, worn gray T-shirt. I put it on and quickly head into his bathroom. I spot a new toothbrush and open it, and then brush my teeth. I walk back into the room and give Ryder a giddy smile. He’s laying on his bed, arms crossed behind his head, his eyes on me. He scoots upwards and his body tenses and flexes with the motion. He’s so damn sexy. His tattoos are pieces of art, and they give him a dangerous edge. My eyes stray to his nipple ring once again and my breath hitches. I climb into bed with him, slipping under the sheets. When I lean over and give him a hungry kiss, he pulls away just when things are about to get serious.

“Not tonight, Lexi,” he says.

“Wait, what?”

“Not tonight, you’ve been drinking. Just sleep now,” he soothes, pulling me close to him and rubbing his hand up and down my spine. I huff, but a few seconds later, I pass out.

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I wake up with a headache and groan out loud. I haven’t had a hangover in such a long time, and I sure as hell didn’t miss them. I hear a chuckle and glance over to see Ryder, his eyes peering lazily at me through his thick black lashes.

“I made you breakfast in bed,” he says, gesturing to the tray on the side table next to his bed.

“Why are you yelling?” I ask in a rough voice, lifting the sheets over my head.

“You should know by now to never try and keep up with Tee. I’m pretty certain she could drink *me* under the table,” he adds with a chuckle. Well, someone is a morning person.

“Try Tee and Kade. I think those two should be banned from seeing each other,” I croak.

“Coffee?” I ask hopefully.

“Right here, darlin’,” he says, and I lift the sheet off my head and sit up, greedily accepting the coffee.

“Thanks, Ryder,” I say, taking a sip. The liquid goodness slides down my throat and I moan.

“So good,” I bite out, before taking another sip. Ryder’s lips curl into a grin. It suddenly hits me that here I am, in Ryder’s bed, wearing nothing but his T-shirt and my panties, and he’s right next to me wearing only a pair of pants. I choke on my next sip of coffee, and cough a little.

“You okay there?” he asks. I nod and put my coffee down on the side table. I glance over at Ryder and our eyes lock. The air suddenly gets thicker, and I see Ryder swallow hard, his throat working with the motion. I push the sheet down off my body and sit up on my knees, facing him.

“What is this?” I whisper to him.

“I don’t know,” he responds, his gaze raking over me. Suddenly feeling bold, I lift up his T-shirt off my body, and throw it on the floor. I hear his sudden intake of breath, and my pulse starts to race. His eyes stray to my breasts, and I watch as he nibbles on his lower lip.

“Are you sure?” he asks in a husky low tone. I nod, which is all the answer he needs, because he's on me in a second. He grips my ass with both of his hands and lifts me up to straddle his thighs. He's sitting on his knees in the middle of his bed, and he groans as my breasts rub against his chest. Our lips connect in an instant, and Ryder's lips devour me, his tongue tasting and playing with mine. I run my fingers through his messy chocolate brown hair, and he groans slightly, his own fingers digging deeper into the flesh of my ass. I sense Ryder's impatience when he moves from my lips to my jaw, trailing wet kisses down my neck, and across my shoulder.

Ryder lifts me up and pushes me back on the bed, instantly lying on top of me. He takes one of my nipples into his mouth, suckling gently as his hands slowly pull down my lace panties. He pulls away from my breasts and I take the opportunity to lick his nipple ring, and gently tug on it with my teeth. Ryder hisses out a curse and pins me down to the bed, capturing both of my hands in one of his, lifting them up over my head so I can't touch him and he's the one in total control. I watch as he leans back, my arms still pinned, and use his free hands to pull down his track pants. I groan. He is huge; thick, long, and beautiful. But even better than that, he's pierced. I moan and lick my lips.

Ryder lets go of my hands and reaches over to pull out a condom from his top drawer. He rolls it on easily, before leaning over me, and kissing me hungrily. He slowly slides the tip into me, and I can't help the loud throaty moan that escapes my mouth. He gently pushes himself inside me, and I can tell he's using all of his strength not to slide home. He knows it's been a year for me and he's taking it slowly. I lift my hips up, so he slides into me faster, causing him to call out another curse.

“Lexi,” he groans, moving his hips in smooth deep strokes.

I lift my hips up to meet him, moving in time with him to each thrust. It's not long before I can feel the warmth tugging in my lower belly, and I scream out Ryder's name as I climax. I ride each wave, panting heavily. As I finally sag onto the bed, sated, Ryder shudders on top of me with his own release.

Afterwards, he kisses me tenderly on the forehead, before sliding out of me, and heading to the bathroom to clean up. I stretch out my body lazily as Ryder walks back into the room, and hops back into bed with me. He starts to kiss me again, gentle, chaste kisses, at first, that soon turn into

deep, demanding ones. I gasp when I feel him hard and ready to take me once again.

“Ryder...” I moan out in surprise and eagerness.

“I told you you'd be blown away,” he whispers with a smug grin.

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After spending the whole day in bed, Ryder and I finally resurface. I jump into the shower, and blush when I think of all the things we did. The man has many talents, that's for sure. I get dressed and walk out into the kitchen, and start to laugh when I see the note Tee left on the fridge.

*Lexi,*

*I really didn't need to hear all that. He's my cousin after all, I DO NOT need to hear how good he is in bed. I've gone to hang out with Layla. See you in the evening. Call me if you want anything.*

*Love, Tee XXX*

“What's so funny?” Ryder asks, also freshly showered. He's wearing a pair of faded jeans sitting low on his lean hips and a v-neck black t-shirt that is stretched deliciously over his chest. I show him the note, and he just shakes his head at his cousin's antics.

“I gotta head out, I was meant to be at rehearsal hours ago,” he says with a raised eyebrow.

I bite my lip. “Can't say I'm sorry.”

“Me neither,” he says, smirking and pulling me towards him by the waist. He brushes his lips once against my neck, before pulling back, and watching me, affection evident in his eyes.

“I'll see you this evening, my queen of hearts,” he whispers against my lips, leaning in for a slow kiss. When he's done, I'm more than ready to head back into the bedroom.

“Don't look at me like that, Lexi,” he warns in a gravelly voice.

“Like what?” I ask innocently, my eyes wide. I may or may not bat my lashes at him.

“You're such a temptress,” he mock growls, ravishing my lips once more before heading for the door.

I exhale deeply.

Only Ryder could leave my pulse racing with just a simple kiss.

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Tee walks in about an hour later, a knowing smirk on her gorgeous face.

“You’re a screamer. I wish I didn’t know that about you, Lexi,” she says with a smirk. I choke on my coffee. The woman has no filter.

“What’s that you have?” I ask, purposely changing the subject. She’s carrying a box of something that has ‘Eat and Die’ written on the side. Tee glances down at the box and laughs. “Oh, this. I was at Layla’s and found this box of chocolates, so I thought I’d help Layla out by taking them,” she says with a shrug. I walk over and peer into the box. It’s filled with Twix bars, about twenty of them.

“How are you helping Layla by eating all her chocolate? You’re taking chocolate from your own sister now?” I say in a surprised and slightly horrified tone. Tee chuckles evilly. “Nah, I’m pretty sure it’s Chase’s.”

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## Chapter 9

### Lexi

I stare around at our new apartment and grin. Tee and I have officially been moved in for five days now, and the place is already starting to feel like home. Luckily it was already furnished, so we didn't need to do much besides add our personal belongings and stock up on food. We also had to buy bed sheets, towels, cleaning products, and other household items.

Ryder wasn't too happy when I moved out. In fact, he sulked for a little while, saying there was no rush to leave. I'm not too far away from Ryder's apartment, maybe about ten minutes, so it's no big deal. I love the feeling of having a place to call mine, the freedom to do whatever I please.

I started my job at the bar yesterday, and so far, so good. I'm only working every Tuesday, because I got offered another job as a receptionist at law firm. The manager at Steele is a really nice girl named Payton. She's covered in tattoos and has thick jet black hair, the woman could be a pin up model. I love the fact that I'm earning money again, and that I can stop pulling money out from my savings account.

Tee's gone to visit her parents and calm them down after they finally found out she was in town and hadn't told them. She'll be gone for two nights, so I thought I'd invite Ryder over for dinner. I've baked chicken with garlic bread, corn, and salad; everything is ready and waiting.

There's a knock on the door and I quickly glance down and check over my outfit. I had decided on black skinny jeans with a thin yellow belt and a black top that was all covered in front, but very open at the back. I walk to the door and open it, my heart thumping in my chest when my eyes land on Ryder.

"You look beautiful," he tells me huskily, stepping in and capturing my lips in a searing kiss. Then he walks forward, our lips still connected, and closes the front door with a push of his foot.

"I've missed you," he says against my lips.

"Me, too," I whisper, pulling back, my gaze still on his sinful mouth.

"It's been so boring at home, it's so damn quiet now," he adds with a crooked grin.



“I’m sure you’ll survive,” I say playfully. Ryder grunts, shaking his head. “Something smells amazing,” he says, wandering into the kitchen.

“I’m not sure what I want to eat first,” Ryder muses suggestively, as he glances between the food and me. My face goes a little red, and Ryder chuckles throatily.

“I think that blush answered that question,” he says, walking over to me and lifting me in his arms. He carries me to my room and to my bed, laying me on the red and black skull comforter. He gets down on his knees and pulls me down the bed so my legs are dangling. Then he undoes my belt and the button of my jeans, pulling my pants down. He makes a sound at the back of his throat before he nuzzles the inside of my thigh, slowly heading upwards.

“You smell so good,” he says gruffly, “I’m going to take my time with you.”

And he does.

In fact, we eat dinner four hours later.

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I’m home alone, and bored. I pull out my guitar and start to play a few random songs. I play ‘Underneath Your Clothes’ by Shakira. I sing the last line, already thinking about which song I want to practice next, when I hear someone clear their throat behind me. I spin around, and my eyes widen when I see Ryder standing there watching me, his eyes glimmering with emotion. He’s leaning against the door, his posture casual, but his eyes are heated and intense.

“You are so fucking amazing, Lexi,” he rasps. I open my mouth, and close it again, still in shock. I don’t usually let anyone hear me sing, unless I’m extremely comfortable with that person. The only other person I have sung with is my ex, and that once wonderful memory is now tainted.

“Play me another song, please,” he begs quietly, walking into the room and sitting down on the bed next to me. I open my mouth to decline but he says, “Please, Lexi,” once more and I break.

“Okay,” I say, clearing my throat. I think for a moment and decide on ‘Creep’ by Radiohead. When I’m done, my hands are shaking. Ryder shakes his head in awe. “It should be you up there on stage, instead of me.” I blush at his compliment.

“You know, for someone who likes R&B music, I’ve never heard you play or sing it,” he muses with a grin.

I shrug. “Wouldn’t want to get kicked out of your apartment. I do love all different music genres though.”

Ryder laughs. “Who are your favourites?” He seems genuinely interested, so I name a few.

“J. Holiday for one, I love all of his songs,” I tell him.

“Never heard of him,” Ryder says with a sheepish smile.

“Joe?” I ask.

“Oh yes, I’ve been practicing Joe ‘I Believe in You’ for Layla’s wedding. She wants me to sing it.”

“You’re so damn sweet,” I tell him.

“Yeah, well, it was that or a One Direction song,” he says with a shudder.

I burst out laughing. Layla is a treat, she really is.

“Will you play it for me?” I ask him softly.

“I believe in you?” he asks, and I nod. “Okay, I’ve only learnt the first verse and chorus so far though,” he admits as he takes my guitar.

“That’s okay,” I assure him.

“Don’t laugh. I think this is the first R&B song I’ve ever sung,” he says shyly. I hold my breath as Ryder sings the first verse. Layla is going to be blown away at her wedding, that’s for sure. I won’t be surprised if there are rivers of tears shed. He sounds incredible, and the song is beautiful. When he hits the chorus, I swoon.

As soon as he finishes the last note, I pull my guitar away from him and jump on his lap, practically attacking him, my mouth attached to his. Ryder chuckles huskily when my hands start to roam his body.

“I should sing for you more often,” he says, as he pulls off my tank top, his eyes heatedly raking over my body.

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The next night Ryder and I are staying in watching movies. I picked up three movies on my way home from work, and I’m sitting comfortably on Ryder’s couch waiting for him to bring the popcorn from the kitchen.

“So what are we watching, darlin’?” Ryder asks as he walks in with a huge bowl of popcorn and two wineglasses.

“We have three choices. Pitch Perfect, Hotel Transylvania or Ten Inch Hero,” I tell him as I take the wineglasses from him and place them on the coffee table.

“Ten Inch... you got us porn?” he asks me, his eyebrows almost hitting his hairline.

“Porn? What?” I sputter.

“Ten inch!” Is all he says, like it’s an obvious conclusion.

“Yeah! It’s about a sandwich shop! You perve!” I say through fits of laughter. Ryder rolls his eyes, and heads back into the kitchen reappearing seconds later with a bottle of red wine.

“Alright then, Lexi, lets watch this non-porn. I like sandwiches, too,” he adds.

He pours the wine, and I press play.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Happy birthday!” everyone yells the second I open the front door to my apartment, scaring me shitless. ‘Everyone’ consists of Ryder, Tee, Layla, Sasha and Jet. I put my skull handbag down on the bench and walk over to them, a timid smile on my face.

“What’s all this?” I ask, looking over the huge skull chocolate cake, and table full of gifts.

“We wanted to surprise you,” Tee says cheerfully.

“Yeah, since you forgot to mention it was your birthday,” Ryder says, his eyes narrowed.

“That’s cos it’s not a big deal,” I tell him, eyeing the snacks I only just noticed.

“Thank you all so much, this is lovely,” I tell everyone, giving each of them a grateful hug. When Jet’s hug lingers a little too long, Ryder growls and calls out an indignant “Hey!”

“Calm your farm, Ry,” Tee calls out.

“Layla, I assume you baked all of these,” I say gesturing to the cake, cookies and cupcakes.

“Yeah, I hope you like them. We argued between a skull or a guitar cake, and skull won out,” she says with a grin. She looks stunning as always in high waisted jeans and a peach colored blouse.

“It was actually Ryder’s idea,” she whispers to me, giving me a wink. I thank her and give her another hug.

“Where’s Cole?” I ask her.

“Chase is watching him tonight, so I can have some fun!” she says. Tee cheers from somewhere around the apartment.

“Are you going to open your presents?” Ryder asks me. I can’t help but check him out in his distressed jeans and tight black shirt. The man is magnificent.

“I can’t wait to unwrap you, that’s for sure,” I murmur to myself.

“Careful what you wish for, darlin’,” he says in response.

I’m about to respond when I see Tee walking out, carrying a carton of beer. “Tee!” I gape.

“What?” she asks, confused. I gesture to the beer.

“What? It’s a party!” she calls out loudly. Layla cheers.

“I just realized that we mustn’t have any friends, Tee, because the only people here are your family,” I say with a chuckle. Tee glances around, only now noticing. She shrugs and pulls out a funnel.

“Tee! You are not funnelling beer!” I tell her.

“No, I’m not, but you are!” she says with that evil smirk of hers. “Oh, who am I kidding, I am too!” she says. I palm my face, and look over at Layla, who is pouring tequila shots. Innocent Layla! There’s a knock on the door so I walk over quickly to answer it, my mouth opening in shock at the person standing on the other side.

“What are you doing here?” I ask him.

“Happy birthday, Lexi!” Kade booms, pulling me in for a hug. He moves past me, and walks into the apartment, acting like he’s been here before. I follow him into the kitchen, and curse when I see what’s been going on while I was answering the door. Tee is funnelling beer, and Sasha is pouring it down for her.

“What do we have here?” Kade asks, walking over and grabbing the funnel.

“Kade, what are you doing here?” Layla asks him, frowning.

“Chase sent me to babysit you,” he smirks.

“He’s so ridiculous,” Layla says.

“Oh come on, I’m the life of the party! Come pour the beer down for me!” Kade calls out to her.

Layla hesitates, and then grins as she walks over and starts pouring the beer, as Kade gulps it down. Ryder comes up behind me, and wraps his arms around me.

“You smell good,” he whispers into my ear, causing the hairs on my nape to stand on end.

“Do you think they’ll notice if we sneak away for a few moments?” I ask him.

“Lexi girl, I think you and I both know I can last longer than that,” Ryder teases. I tickle him on his ribs, giggling as he slowly walks with me, steering me towards the bedroom. I wince when Kade points out our departure and starts to sing ‘Birthday Sex’ by Jeremih.

“Leave them alone, Kade! It’s her birthday and she deserves some good lovin’!” Tee adds with an encouraging nod. I hide my face into Ryder’s chest. I know he’s silently laughing, because I can feel his chest rumbling.

“Are we hitting a club?” Jet asks us all.

“After we do the tequila shots,” Kade suggests, causing Sasha to do a little booty dance.

“Where’s Nikki, by the way?” Layla asks Kade as she downs a shot. I giggle when I see the graphic shot glass she’s using. It has a naked man on it with a 3D penis.

“She’s visiting her parents,” Kade tells Layla.

“Why does she even let you out alone? Or doesn’t she know you’re out tonight?” Tee taunts. Kade maturely sticks his tongue out at her. I glance up at Ryder, and nod at him when he slyly motions to the door. He locks it behind him after we both enter.

“Those sneaky sex fiends!” I hear Kade call out.

“Don’t be a cock block, Kade!” Layla calls out in return.

I can’t contain it anymore, I burst out laughing. Kade is such a character. Ryder pushes me against the wall and fuses his lips to mine. I forget about anything but him for the next hour.

I tip toe outside of the room, and head into the kitchen. Everyone headed out to the club after banging on my door and telling us to meet them there. I sit at the table and open all of my gifts. I feel a little overwhelmed; I’ve never really had anything like this done for me before. I slowly open each and every card and gift, loving and appreciating everything I was given. I’ll definitely treasure it all.

I open Ryder's gift last and my mouth opens in a gasp when I see the stunning gold chain with the word 'LEXI' written in the middle. It's beautiful. There are two small gold skulls on each side, with diamonds in each pair of eyes. It's so me, and I love it that Ryder knew how much I'd adore it. Ryder walks out just as I'm trying to put it on, and he silently takes the chain out of my fingers to clasp it for me.

"Thank you, Ryder, it's the most beautiful thing I have ever received," I tell him honestly. "Well, besides my guitar," I quickly amend with a grin. Ryder chuckles, pushing back a honey blonde strand before kissing me sweetly on the temple. I breathe in his scent, that masculine cologne I adore, and just Ryder.

"Are we heading to the club?" I ask him.

"Yeah, we should probably go keep an eye on them all," Ryder says in mock exasperation. We both jump in the shower and get dressed to head out to Steele. I put my hair up in a high ponytail, teasing the front up. I choose an emerald green mini dress, it's strapless and shows off my new chain. Some mascara, and a little contouring on my face and I'm good to go.

We walk into Steele and I burst out laughing at the scene we come upon. Kade and Tee are engaged in some sort of dance battle, Sasha is chatting up some sexy looking man at the bar, Layla is sitting *on* the bar and Jet is missing in action. I can't help but notice that even fooling around and probably drunk, Kade is keeping an eye on both Sasha and Layla, checking on both of them every few minutes.

They all beam when they catch sight of Ryder and me. Ryder tells me he's the designated driver, if I want to have a few drinks. I don't really want to drink tonight, so I decline. I want to remember this night, everything about it, in vivid detail. These crazy people have somehow become my family, and I appreciate them being here to celebrate with me. I lean my back against Ryder's chest and grind my hips in a circular movement. Ryder instantly grips my hips with his fingers, bringing my body even closer to his. We are pressed so closely together not even a piece of paper could fit between us. I rotate my hips sensually, and hear Ryder growl into my ear, "I had no idea you could move like this." I smirk, even though he can't see my expression, and grip the back of his neck with my right hand, my body rolling backwards into him as I do so. I can feel his arousal pressing into my behind, and the fact that he wants me again after

just having me thrills me. We dance for a little while longer, and after Ryder calms down a little, I go and dance with the girls.

When Ryder walks out with another birthday cake for me, lit candles and everything, my eyes start to tear up. This is the best birthday I have ever had in my life, usually it was just me and my mum. Ryder places the cake down on the bar and sits me down on the stool. He runs and jumps on the stage, and the DJ stops playing the music, the club is momentarily silent.

“It’s my girl Lexi’s birthday today, so we’re all gonna sing to her!” Ryder calls out. The club cheers.

“Happy birthday to you...” Ryder sings to me, along with everyone else. At the end I blow out my candles, and for once in my life I have to try hard to think of a wish. I have everything a girl could want. I wish for health for myself and my friends, blow out my candles, and sigh in contentment. The DJ starts to play dance music again, and I giggle as Ryder walks over and cuts me a small slice of cake, holding it up for me to take a bite. I moan as the chocolate hits my tongue, and watch as Ryder licks the remains off his fingers.

“My first time organizing anything for you, how did I do?” he asks into my ear. He says it like there are going to be many more times to come. I love that.

“It was perfect, Ryder,” I say sincerely. I don’t even need all this, but the fact that everyone put in such an effort for me makes me feel really special. Loved. Ryder throws a devastating smile my way, obviously pleased with himself, as he should be. We all party the night away, dancing, laughing and just enjoying life. We make it home in the wee hours of the morning, Ryder and Sasha crashing at our apartment. Jet and Kade take a cab home.

Best. Birthday. Ever.

The next morning Ryder makes me breakfast in bed, and we celebrate all over again.

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# Chapter 10

## Four months later

### Lexi

Ryder and I have been going strong for almost five months now, and it's been amazing. We spend all the time we can together. Unfortunately, every Friday night when he's been performing I've been at my other job. By the time I get home it's late. Ryder's been begging me to come and watch him, and the next time he plays at Steele is on a Saturday instead, so I can finally go. I can't wait to see him in action.

We're sitting in the living room, playing band here. I'm on the guitar, and he's on the drums. It's so funny watching him concentrating, when he's the front man of a popular band in real life.

"Lexi!" he calls out chuckling. Oops, I was staring at him and not playing.

"You're letting the band down!" he mock growls. After we finish the tour we're doing, we turn it off, and head into the kitchen. Ryder cooked us dinner earlier and I'm starving. I glance at my plate and my mouth waters; grilled fish, asparagus, and mashed potato. I take a huge bite enthusiastically.

"Someone needs to husband you right now," I say, taking another bite. Ryder laughs, shaking his head.

"I'm serious! If the whole band thing doesn't work out, you could become a chef," I tell him.

"My mother taught me, and she knows her way around the kitchen," he says softly, watching me eat.

"Stop watching me," I hiss, my cheeks going pink.

"I like watching you," he says simply.

"You're making me nervous," I counter. He grins and takes a bite of his own food.

"If I'm *not* watching you, that's when you should be worried," he teases.

"Is that right?" I say.

"You don't mind my eyes on yours in the bedroom," he adds with a chuckle.



My mouth opens in disbelief. “You can’t bring up things that happen in the bedroom at the dinner table!”

“Why not?” Ryder asks, giving me a full on belly laugh. He obviously finds this amusing.

“You just can’t! What happens in the bedroom, stays in the bedroom!” I say.

“I’m pretty sure I went down on you in the kitchen the other day,” he adds nonchalantly.

I can actually feel the flush riding up my neck, “Ryder!”

“Best meal I ever had,” he continues.

“Do you want another taste?” I ask coyly. I inwardly smile at Ryder’s reaction. His beautiful gray eyes smoulder and his nostrils flair slightly.

“Always,” is his husky reply.

“Good,” I say. I go back to eating.

“Lexi!” Ryder practically growls, his eyes narrowed to slits.

“What does that tattoo on your neck say?” I ask him, purposely changing the subject. I’ve been wondering from the first moment I laid my eyes on him. It’s in another language, a quote in beautiful script.

“It’s a secret. Nice change of subject by the way,” he says slyly.

“I’m just going to google it,” I announce before taking another bite of fish. Ryder stands up and pours me a glass of red wine, placing it down next to my plate.

“Thank you,” I tell him quietly.

“You’re welcome,” he says in a deep tone. I run my gaze over the rest of his tattoos, admiring his two full sleeves of beautiful artwork from shoulder to wrist. Our eyes meet and his are now a dark gray, and intently on me.

“Like what you see?” he asks bluntly.

“You know I do, Ryder,” I say between sips of wine. Hell, what’s not to love? He shakes his head at me again and a chocolate brown lock falls over his forehead. I lean towards him and push it aside, Ryder taking my hand in his as I’m about to pull it away. He places a chaste kiss on the inside of my wrist, and gives me a full watt smile. We finish our meal in silence, the air in the room thick with sexual tension. Ryder gets up and clears my plate and I thank him. When he comes back into the room

holding a plate with cheesecake, strawberries, and a bottle of whipped cream, I raise my eyebrow in question.

“Dessert is in the bedroom tonight,” he says huskily, motioning his head to the bedroom door. My breath hitches as I stand up slowly, and walk into the bedroom; an exaggerated swing in my hips. I hear Ryder growl as he walks closely behind me.

He doesn't even bother closing the door.

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# Chapter 11

## Lexi

Laughing, Ryder and I walk hand in hand into the club. *Morning Alliance* are performing a gig at Chase's club, and this is the first time I'll see him play with his band. I'm wearing a tight, fitted white dress, with a sweetheart neckline, and playful white platform heels. My hair is curled and let loose and wild, bouncing over my shoulders as I walk. My makeup is my usual mascara and bright red lips. Ryder's eyes almost popping out of his head when he saw me was validation enough that I clean up pretty well.

Ryder stands behind me and nuzzles my neck, placing a few wet kisses there. Goosebumps rise on my arms, and my hair stands on end. Ryder is so affectionate and it's still taking some getting used to. "Lexi girl," he growls, "every pair of male eyes are on you right now." I blush and give him a small grin, causing him to dig his fingers into my hips. "I'm both proud and frustrated as hell," he whispers into my ear, nipping the bottom of my lobe with his teeth.

"Ryder!" I chastise, not used to PDAs. He chuckles deeply, and spins me around, giving me a deep kiss. We walk over to Tee, Layla, Chase, Kade and James.

"Look who finally made it!" Tee teases, giving me a sleazy grin. Ryder leads me over to the empty chair next to Tee. "I gotta go, my Queen of hearts," he says to me, kissing me once more. "Look after my girl, Chase," he says to Chase. Chase nods. Ryder, satisfied, leaves me to go prepare with his band.

"Can I get you a drink, Lexi?" Kade asks with an evil grin.

"No, thanks," I say back, causing him to laugh. Ignoring him, I turn to James.

"So, James, how are you?" I ask him.

"I'm doing alright, how are you?" James counters. He looks delicious in a blue shirt that shows off his ripped biceps and gives a nice view of his chest. Which, for your information, is worthy of being on a calendar. I stare at his lip ring as he bites it with his teeth.

"Lexi?" he asks, not for the first time.

"Huh, what?" I say stupidly.

James chuckles, shaking his head at me. What's a girl to do?

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Twenty minutes later I'm standing at the bar, ordering myself a screwdriver from Payton when a man stands next to me. He motions to Payton with a nod, which she returns. I tilt my head to the side when I realize there's something familiar about him. I can only see his profile, spiked up brown hair, arms covered in tattoos, and an eyebrow ring. I don't know anyone who looks like that, but I still can't shake the feeling that I've met this man before. Payton hands me my drink, offering me a smile, and I pull a fifty dollar note out of my purse. The man next to me takes his own drink, thanking Payton.

When he speaks, I instantly stiffen because I know that voice. Oh, hell, do I ever know that voice. I put my head down, covering my face with my hair. How could I forget that posture? That delicious scent of his cologne? I slowly take a step back, turning around, and heading for our table.

"You forgot your drink, sweetheart," he calls after me in his smooth voice. I realize there's no getting out of this. I'm going to have to face him. I turn around and look into the melted chocolate eyes of the boy who broke my heart.

"AJ?" he says, surprised, taking a step closer to me. "Fuck, AJ, you look so different. I've been trying to find you for years now." His voice has turned hoarse, and his eyes are full of pain. Why he's feeling pain, I have no idea.

"Saxon," I acknowledge him with a nod of my head. I don't know what he wants from me, but he's not going to get it. "I gotta go," I say, stepping back once again.

"AJ, wait, baby, we need to talk. Fuck, I have so much I want to say to you. I'm not letting you leave again," he says, deep emotion in his voice.

Wait, what? He grabs hold of my arm and pulls me into his arms. I put my hands against his chest and push myself away. "Saxon, let me go!" I say, struggling, but he only holds me tighter into his arms.

"What the fuck are you doing, Sax?" I hear a growl from behind me. I instantly stop my struggling when I hear his voice.

"Don't worry 'bout it, Ry," Sax says nonchalantly.

“Why wouldn’t I worry that you have your hands all over my fucking girl?” Ryder yells, the vehemence in his voice causing me to gulp. Saxon finally lets go of my arm and I quickly turn around and run into Ryder’s arms. He wraps his arms tightly around me in a protective gesture.

“Your girl?” Sax repeats in disbelief. I glance over at him to see him close his eyes for a moment, his mouth twisting. When he opens his eyes and our gazes lock, the pain in them astounds me. He looks crestfallen.

“Yeah, this is Lexi. Wanna explain what’s going on here?” Ryder demands.

“She’s my ex, AJ” Sax informs him.

Ryder looks down at me his brow furrowed. “AJ?”

“Alexis Joy,” I whisper.

“Fuck! This is your ex, the one you still...” Ryder doesn’t finish his sentence.

Saxon rubs the back of his neck, now staring at the floor. He looks so different. My Saxon didn’t have any tattoos or piercings or have his hair like that.

“Did you know?” Saxon asks me.

“Did I know what?” I respond, confused.

“That Ryder was in *Morning Alliance* with me? Is this some fucked up way for you to get back at me? By getting with a guy I consider family? Cos you win, AJ, this fucking hurts like hell!” Saxon spits out at me. I notice Ryder putting a little space between us and it pisses me off. He doesn’t believe Saxon, does he?

I gape. “You think this is all about you, Sax? What the hell?! I never wanted to see you ever again!” I’m yelling now. I turn around and look at Ryder who is now staring at Saxon, not looking at me. “You know what? Fuck you both!” I hiss, walking towards the club exit. I don’t deserve this shit. I hail a cab and jump in.

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## **Ryder**

“She’s the girl? The one you never got over? The one you kept looking for?” I ask Sax, already knowing the answer. Fuck if this doesn’t hurt. My Lexi has been with Sax, and from the looks of things, they were

serious. Serious enough that Sax never got over her. This whole thing is a cluster fuck of epic proportions. I don't want Sax hurt, but Lexi...

Lexi is mine.

"Yeah, she's my girl, Ry," Sax states, causing me to clench my fists.

"She's not your girl anymore, Sax," I say in a quiet, deadly tone.

"I don't think you understand, Ry. We were together for years. High school sweethearts, we were each other's firsts...in everything," Sax says simply.

I see red. He was Lexi's first? Fuck.

"I'm sorry, but you're not getting her back, Sax. L, she's with me," I tell him frankly. I hear our name being called on stage. How the fuck am I going to perform now? Not to mention Lexi ran out by herself.

I make an instant decision and run off after her, but I'm too late. I see her jump in a cab and drive off. Running my fingers through my hair, I exhale deeply. Walking back into the club, I see the disapproval from the other band members. I put Lexi out of my mind, and jump on stage.

"How is everyone doing tonight?" I say into the microphone. We get some cheers and catcalls from the audience. I see Tee shooting me daggers, so I avoid looking at her. I concentrate on the task at hand, and put on a good show for the crowd.

As soon as we get off stage, the guys start in on me.

"What the hell, Ryder? Why were you with AJ?" Kidd asks, looking confused.

"She goes by Lexi, and she's mine," I spit at him.

Jet walks over looking confused. "What's going on?" he asks before taking a gulp of water.

"Nothing," I say to him.

"Nothing? Stealing my girl is nothing to you?" Sax hisses at me.

"Steal? Don't make shit up, Sax. *If* she was yours, I wouldn't have gone near her. I'm not like that and you know it," I tell him, affronted.

"Yeah, well, I'm not going to sit around and watch you with the woman I love," he tells me, his face blank, and then he storms off, not giving us a backwards glance. He even slams the door for good measure.

"Fuck! This is going to mess up the band, Ryder. Look, I love AJ... I mean Lexi... She's a good girl and I've known her for many years, but this is our chance, everything we've ever wanted for us is almost within reach.

With you and Sax going at each other this isn't going to happen! You need to sort this out."

I stare at the ceiling. Fuck if he isn't right. And I hate it. What's that saying? *Get what you want, lose what you have*. Which is it gonna be? My career, or the woman of my dreams? It seems fate is a bitch and won't let me have both.

I know exactly how this is going to play out.

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## Chapter 12

### Lexi

I rush out of the bar and jump into the nearest taxi. I absently give the driver my home address, and then stare out of the window. My mind returns to the scene I just left, and then all the memories come flooding back.

Saxon was my first love. We started out as friends, and it just grew from there. He was my everything; my best friend, my boyfriend. He was the one person in my life that I could trust and rely on. I went by AJ then, Saxon gave me that nickname and it just stuck.

When my mother died, in the beginning he was there for me, helping me grieve. She was here one day, and the next she was hit by a drunk driver; never even got the chance to say goodbye. After a while Sax wasn't around as much, and I found out why fast enough.

I was out getting some groceries when a woman walked up to me. She was pretty, dressed simply in a sundress and sandals.

“Are you AJ?”

I frowned in confusion, wondering who the hell this girl was. “Yes,” I told her, a little hesitantly.

“AJ, as in Sax's girl?” she asked.

“Yeah... Why do you want to know? Is he okay?” I asked, concerned. Suddenly there were a thousand different scenarios running through my head.

At first I thought she would be bitchy, but she almost looked sad, as if she didn't want to be the one to tell me this next blow. “My name is Shanora. I don't want to tell you this, but I have to,” she said, and then took a deep breath. “I slept with Sax a few nights ago. I didn't know he had a girlfriend until he called out your name during... our time together.”

“What?” I breathed out. I had a fleeting thought that there was no way Sax would do something like that to me. But the look on the girl's face had me questioning everything. It had me nervous.

“I didn't want to tell you, but I know what it's like to be cheated on, and I'm sorry, but you needed to know.” Before I could ask her anything else, she rushed off.



Instead of finishing my shopping, I rushed out of the store, and headed over to Sax's house. When I pulled up, he was sitting on his top step. I got out of the car, slamming the door, and he looked up. Noticing the look on my face he came to me right away, but I instantly backed up and held out my hand.

"Don't fucking touch me," I hissed violently.

"Baby, what..."

"Is it true? Did you sleep with some girl named Shanora?" I asked, cutting him off.

He put his head down then looked back up, tears in his eyes. "Baby, I'm so sorry, it was a mistake."

"Well, that mistake just ended us. Stay away from me, Saxon." I ran back to my car and he chased after me.

"AJ, please, stop. I'm sorry. It won't ever happen again. I can't lose you," he begged.

Before pulling out, I yelled out my rolled down window, "Should have thought about that before you cheated on me!" Big, ugly, fat tears rolled down my face. I lost my mother, and then I've lost Sax, the only other person I had left in my life.

I was alone.

All alone.

I drove off, sobbing hysterically. It didn't take long for Sax to come over to my house, pounding on my door, pleading with me. But I never opened it because I was busy making my own plans. I finished packing all my things and called up a rental company to get my house set up to rent out. Once I knew Sax was gone, I took my bags to my car, locked up the house, and left. I never looked back.

That was about three years ago. Seeing Sax again has hurt me all over again. The fact that he's in a band with Ryder, I don't know what to do with that. I want to be with Ryder, but apparently being with him means I get my past rubbed in my face every day. What are the chances of this happening? Apparently the universe is out to get me.

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**Ryder**

Everything's messed up. Sax is missing in action, and Lexi isn't talking to me. I went over to her apartment and Tee slammed the door in my face; nice to see that family has my back. I know I screwed up, letting Lexi think that maybe I believed some of the stuff Sax was spitting out, but that really isn't the case. I have no idea what I'm gonna do. I can't let the band fall apart, years of hard work and friendship, over my personal life. I need to talk to Sax and sort this out.

When he's not at his house, I check a couple of other places he frequents. Some dodgy looking bar that doesn't even have a sign, the basketball courts where he plays, and even his mum's house. When all come up empty, I head back to Lexi's and feel completely stupid when I see Sax's Harley parked in front of her apartment. Of course he would be here. I can't help the sliver of fear that runs down my spine. What if Lexi wants him back? I don't know what I'd do.

I run up the stairs and bang on her apartment door. Tee opens the door, this time letting me in quickly. I walk into the living room and see Sax and Lexi sitting on one of the couches. Sax is talking too quietly, and Lexi is sitting there saying nothing, looking like she wishes she was anywhere else.

"Lexi?" I say.

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### **Lexi**

"I'm so sorry, AJ, please give me a second chance to make things right," Sax says. He's sitting next to me on the couch, his face drawn with sorrow.

"I forgive you, Sax, but we're not going to happen. You need to move on," I tell him, not for the first time since he came to talk to me.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would ever forgive him, but here I am. I don't like seeing him like this, I think he needs my forgiveness to move on, and I want that for him. Sure, I've been bitter for a while now, but it's been years and it's time to move on.

"No AJ, I want you in my life. I knew I had fucked up the minute you left. I looked everywhere for you but..." he trails off. I look over at him. He's a gorgeous man, there's no denying that. His brown spiky hair is without product today, just sticking out haphazardly, and his brown eyes are

filled with regret. He's wearing jeans, motorcycle boots, and a black t-shirt. His muscles are impressive, and I'm not gonna lie, I really like the tattoos and piercings. But Saxon Tate is my past, and I am not going back. Ever.

"I needed you, Sax. I had lost my mother, my world was falling apart. I was lost, and you weren't there for me. In fact, you were in the arms of another woman. That's not something you can just say sorry for and expect me to take you back with open arms," I tell him, exhaling deeply.

"I know, fuck, I know. She meant nothing. Nothing," he says, rubbing his hand over his head. I glance at his knuckles and frown when I see the initials 'AJ' written on the two of his fingers on his right hand, just below the knuckles. He sees where I'm looking and sighs. I swallow heavily.

"Any woman that takes a cheater back is stupid. And I'm not a stupid woman, Sax! What would happen when you went on tour? The trust is gone, you can never get that back." I hiss at him.

"I love you, AJ," he whispers to me, his eyes pleading.

"All I can offer you is friendship, Saxon," I tell him frankly. He looks disappointed, heartbroken even.

"Because of Ryder?" he asks bitterly.

"No, Saxon. It's because you cheated on me!" I almost yell, losing my temper.

"Yeah and sleeping with one of my best friends is enough of a payback, don't you think?" he counters.

"Oh my god! I didn't even know that you knew Ryder! My relationship with him has nothing to do with you, Saxon! I've moved on, and you need to do the same!" I tell him, exasperated.

"You can't expect me to see the two of you together every day!" he says sharply.

"So what, you want Ryder and me to break up? Are you that selfish you don't want to see me happy?" I spit out.

"No, I just love you that much!" he says through clenched teeth.

"That's not love," I counter bitterly.

"You're mine AJ," he says. I almost want to squirm under his penetrating gaze.

"I haven't been yours from the moment you touched another woman!" I yell at him, my eyes narrowed to amber slits.

“She was a distraction! You were out of it, grieving, you wouldn’t even talk to me!” he retorts.

I gape. “That’s your excuse? You piece of shit!”

Saxon takes a deep breath, visibly calming himself.

“I know it was my fault, not yours. Okay? But we were each other’s firsts, I can’t say I wasn’t intrigued by the idea of sleeping with another woman,” he admits. Finally some honesty.

“And I hope she was worth it,” I say snidely. I’d be lying if I said it doesn’t feel good to say it.

Saxon clenches his fists so tight his knuckles turn white. “It’s the biggest regret of my life,” he almost whispers.

I have no idea what to say, so I sit there staring at him.

Ryder suddenly walks in, calling out my name.

Saxon and I both look up at him, and I can’t help but admire his thick strong legs in his jeans. The man is built perfectly. He’s wearing a long sleeved, thin black T-shirt and his chocolate hair is in a messy disarray. His five o’clock shadow is sexy as hell, too, but his most amazing feature are, of course, those intense stormy gray eyes, which are now narrowed suspiciously.

“What are you doing here, Sax?” he demands.

“Talking to AJ,” Sax drawls lazily.

“Her name is Lexi,” Ryder hisses.

“She’ll always be AJ to me,” Saxon replies.

Ryder’s fists clench as he moves his gaze from Saxon to me.

“Is everything okay, Lexi?” he asks, gentling his voice.

“Saxon was just leaving,” I say, nodding. I can see Sax frown at me from the corner of my eye, but things between Sax and me are over. Apologies, years too late, aren’t going to help anything. Saxon was my first love, and I will always have feelings for him, but I know that he isn’t going to be a part of my future, at least as anything more than a friend. Saxon stands up and I’m surprised when Ryder tells me he’s going to walk Sax outside. I inhale deeply and bury my face into the couch.

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## Chapter 13

### Ryder

“We need to be cool, Sax, we can’t let the band pay for this drama between us,” I tell Sax.

“Yeah? Easy for you, you get the girl,” he says to himself, grabbing his helmet.

I ignore his comment. “Are we gonna be okay?” I ask frankly.

“I don’t know, Ryder,” is his infuriating reply. “I can’t stand to watch you with the girl I love, and I’m sorry, but I can’t pretend that I’m going to be okay with that shit.”

“So what? You want me to break up with Lexi for you? For the band?” I ask him, my fists clenching with the thought. I don’t think I could ever give up Lexi. I *won’t* give up Lexi.

“The fact that you even ask that makes me know that you don’t deserve her. I would give up this band in a minute for Lexi,” he says as he puts his helmet on. And as he rides off, I feel like punching something. Preferably Saxon’s head.

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### Lexi

Ryder comes back inside and sits next to me. I made a decision while he was outside. The hardest, most selfless decision I have ever made.

I realized that I was going to have to give up Ryder.

I was coming between him and his dream, and I couldn’t let that happen. Ryder would resent me if he was stuck here with me working a nine to five, while his band made it big. I’d never hold him back like that. Sax made it clear he wasn’t going to be okay with Ryder and me being together, and I really have no other options. And when Ryder starts touring, who knows how our relationship would fair? He could find someone else, and I would be lonely and wondering what he was up to.

“I think we should break up, Ryder,” I blurt out, setting my shoulders.

“What? Because of Saxon?” he asks in a rough tone.

“Yes, he's a part of it, but it's just not gonna work out. Okay?” I tell him bluntly. Ryder stares at me in silence for a few moments before nodding with realization.

“You're not gonna fight for us. You're just gonna take the easy way out. Let me tell you something, Lexi, anything worth having you need to fight for. Nothing this amazing comes without a fight. And I was going to fight for you, for us, until the very end. But I can't do that if you aren't willing to do the same.”

Saying that that, he gets up and leaves.

I burst into tears.

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A week later, I know I've made a huge mistake. I want to fight. I'm ready and willing. Over the past few days I've been miserable. Nothing Tee tried to do could cheer me up, and I can tell she's starting to worry. I've tried to call Ryder a few times, but he didn't answer; he's obviously still mad at me. The only way I'm going to be able to talk to him is to go and see him.

I run up the stairs to Ryder's apartment, eager to see him, but slow down when I hear voices coming from his front door.

“I think we should give this a go, Ryder, don't you?” a woman's voice purrs. The hairs on the nape of my neck stand on end. I listen intently, and I hear Ryder sigh. I can just imagine him rubbing the back of his neck with those long slender fingers of his. Musician's hands. My heart breaks as I realize he's actually considering this. He possibly wants to be with this woman. What was I to him?

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## Chapter 14

### Ryder

“I think we should give this a go, Ryder, don’t you?” Nikki says huskily.

“I guess we could give us a try, or we will always be wondering what if,” I find myself thinking out loud.

But... Lexi. Lexi brings complications. Lexi herself is complicated. She's a threat to everything I have worked towards because of her past with Sax. Lexi can bring down the band, put a stop to my dreams. Lexi is our band's Yoko Ono. I feel so much for Lexi, but am I willing to sacrifice my hope, my dreams, and my career for her? For someone who isn't even willing to fight back for me?

Before I can say anything else Nikki makes the decision for me and puts her lips on mine. The woman has always been forward, but with me she was never the one to take the lead, it's always been me, so this is a new experience for us. I think she really wants to see where this can lead. I hear a gasp and my head snaps towards the staircase where I see the back of a retreating Lexi. I'd recognize that honey blonde hair anywhere. Fuck. I don't want to hurt her. Ever. I love Lexi. I flinch as I realize the truth of what she just saw. This is a cluster fuck.

“Who was that?” Nikki asks, her emerald eyes narrowing.

“A friend,” I say softly.

At least she was.

Because now Alexis Joy Raine probably hates me.

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### Lexi

I have no idea what to do about Tee. If I tell her that I'm running, she'll want to run with me. But she already has a good thing going here in Perth. I decide honesty is always the best policy, so I call her up.

“Hey, butt face,” she says in welcome. The woman is charming.

“Tee, I’m leaving Perth. I need to get away for a while,” I tell her, getting straight to the point.

“When do we leave?” she asks instantly.

I’m silent.

“Lexi?” she asks.

“You don’t need to come, Tee. We just moved in, you can find another roomie and...”

“What happened with Ryder?” she asks knowingly.

“He moved on,” I say slowly and softly, drawing out each word.

“Come again?” Tee hisses. I don’t reply because I know that she heard me.

“Where are you going to go?” she asks after a few seconds.

“I’m not sure yet, but I’ll be back,” I assure her.

“I’ll give you three months,” she announces. “If you’re not back, I’ll come to wherever you are.”

“Deal,” I say. I always keep my word, and so does Tee. We’re both loyal to a fault.

“Will you be there when I get home?” she asks me.

“I’ll wait for you, I’m not gonna just leave without saying bye to my family,” I tell her.

“Fuck, Lexi. I’ll be there in an hour,” she says.

“See you then.”

We both hang up and then I pick up my suitcase to start packing.

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## **Ryder**

I made a mistake and I’m going to fix it. First, I’m going to visit Lexi and fix things, and then I’m going to visit Nikki and tell her that we can only be friends, because I’m in love with someone else.

I run up the stairs to Lexi’s apartment and bang on the door. A ruffled looking Tee opens the door, her eyes slightly red.

“Have you been crying or smoking something?” I ask her. It’s a legitimate question. Tee narrows her eyes and slaps me hard across the cheek. Fuck!

“What was that for?” I ask gruffly. She says nothing, just walks into the house, leaving the door open. I step in, a bad feeling churning in my gut.



I head straight for Lexi's room, my eyebrows furrowed in worry.

"Where is she, Tee?" I demand when I see some of Lexi's belongings gone.

"I don't know," Tee responds, her voice cracking.

"What the fuck do you mean, you don't know?" I demand.

"She's gone. She wasn't even sure where she was heading off to," she tells me as she pours two coffees.

"What? But..." I trail off, collapsing on the couch. I was coming to make things right, to tell her I love her, to beg for her to forgive me.

"She'll be back eventually," Tee says dryly.

"You're gonna be alone here?" I ask Tee, concerned.

"Yeah, thanks for chasing away my only friend, Ryder," she says dryly.

"Thanks, Tee, cos I don't already feel like shit," I say, rubbing my hand over my head.

"Wanna tell me what happened?" she asks, handing me a cup of coffee.

"Yeah, okay, but don't slap me again," I say, eyeing her. She cracks a small smile. And then I open up and tell her exactly how I chased away the woman I love.

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# Chapter 15

## Ryder

I haven't seen or heard from Lexi, but not for lack of trying. Tee won't tell me where she is or how she's doing; nothing. I mean, come on, throw me a bone here. She claims she doesn't know much, but I know how close those two are.

I've been on tour for a few weeks, and I haven't even touched a woman. Shocking, I know. Men like me should be all up in the groupie scene, but I can't stop thinking about Lexi. She's taken off, and I don't even know where to start looking for her. I feel like I've lost my muse.

Tonight I'm going out with the rest of the band. because they think I need to have a little fun instead of moping around thinking about Lexi. I get dressed in my usual jeans and a black t-shirt. I spray on some Issey Miyake, my staple cologne, and I'm good to go.

I hesitate as I pass Saxon's door, and I cringe when I hear him singing The Script's 'Breakeven' with his guitar, obviously to Lexi. That's some depressing shit right there. I knock a few times before he finally answers. "Hey, man, you coming out with us tonight?" I ask him.

"No, just gonna hang out here," he says, shutting the door in my face. He's been doing nothing but feeling sorry for himself, he's really beating himself up about Lexi. I wonder what happened between the two of them. No one's ever told me the whole story. I was hoping Lexi would offer it up to me, but she never did.

I make my way down the hotel lobby and straight to the bar. I see Jet and Kidd, so I make my way towards them. I notice a few scantily clad women surrounding them.

"Hey, guys," I nod in greeting, taking a seat on the bar stool.

"Whoa, you're out. Girls, this is Ryder, he's been pining over a girl the last six weeks. One of you should show him a good time," my cousin Jet says with a grin. I know he doesn't like seeing me upset, and he's been trying his best to cheer me up.

I start to protest when a stunning blonde comes over to me and glues herself to my side. She's beautiful, but not what I want. She doesn't smell right, and she definitely doesn't look right.

She's not my Lexi.

I decline her offer to go somewhere private and decide this wasn't a good idea. I tell Jet and Kidd I'm leaving.

I make it back to my room and plop down on the bed with a sigh. When our tour is over I'm going to head straight home, and then hopefully I can get some answers out of Tee, so I can find Lexi and bring her home, where she belongs.

I love her.

Saxon be damned, she's mine.

And when I find her, I won't let her go again.

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## Chapter 16

### Lexi

I wake up after a full night of sleep, but I'm still exhausted. I've literally been working ten hour shifts every day, just to keep myself busy. The money isn't bad either. I know I'm using work as means of distraction, but any way I can cope, I'm going to take it.

I force myself to get up, and fill up the bath tub. I think a good soak would do me justice. I check my phone, like clockwork, just in case. Just in case Ryder somehow wants to talk to me, contact me. I'm torn, I'm both mad at him and I miss him like crazy. I don't know what to do with myself anymore. I'm a coward.

I ran, *again*. When things get tough, I run.

I add some bubbles to my bath, and then slowly undress, only using gentle movements with my aching body. I haven't even made any new friends in this town. I'm keeping to myself. It's almost as if I'm punishing myself. But for what? For trusting again? For screwing things up with Ryder? I don't even know anymore. All I know is that I don't want to go on like this.

I stare at my reflection in the mirror and sigh heavily. My amber eyes look tired, my honey colored hair not even brushed. I need to get my shit together. I have to get back to Perth, just as I promised Tee. Over the three months I travelled around, working random bar jobs to make extra cash.

After I'm done with my bath, I put some moisturizer on my face, and then apply some light makeup. My bags are all packed and ready to go. I'm not worried about seeing Ryder because I know for a fact he's touring right now. I've even seen him on TV, and he seems to be doing well. I'm proud of him. He's living his dream.

I finish my makeup, brush my hair, and sit down on my bed. When I saw Ryder on TV, he dedicated a song to me. 'This song is for the queen of hearts,' was what he said. The song was 'Here Without You' by Three Doors Down. When he sang the chorus, I burst into tears.

What exactly did it mean? Nothing really changed. Sax is still an issue, as is the fact that Ryder was kissing another woman so soon after I broke up with him. I have no idea if Ryder tried to contact me or not

because I got a new number. Tee has that number, though, so he could have gotten it from her if he really wanted to.

I stand up, and do a quick check of the hotel room, making sure I haven't forgotten anything. Then I pick up my bags, and head out.

Time to face the music.

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## Ryder

I gulp down my bottle of water. We've just finished another opening act, and I'm still high on adrenaline. I can't wait until *Morning Alliance* gets our own tour instead of just opening. Still, every show for Cold Nation, we get to do about four songs as an opening act, and I'm not complaining. We usually do two of our own songs, and two cover songs. We've gotten so much publicity its crazy. We've been asked to do interviews, to pose for a whole heap of photo shoots. We even have our own groupies. The whole thing is insane.

Things have been better with Sax and me, but still a bit tense. When I dedicated a song to Lexi, even though it was only by her nickname, he started pulling back again. Sax is our drummer, and if it wasn't for that I think he would have dedicated a song to her too. He has an amazing voice, and I'm sure he's dying to sing 'Breakeven' to her. He thinks I let Lexi go for the band, but he doesn't know the events that actually went down. He knew I was seeing Nikki for a little while, but that's finished now. I haven't seen him hook up with any other women. While Kidd and Jet are out hooking up, Sax and I sit in the hotel room, pining over the same woman. It's fucking sad, really.

Lexi changed her phone number, and I haven't even spoken to her since she saw me with Nikki. Nikki and I ended things; we both knew we were better off as friends. We didn't even have sex, it didn't feel right. She wasn't who I wanted, and I wasn't who she wanted. If Lexi finds out I even attempted a relationship with Nikki, that's another strike against me. I've fucked up so bad, it's not even funny.

I can only hope that I get a chance to make things right.

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# Chapter 17

**Three months later**

**Lexi**

I'm back in Perth, at the apartment with Tee, and things are going well. Ryder is still on tour, and my life has gone back to normal. I'm back to working at the bar at *Steele*, after Chase asked Payton to take me back. I'm working here full time now, as my office job has already been replaced.

I even started seeing someone. His name is Derek and he's a friend of Kade and James. He asked me out about ten times before I actually agreed to go on a date with him. The man is relentless, that's for sure. He's also quite delicious, with brown hair and eyes, and a charming personality. We aren't serious or anything, in fact, we've only been dating for a week.

"Well, if it isn't my favourite bartender?" Derek flirts. I grin.

"I'm pretty sure you like anyone who gives you alcohol, Derek," I tease. Derek chuckles and shakes his head at me. I'm pretty sure Derek and I are destined for friendship only, which I clearly stated to him, but he seems dedicated to proving me wrong.

"So, you ready?" he asks.

"No," I say. Tee and Layla talked me into performing a song at the club. It has taken them about a month to wear me down, and I'm at the point where I'll do anything to get them off my back.

My point of relenting was when they got Kade on my case. The man's been playing pranks on me and annoying the hell out of me for the last month. He sends me video messages constantly, giving me a play by play of his day. He has also started trying to hook me up with James, and he keeps sending me pictures of James in various states of undress, and I'm pretty sure James has no idea. The latest one was of James in nothing but a towel, and the view was good, but James and I are just friends. When James goes away on business, Kade finds other ways to harass me.

Last night he sent me a picture of himself shirtless (wow) and the caption said 'Kade and Nikki.' There was no Nikki in the picture, so I texted back and told him so, thinking he sent me the wrong picture, but Kade texted back saying 'she's on her knees so you can't see her.' I choked on my coffee when I read that. Kade has no shame; he also sent me a

message casually asking if I wanted to come over for a threesome. He better have been joking, you can never really tell with him.

I've met Nikki, the woman I found Ryder embracing. I obviously knew who Nikki was, heard about her from Layla and Kade, but I had never actually met her, so when I saw her with Ryder, I had no idea it was her. She admitted to knowing about me too, and when she heard I dumped Ryder, she took her chance. She was on the rebound from Kade, and she thought since Ryder was also recently single, it was a good idea.

At first we were both wary around each other, but we've become friends. She keeps telling me about Ryder and how much he cares for me, but then she let it slip that they dated after I left. I had no idea about it, for some reason I stupidly thought it was just the one kiss. That was the moment I agreed to go out with Derek. After I had left, heartbroken, Ryder resumed a relationship with Nikki. It didn't matter to him one bit that I was gone. I'm not gonna lie – it hurt to hear it.

I walk around the bar, and groan out loud. I can see Kade, Chase, James, Nikki, Layla, and Tee, all sitting there, wearing smiles. Evil! The lot of them. I get my guitar and walk up on stage, taking a seat on the stool in the middle. The good thing is that it's during the day and not many people are here. Steele turns into a restaurant lounge during the day, but today is pretty empty. Only a few customers are at the table besides Tee and the gang. I clear my throat and say into the microphone, "Just to clarify, Kade will leave me alone after this, right?" Everyone laughs, but I'm dead serious. His TMI messages and videos are driving me around the bend. The man is perfect until he opens his mouth.

"Hey! I thought we were BFFs!" Kade yells out, pouting. Everyone laughs, myself included. I start to strum on my guitar, and everyone goes silent. I gulp, and look down at my shaking fingers. Okay, I can do this, these people are my friends and family. I look at Tee and our eyes connect. She gives me a small nod, an approving smile. I nod in return and close my eyes. Everyone and everything fades away as I start to sing. One of my favorite songs ever to both play and sing is 'The Special Two' by Missy Higgins, so I chose that to sing today. As usual with this song, soon I'm completely lost in the music.

I sing the lyrics, my heart feeling each and every word. This song is really beautiful, and I can't help but think of Ryder and what could have been. I sing effortlessly, the words and tune pouring from my voice and my



fingers. When it's done, and I sing the last note, I almost sigh in relief, and slowly open my eyes.

Everyone is standing and cheering, and a laugh bubbles in my throat. I can see the looks of awe from Layla, Kade, Derek, Chase, and James. Tee is the only one who's heard me before, which is probably why she's sporting a smug 'I told you so' look. Someone cheers louder than the rest, and my gaze goes to the back, where the cheers are coming from.

I do a double take when I see Ryder. He's standing there, leaning against the wall, clapping away. His gray eyes are intent on mine, and he looks... proud. He's proud of me. He's wearing distressed jeans with a tight white t-shirt, and he looks amazing. His hair is longer, shaggier, curling around his chin. I feel like someone is squeezing my heart. I knew he would be back eventually, but today of all days? I tear my gaze from his and walk off the stage. I take a seat between Tee and Derek, my body trembling slightly.

"I'm next!" I hear Ryder call out, causing me to flinch. All eyes glance between Ryder and me as he walks towards us. Derek tenses beside me, and moves his body closer to mine. Ryder walks straight to me and I hold my breath, waiting for his next move.

"May I?" he asks, gesturing to my guitar. My eyes take him in greedily. I also take a second to enjoy the husky drawl of his voice before I nod. He gently takes my guitar and walks onto the stage, sitting on the same stool where I sat moments ago. The club is so silent you could hear a pin drop. Ryder takes the microphone in his long fingers and raises the stand from where I had lowered it down to my sitting level.

"This song is for Lexi," he says, glancing up and pinning me with a searing look, watching me underneath his thick inky lashes. I can't help it when my lip twitches as Ryder starts to sing 'Suffocate' by J. Holiday. Looks like Ryder's been getting familiar with one of my favorite artists, because last time he didn't even know who J. Holiday was, and I know how Ryder feels about R&B music.

Ryder's deep husky voice sends shivers down my spine. When he stops the song half way and breaks into 'Pimp in Me,' I lose it, laughing. After he's done, we all clap and cheer. I can't stop the smile that beams on my face.

"Lexi, I love you. I want you. Please forgive me, my queen of hearts," Ryder says into the microphone. My smile immediately disappears.

I feel Derek wrap one of his hands around my waist, and Ryder's eyes narrow on Derek when he notices.

"Excuse me," I mutter, getting out of my chair, and walking outside. All of this is too much, and I need a moment to think.

I'm weak.

I'm weak because I want nothing more than to run into Ryder's arms.

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### **Ryder**

"Lexi?" I call out. I notice her leaning against the wall outside, her arms wrapped around herself protectively.

"What are you doing here, Ryder?" she asks in a small voice. My eyes take her in greedily. She looks a little different. Her hair is longer, and dead straight. She must have done whatever it is women do to get rid of her gorgeous curls. I was surprised when I saw her on stage, but so very proud. I know how much she hates it up there. She was a vision, her eyes closed, singing like an angel in that slightly husky tone of hers. Her voice left me breathless.

"We're on break right now, so I came home. I didn't know you were back. I actually came here to find Tee and ask her where you were," I say.

We're quiet for a few moments, before I have to ask, "What was that with Derek inside?"

"We're together," she says, looking at the ground and fidgeting with her hands.

I didn't expect that. I'm pissed. I don't have the right, considering I did date Nikki, but fuck.

"I'm gonna go back inside," she says quietly. Before she moves, I grab her arm and move in closer.

"Lexi, I'm sorry. Give me a chance to explain some things. I want to make this right. I want you, desperately. I love you, Lexi," I tell her.

"I can't, Ryder. You replaced me almost instantly. You guys are all the same. Sax cheated on me when I was grieving and you..." she trails off. Fuck, Sax cheated on her? I didn't even know that.

She tries to shrug me off her, but I move faster. I capture her lips with mine, gently nudging her mouth open with my tongue. I know when

she gives in because her whole body relaxes, and she leans into me. She tastes amazing, I've missed this so damn much. She moans into my mouth, but then suddenly freezes, and rips her mouth away from mine and shoves me away.

“No, I can't do this, I don't cheat!” she yells at me, and then runs back into the building. Fuck!

I don't bother going back inside. I'm going to go and have a chat with fucking Sax. He's all pissed and mopey over Lexi, yet he cheated on her.

He needs to get off his high horse and let Lexi go.

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## Chapter 18

### Lexi

What the hell am I doing? I'm just as bad as Sax and Ryder. I can't believe I just kissed him, while dating Derek. It felt like coming home. I know Derek and I aren't like that, but I owe it to him to be faithful while we're together. I make my way back into the club and sit by Derek.

"You okay, babe?" he asks, looking at me with concern.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I tell him, smiling up at him. I need to tell him about the kiss. If not, it will eat me alive; I'm not a person to keep secrets. After a few more drinks Derek and I head to my apartment. He's yet to spend the night with me, and we've done nothing more than kiss so far. As he walks me to the door, I blurt out, "Derek, I have to tell you something, and you're probably gonna be mad."

He frowns and glances at me. "What is it, babe?"

"I kissed Ryder tonight," I quickly rush on. "I'm so sorry, it won't happen again."

Derek is quiet for a moment but he looks pissed. His jaw clenches, and his eyes narrow, but all he tells me is, "It's okay, babe."

I don't know how he can be so forgiving. I unlock the apartment door, and invite him inside. I don't know if it's because I feel guilty or what, but I practically attack him, kissing him almost desperately, trying to forget Ryder's kiss. Derek picks me up in his arms effortlessly, and takes me into my bedroom. I don't stop him when he undresses me, his gaze raking over my body hungrily. Derek undresses himself afterwards, his brown eyes connected to mine the entire time. I gulp when I take in his muscular body. He's ripped. He pushes me back onto the bed, and pulls a condom out of his wallet, putting it on his aroused cock. When he leans over me and slides inside me with one smooth thrust, I moan out, "Ryder." He instantly stills. Oh, shit. Shit, shit, shit.

He gets off me in an instant and sits on the bed, his head in his hands.

I feel like the worst person ever.

"Derek, I'm..." I try to explain, but he cuts me off.

“Just don’t. I should have known. It’s always been him,” he says hoarsely.

“I’m so sorry, Derek.” I start crying and he pulls me close to him, hugging me. He’s comforting me when I don’t deserve it. This man is one of the good ones.

“It’s okay, Lexi, you’re a great girl. It just didn’t work for us. Don’t be upset, sweetheart,” he croons.

I feel sick that I did this to him. Derek gets up and gets dressed. Before he leaves I give him another hug. “Derek, I’m really sorry. You’re a great guy.”

He sighs and hugs me tight. “It’s okay, Lexi.”

“You’re really hot too,” I tell him.

He chuckles, kisses the side of my head, tells me to take care, and that he’ll see me later. I sink back onto my bed, feeling like shit.

Ryder. I guess he and I need to talk, after all.

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## **Ryder**

I storm into Sax’s place without even knocking, and I’m shocked when I see him with a chick in his bed. She’s on all fours, and he’s pounding away behind her. I so do not need to see this shit, especially when I recognize the girl. It’s Payton, the bartender from Steele. I’m pretty sure Lexi and her are friends, too. Fuck!

“What the fuck, man? I thought you were pining away for your precious AJ,” I yell at him, making sure not to look at Payton. Sax quickly covers Payton’s body, apologizing and passing her her clothes. She quickly puts them on, rushing out. She avoids looking at me the entire time. Sax throws his boxers on, his eyes solely on Payton’s retreat.

“I just came to tell you that Lexi is mine. I’m going to get her back because I love her. And I sure as fuck would never cheat on her,” I hiss vehemently. Sax’s gaze snaps to me, like he forgot I was even standing here.

His face pales at my words. “She told you?”

“Yeah, you cocksucker, she told me you cheated on her when she was grieving for her mother. How the fuck could you do that to her?” I fume.

“Trust me, I’ve regretted it every day since.” He wipes his hand over his face. “I loved her, man, I still do. She won’t forgive me, though. When she took off years ago, I tried to find her. And when she came back, I thought it was my chance. But she fucking hates me,” he says, his voice cracking at the end.

Fuck, he’s my friend, and I’m moving in on his girl. Granted, I didn’t know Lexi was AJ until later. But still, it makes me feel like shit. “You’ll find someone else, and when you do, don’t fuck it up. You cheat on a chick, there is no coming back from that,” I tell him.

He lets out a sigh. I’m starting to feel like this is a huge fucking girly moment. “If you can get AJ, I mean, Lexi back, I’ll stand by ya, man. She’s an amazing girl. Hurt her though, and you’re dead,” he warns. I nod. I’ll do anything to get Lexi back.

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## Chapter 19

### Lexi

I wake up to someone banging on my door. Tee's not home, she texted me saying she's staying out. She's been dating some mystery man for a while now, but she's keeping it very hush, hush.

I get out of bed, too lazy to grab my robe. I walk out in just panties and a T-shirt. When I open the door, Ryder comes charging in and slams my door shut, before backing me into it, and caging my body between him and the door.

"Get rid of Derek. I need you, Lexi. I love you, and I'm so fucking sorry."

Before I can formulate a response his mouth is on mine. I don't want to stop this kiss, but we really need to talk first. I push him back gently, but still remain in his arms.

"You don't need to worry about Derek. After we came home last night, we decided it wasn't working for us," I tell him.

"Did you tell him about the kiss?" he asks me, his eyes searching mine.

"Yes, and then I..." I trail off, dreading having to tell him the next part.

"And then what, Lexi?" he demands, his body stilling.

I sigh, and look down at my feet. "We were about to have sex for the first time," he tenses, "and then when it was about to happen, I sort of moaned out your name." He doesn't say anything, but I can feel his chest shaking, and when I look up he bursts out laughing. I narrow my eyes at him, not finding anything about it funny. He gives me a devastating smile and then starts to nuzzle my neck.

"Wait, Ryder, we still need to talk. You need to explain what the hell went on with you and Nikki." He sighs and grabs my hand, leading me over to the couch. He sits down and brings me down to sit on his lap.

"You broke up with me. There was all that tension with the band and Sax, and then Nikki just rocked up on my doorstep wanting to see if we could try a relationship," Ryder tells me. "Nikki and I have a past, and there was a small part of me that was curious, I'm not going to lie. She offered me an easy way out, and I'm sorry that I took it. Nikki kissed me, and then

you walked up the stairs at that moment, and then you left, and I couldn't make it better. I fucked up so bad, I knew that the moment I saw you leaving. I came after you, I wanted to fix everything but you were already gone."

"So, because of that, you just decided to *date* Nikki?" I say sharply. Ryder flinches.

"Lexi... I didn't want to hurt Nikki, and we didn't even have sex or anything, okay? I care about Nikki and in the past I may have wanted more, but then I met you and I knew that you were the only woman for me," he explains.

"So instead of coming to find me, you just decided to date another girl," I say bitterly. This is the part of this whole fiasco that is the hardest for me to take.

"Lexi, Tee told me you do this. You need space. I had no idea where you'd gone. I even searched the apartment for clues, but then I figured you would come back whenever you were ready. Plus, I knew Nikki was just trying to distract herself from Kade. We both just hung out as friends, we only kissed a few times, that's all, and then I went on tour."

That's all. Easy for him. The thought of him kissing another woman makes me want to kill someone.

"I haven't been with anyone since you, Lexi," he tells me, starting to trail kisses down my neck. I shiver.

"Come on, my queen, let me in again, you won't regret it," he says against my neck. I nod, making a choice. He's up like lightning, standing with me still in his arms. He storms into my room and throws me none too gently on the bed.

Then he makes up for all the time we've been apart.

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## Chapter 20

### Lexi

After Ryder and I talk about the whole Nikki thing, I'm kind of unsure of where to go from there. He tells me about Saxon and everything they've talked about, and how Saxon is finally willing to let me go. After I hear that, I decide to go over to his place, so we could finally talk. I've been so angry and bitter at him for so long, I think it's about time to let it go and move on. I don't think he and I will ever be close again, but the weight will be off my shoulders. With encouragement from Ryder I get dressed and leave to go see my ex boyfriend.

I knock tentatively on the door, and take a step back when Sax's older brother Kidd answers it. Kidd's real name is Michael Tate, and I have no idea why everyone calls him Kidd. They just do.

"What are you doing here?" he asks curiously.

"Just wanted to talk to Sax for a minute," I tell him. Kidd searches my eyes and then nods.

"Come in, AJ, he's in his room," he says, opening the door for me. I take the familiar steps to Sax's room and open the door, peering in. Sax is lying on his bed, bare-chested, wearing nothing but a pair of jeans. My eyes roam his sculpted abs and the tattoos displayed on his body.

"Sax?" I ask softly. He sits up, looking alert.

"AJ? Is everything okay?" he asks, giving me a quick once over.

"Everything's fine. I just wanted to talk," I respond.

"Okay, sure. Take a seat," he says, gesturing to his bed. I sit down and take a deep breath.

"I'm glad you and Ryder talked," I start.

"I'm sorry I've been such a selfish dick, AJ I just didn't want to let go of you. I'm sorry, for *everything*," he says sincerely. This is the Saxon I remember.

"I forgive you, Sax," I tell him, "but I will never forget. We both need to move on from this. I think this is the first step, so thank you."

He nods. "I'll always be here for you, though. Okay? Anything you need. Anything. You're always welcome here."

I give him a small smile, and walk over and give him a peck on the cheek. I pull back and run my finger over the scar running through his

eyebrow.

“I never said sorry for this, did I?” I ask.

Sax chuckles. “I deserved it.”

“Yes, you did. But I’m still sorry. It does give you a more rugged appearance, though,” I tell him.

“Should I warn Ryder that you like to throw things when you’re angry?” he says with a chuckle.

“Hopefully he will never find out,” I say dryly.

“Give Ryder hell, AJ!” he calls out as I leave. Then I do something I never thought I would do again. I walk out of Saxon Tate’s house with a smile on my face.

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# Epilogue

## Six Years Later

I'm standing in the crowd with Tee at our VIP spots right in the front. My son, Killian, is at home with Tee's parents, who offered to watch him so I could be here to support Ryder. The band comes out and my eyes instantly roam over my husband. He only gets better with age. He's wearing a pair of leather pants that leave nothing to the imagination, no shirt. Over his ribs 'Lexi' is written in large font. He loves to show it off any chance he gets.

Ryder gives me a sexy wink before addressing the crowd. I love listening to all of the songs he's written himself instead of doing only cover songs. There are several songs dedicated to me, and I blush every time I hear them. There's even one song I helped him write.

Ryder and I have been inseparable since we got back together, and about three years ago we finally tied the knot.

*Morning Alliance* made it huge. They're no longer opening acts for big bands, they have people opening for them, instead. Since all band members are now married, they have a strict no groupies policy. It was enforced two years ago when Jet finally tied the knot; he was the last of the boys to settle down. They're all completely loyal and devoted to their women. It's an amazing thing to see, especially in their line of work.

After the concert I head backstage and I run into Ryder's arms the moment I see him. He lifts me up and kisses me greedily. "God, I love you."

"I love you too, Ryder," I tell him, framing his face with my hands. I rest my forehead against his, and then whisper, "I'm pregnant, Ry." He instantly pulls back, his eyes wide, and his mouth open in shock.

"Really?" he breathes out.

"Really," I add with a giggle at the expression on his face. Ryder puts me down gently, and puts his hands on my flat stomach.

"You really are the gift that keeps on giving, Lexi," he says with a smile. My heart melts when he gets down on his knees and places kisses on my stomach.

"If you're a girl and you look like your mother, I'm going to have to buy a few shot guns," he murmurs to the baby. I giggle.

“Or bodyguards. Like five of them!” he continues. When he whispers “I love you so much already,” I can’t stop the tears that fall.

“I love you, Ryder,” I repeat.

“You better,” he says with a grin as he stands up and captures my lips in a kiss. I trail my fingers down his neck, brushing the beautiful script written there.

*Without music, life would be a mistake.*

— [Friedrich Nietzsche](#)

**The End**

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**Coming soon**  
**James**

James Steele leads a complicated life, a life that makes it hard to get close to people. James' secrets caused him to lose the woman of his dreams, Sasha Crawford. James has now moved on with Tatiana, a lovely woman whom he works with, someone who understands his reasons for secrecy. When Sasha comes back into the picture James will have to make a decision. Will he stay with Tatiana, a woman he has grown to care for? Or step up with explanations for Sasha, the woman he can't seem to stop wanting?

Sasha, a foolish romantic, had thought she had found the love of her life in the sexy James Steele. That was, until she saw him in the arms of another woman. Heartbroken and betrayed, Sasha now had a new take on romance, using dating and men as a way to get over the pain of losing James. When their paths cross again and James now has a new woman, how will she react? Will she let go of all the hurt and anger, and move on? Demand answers? Or lay her cards down, and fight to win back the man that was once her everything?

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**Coming soon**

## **Derek**

Rylie Sullivan hasn't had an easy life. She is broken, so broken she doesn't think she will ever be fixed. When she meets Derek, he barges into her life and tries to break down the walls she has so carefully construed to keep what's left of her safe. When Rylie's past mixes with her present, will Derek stand by her and help her survive? Or will he bail for the next pretty thing?

Derek Tremaine has had it easy. Coming from a wealthy family and blessed with good looks, Derek has breezed through life. After years of one night stands, and a few half ass attempts at relationships, Derek has almost given up on ever finding the woman for him. When he sees Rylie however, he can't help but be drawn to her. Rylie is different, more so than any other person Derek has met. Rylie's beauty- her tattoos, piercings and beautiful blonde dreads drew him in, but it's her sweet, kind nature that makes him want to stay around and protect her. Winning Rylie's heart will be his greatest challenge yet, but Derek knows the reward will be more than worth it.

Which is why Derek has no intentions of letting her go.

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# Wrong Kind of Love by Amanda Heath

Releasing June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013

## Chapter 1

### GRACE

The water from the showerhead is scalding. It burns along my skin, turning it a lovely shade of pink. I can't bother to care, since I want all this blood off of me. Its not my blood mind you. No it's *his*. I stare as the pink tinged water rolls down the drain. I'm sitting on my ass with my knees pulled up to my chest.

My mind is completely numb.

I refuse to think about the things I have done. I refuse to think about what I have been through. Life throws you shit just to fuck you up. Well life can take a damn hike. I have had enough shit happen to me in my 17 years that I refuse to let anything else bad happen to me.

"You need to get that blood washed off." My older brother Aiden's voice grumbles through the shower curtain. "I have some clothes set out for you. We still have to dye your hair." I see his shadow lift its hands up to pinch between its eyes.

"Okay." I whisper. Standing up I grab the body wash off the rack that is hanging off the showerhead. I scrub myself three times, just in case. I want all *his* blood off of me. What I did was so horrible, but I can't seem to have any remorse for it. That bastard deserved it. For what *he* did to Aiden. If only *he* had wanted me. But no *he* wanted a boy. Not that makes it any different, but then I could have saved Aiden from the horrible things *he* did. If only.

I step out and dry off. I wrap the towel around my body when I'm done and sit in the chair that sits in front of my mother's vanity. "I'm done." I call out to my brother.

"About time. We have to get out of here like 5 minutes ago." He picks up the latex gloves lying on the vanity and proceeds to slather my hair with bleach. It burns my scalp and I wince. My hair is a natural honey brown, but I'm going into hiding. I have to become someone different. I

have to leave behind everything I love. Everyone I love, well, except for Aiden.

My PlayStation 3.

My weed.

My black all-star chucks.

All my t-shirts with their dirty innuendos.

My baggy jeans with all the holes.

Instead I'll have to have a completely different lifestyle. I will have to actually get up every morning and do my hair and makeup. I will have to wear designer clothes and shoes. I will have to talk like a complete and total airhead. Jesus I need a joint. I want nothing more than to forget the past couple of hours and get high. That's the life of a stoner for you though. When life gets to hard to handle, toke it up.

Aiden doesn't say anything to me while he bleaches my hair. I don't expect him to. What happened was out of my control, out of everyone's control. Though we were eventually planning on getting out of this hellhole we call life, things just seemed to have sped up.

I'm going to leave the house I grew up in tonight, or early in the morning, whichever way you want to look at it. Aiden is going to drive me to Arkansas, which is a 20-hour drive straight through. He is going to drop me off at a hotel where I'm registered under Grace Breadfield. (This is not my real name.) When its time I will go to the university of Arkansas in Fayetteville and register for classes. Which is scary because I haven't even graduated high school yet.

Don't ask me how this is possible, because I don't know. Aiden apparently knows someone who hooked us up. Fake ID, birth certificate, social security number, and high school diploma. I do know why he chose Arkansas. No one would look for us there. I have never been there, nor have I ever talked about it. I was born and raised in New York City, so Arkansas is a far cry from home.

Anyone who knows me will tell the police that I wouldn't go far from New York. This is what I know, where I'm comfortable. My friends would laugh if they heard Arkansas is where I ended up. I have always wanted to be an actress. My mom even paid for classes since I was 5. I know how to speak in a southern accent, and it doesn't sound fake.

The last few years I kind of drifted from my dream, but now I kind of have to live it. I might not become famous or get paid, but its that or tear



my family wide open. This way no one finds out what we are all trying to hide.

“Get in the shower and wash that out. We have to do mine next.” Aiden’s voice breaks through my thoughts.

Its funny how when you’re little and you wish you could run away and live some exciting life, but it never happens. Well Aiden and I were some of those kids and we always wanted to run away together. I don’t know about living an exciting life in Arkansas, but at least we get to do it together. I wish that it were under different circumstances.

“Okay.” I say softly, sticking my head under the bathtub facet and washing out the bleach.

When I’m done I do the same for Aiden and help him wash it all out. We get dressed in our new clothes. It’s funny what you can buy with a lot of money. Something I never indulged in before. I had nice things growing up, but I didn’t out right buy the most expensive things I could. Aiden did and does. Though he knows clothes and shoes, oh and guys. My brother hits for the same team. Not that it’s ever made me love him less.

“You ready to go, love?” Aiden says walking into my bedroom, for the last time maybe.

I stand up off my bed and look into the mirror on the back of my door. I don’t know the girl looking back at me. Her hair is platinum blond and mine is honey brown. Her eyes are dark blue and mine are brown. Her shirt is pink and shows way too much cleavage. While my shirt would have been black and said something like “If its long and hard, then it’s probably my baseball bat.” Her skirt is made of lace and stops about an inch from my knees. I would never be caught dead in a skirt. Baggy jeans all the way for this girl. Her shoes are ballerina flats made of leather I’m pretty sure Aiden got at Prada. I would have on chucks. Never anything else. She also has a Gucci bag slung over her forearm. I wouldn’t be caught dead with a purse.

“Yes.” I say cringing at my appearance. Lets get this show on the road.

I stop to admire Aiden in his changes. His hair isn’t as light as mine but its still a dirty blond where I’m used to honey brown. His brown eyes are now green but I can still see the pain in them. I don’t think he would ever get rid of it. I know I won’t.

Aiden always dressed nicely, so its weird to see him in a band t-shirt and cheap holey jeans that weren’t designed that way. His shoes are black

ass kickers and I smile at the sight. His muscles strain against the fabric of his clothes since they are way too small. Aiden works out religiously and you can definitely tell in his new clothes.

Before I know it, I'm sitting in the passenger side of Aiden's Volvo, while he loads the bags into the trunk. We had been planning on what to do when the time came. So I know he's excited to get out of here. I think he's been ready to leave since he turned 18 two years ago. He was just waiting on me. Too bad I just turned 17, but neither of us can live here anymore. And they will come looking for us. We are their pawns and punching bags. Well not anymore.

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### **2 months later...**

If Teagan Harper knew the real me, then we would have been best friends. She dresses like I used too and she is really immature. Though the immaturity isn't her fault. I don't think anyone in her family let her grow up. Which brings her down to my level, since I'm two years younger than her. "Who is throwing this party?" she asks me, while I park my car outside of this pretty house out in the suburbs of Fayetteville.

"No idea." I tell her in my fake accent and with my fake smile. I don't really want to be at this party since I would never be caught dead at this party before I became Grace. I had one serious relationship and we broke up like 5 months ago. Grace is boy crazy and I can't even keep up with her on that front.

"I hope my brothers don't show up." She bites her nail and walks ahead of me to the front door. Her long black hair swishes near her butt and I can imagine her big green eyes wide from here. She doesn't get out much, considering her twin brothers won't let her near the opposite sex.

"Jaden is on the team, Teag. I'm sure he is here." Now there's a man to be crazy about. Jaden Harper is a God. Short black hair, dark blue eyes, and a body to die for. Aiden says he's the perfect guy for me to go for. That would be because he isn't my type. He's a good guy and driven. I like them bad and alpha to the bone. I want a man who will throw me up against a wall and kiss the breath out of me. I want him to growl and be jealous if

another guy talks to me. I want him to be crazy and kinky in bed. Yeah, I'm definitely asking for too much.

"Damn, I didn't think about that. Maybe we should leave." She turns around to face me and I envy her Avenged Sevenfold shirt, which is freaking signed. Now M. Shadows is a man to go after.

"No, Hun, if we see one of the dick twins, we will head in the other direction." I slip my arm through hers and pull her towards the front door. Entering the house I stop to take in the surroundings. A straight male definitely decorated this place, with its blue couch and big screen TV in the living room. There's a rug with a hound dog on the floor below the dark coffee table. There are football pictures all over the living room wall. Man, totally.

Teagan and I make our way through the crowd, looking for something to drink. I hate alcohol and thank the lord that I packed a joint in my purse. I know I was supposed to quit, but I had to give up everything else that made me happy, I just couldn't deal without my weed. I have a problem, don't judge.

After the football players get Teagan and I to take six shots a piece, I'm beyond tipsy. The room kind of spins and I'm left wondering if I'm actually spinning or if its in my head. That's when I run into him.

He towers over me and I have to look nearly straight up to see his pale blue eyes. His blond hair hangs down into his eyes and I nearly swoon when he tosses his head back to remove it. There's smirk on his full lips and I somehow find the strength not to lean in and nibble on the bottom one. His blue jeans are loose and hanging off his hips, showing a peak of his stomach. They have splashes of paint in every color all over them. I also don't think I have ever seen an honest to goodness six pack of abs. Tattoos peak out from his shirtsleeves and all I can think is that he's a total panty dropper. Damn I'm in so much trouble.

"Hello Angel."

## CADEN

When Jaden called and invited me to Declan's party, all I could think about was getting laid. Drunken college girls are the best for that. Everyone wants to live free and have new experiences and they would certainly have one with me. You see, I like things a little kinky. No, I don't

get off on ball gags and butt plugs, but I do like to tie my conquests up and maybe add in a little spanking. You'd be surprised who is into that.

So all I can think about when I run in to little blond, is her hands bound over her head and her generous breasts bouncing around while I thrust into her. I might wrap those long blond locks around my palm and tug 'til she cries out in pleasure. My hands might smooth over all those curves hiding underneath her expensive clothes. The innocence in her eyes says she might not be ready, but I have my own rules when it comes to sex.

"Who the hell are you calling Angel?" she spits angrily. Damn little miss innocent has some fire. Maybe I was wrong about what those dark blue eyes are telling me.

I chuckle and grab her hand pulling her into my body. "You. The way the light shines on all this blond hair makes you look like you're wearing a halo." I place my hand on the small of her back and sway my hips into hers.

She huffs before placing her hands on my chest and pushing my body away from hers. "I'm not an angel. I'm also not into one night stands, so back the hell up and move on." Her eyes glare bloody murder but I'm not listening. If I was interested before, I'm enchanted now.

I pull her back into me and move my hands to her hips and sway them back and forth. "Just dance with me, Angel. We will see where it goes from there." I would give anything for her to just dance with me. Every girl I meet seems to want it more than I do. It's getting old fast, but this little miss wants to fight back and my dick has her name on it. Speaking of names, "What's your name, Angel?"

"Grace. And I don't feel like dancing with you, Mr. Hands." She tries to pull away again but I swing both my arms all the way around her and hold her as close as possible.

"Well since you asked so nicely, my name is Caden. Just Caden, don't shorten it to Cade. That shit is annoying." Grace stands there stiffly and continues to glare. I'm kind of ashamed that I'm so turned on.

"I didn't ask. Let go of me before I knee you in the balls." She squints her eyes up at me and her lips purse. It's honestly cute as shit.

"Just calm down, Angel. Dance a couple of songs with me and if you still want to knee me in the balls, I'll let you go." Her limbs loosen up but she doesn't move to place her hands around my neck like I want her to.

“Fine. I’ll still want to knee you in the balls though.” Her arms finally come around my neck and she moves her hips to the music. I’m mesmerized by the way she moves. I’ve never seen someone move so freely without wanting someone to look. She has already made it clear that she doesn’t care if anyone does look.

“How old are you?” I ask softly next to her ear, which makes her shiver a little. Finally a reaction I want.

“19. I’m a freshman.” She pauses looking up at me with mystery in those blue eyes. “You’re 19 and also a freshman, but you know your major. You also have a twin brother named Jaden, but you only look alike in the face. You also have a little sister named Teagan, who is also a freshman. Save the breath telling me about yourself.”

I blink several times and wonder if I’m being played. “How do you know all that?” Grace continues to dance but I have gone still.

“Teagan is my roommate. Don’t worry I’m not stalking you.” She chuckles and turns around pressing her ass against my groin.

“You’re that Grace? Damn.” Not that it’s going to stop me from seducing her. It’s kind of what I live for.

“Yes, I’m that Grace. Teag talks about you and the rest of the family all the time.” Her ass sways gently against me and my dick starts to stand at attention. It wants what she has hidden under this lacy skirt.

I don’t answer. Instead, I run my hand from her shoulder, over her breasts, down her stomach and stop at the place I really want to be. She sucks in a gasp and I feel my lips pull into a smirk. Her hands leave my neck and run up into my hair, tugging lightly. I’m not gonna lie, I totally groaned.

“I know enough about you, Grace.” I lean a little and whisper in her ear. “I know that I want to touch every inch of this body. I know I want to kiss you until neither of us can breathe properly. I also know I want to know what you sound like as you come. Whether it be from me tasting you, me sliding my fingers in and out of you, or me fucking you into next year.” I pause to run my thumb over her nipple, which decided to come to a hard point while I was speaking. “Yeah that’s what I know.”

She moans a little and my dick responds by making my jeans feel like they might burst open. Her face turns towards me where she whispers, “Just sex. I can’t get involved with a guy like you.”

I nod when she can see and step away from her. I don't know what the hell that was supposed to mean, but I don't read too much into it. I grab her hand and pull her to the front door. My mustang sits about twenty yards a head of us and I hope I can make it there before I try to devour her.

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Since I refused to live in a dorm room with Jaden, our parents rented us out an apartment not too far from campus. I love my twin, but he's impossible to live with. I hope like hell he's still at the party. I want Grace to be loud. Hell, I want to be loud.

"You're lucky to be living off campus. I love Teag, but I hate having a roommate." Grace says as she gets out of my car. I stare at her ass as she smooth's down her skirt.

"I still have to share space with Jaden. He's not the easiest to live with." I shrug when I get out and walk around to the passenger side. Before she can get away from me, I back her into the side of my car. I don't even take a breath before I slam my lips down on hers. She opens on a gasp and I don't waste time slipping my tongue into her mouth. Her arms go around my neck and her legs swing up around my hips. I hold her weight with the car and slip my hand under her skirt. She has on some fancy lace panties and the front is damp. Fuck. Yes.

I flick my thumb over her clit through her panties, making her arch her back. She breaks away from my lips to groan out, "Yes." Before coming back to bite my bottom lip.

I lean into her neck and bite the tender skin there making her tug on my hair. Hard. "I bite back." I say.

"Good." She whispers before coming back for more kisses. I chuckle and set her down.

"We need to move into the apartment. I have nosy neighbors." I place my hand on her full ass and guide her up the steps to my second floor place.

I put my keys into the lock and open the door to let her pass. The living room light is on but it's full of the same thing any single guys place would be. Old couch, big screen TV, and a computer desk. I don't let us linger in there, I have plans for Grace.

I lead her down the hall and open the door on the right, which is my room. She passes by me to enter and I shut the door. I take a deep breath to calm down. "Climb on the bed." I speak low so she knows I'm serious.

She blinks before I see lust cloud over in her eyes. She doesn't say anything but does what I commanded. I stalk over to her and stand by the bed. "Put your hands over your head and don't touch me." I don't wait for a response this time before I'm tugging her shirt over her head. I groan when I take in the pretty hot pink bra she wears underneath. I reach around her body and unclasp it, throwing it to the ground. I take the slick leather binds I have attached to my headboard, then I hold her wrists together as I wrap it around them and make sure it's secure.

"You like it kinky. Should have known." She looks up at the binds and then over at me. I smirk before moving down to pull off her skirt and the matching hot pink thong. I don't have time to admire her in it because I'm gonna blow if we don't get this show on the road. I haven't had one girl in here that actually was into this. They did it for me.

I pull my shirt over my head and take in the expression that comes over her face. It's one of awe and I wonder how I never met Grace before. She isn't like the one Teag describes to me. That one is nice, sweet, and angelic. This one is bitchy, cocky, and kinky. They don't match up.

I open the drawer on my nightstand and pull out a condom. I unbutton my jeans and push them down a bit, freeing my dick so I can roll the condom on. I look back at Grace and say, "I can't seem to wait this time. Next time we will slow down. Promise." She only nods, her eyes focused on my dick. Yeah that makes me smirk.

When the condom is on, I climb on to the bed and hover over Grace, looking down at her blue eyes. Somehow I think they would look better on her if they were a warm brown. I shake my head and snake my hand down to play with her sex. I want to make sure she is ready for me. When I find her soaking wet, I waste no time in pushing the head of my dick into her. Her eyes glaze over in pleasure and her hips reach up for more. Which I oblige.

Before I know it, I'm all the way into her tight heat, where I pause to lean all the way down to kiss her. Which is strange for me, I don't kiss during sex. In this room I have rules and apparently I'm starting to break them. I shake the thought out of my head and pull away from Grace's luscious lips.

I clutch her hips while I fuck her. I don't watch her face, instead I watch the way my dick looks pushing in and out of her. I close my eyes because it becomes too much. I don't want to go over the edge without her.

I place my hand right over her mound and flick her clit a few times until I feel her inner walls clutching my dick and she screams out. I throw my head back and let the feeling that is creeping up my spine take me over completely.

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We are two friends that share a love of reading and decided "Hey, let's write a book."

About Chantal : I am 26 and a mother of three beautiful little boys. I live in Western Australia. I love to read and write; I'm a dreamer. Ryder is my novella in the Resisting Love series.

About Dawn : I drink too much, Swear too much, and Read too much. I don't have a filter, and I tend to speak before I think. I live in Alberta Canada. I have an amazing pain in the ass husband, and two little girls. I have a huge love of reading. I've been a beta reader, and helped a few authors edit.

You can find us on Facebook :

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