

Damien

COOPER BROTHERS IN ALASKA

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Damien

**A Mountain Man Curvy Woman
Romance**

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Chapter 1: Faye

“So, have you been to Stony River before?” the pilot, an elderly but robust man, asks without looking in my direction.

“No.” A gentle smile spreads across my red lips. “But I’ve heard so many wonderful stories about it. I’m looking forward to my stay.”

My eyes dart to the window again as I take in the endless green that blankets the earth below. From my vantage point, it’s easy to see why this town is named Stony River. It’s because of the many rivers and streams flowing through the land. This gives rise to multiple wildflower fields and vast wildlife.

“Are you looking forward to anything in particular?” The man has a pleasant demeanor, encouraging me to open up to him.

I momentarily close my eyes and take a deep breath, visualizing the effect of my words. “Just relaxing overall. I just need to take a break for a few weeks to reboot my system.”

“Well, you’ve definitely come to the right place. Time sometimes stands still, especially in the right environment.” He presses a few buttons on the console of the small Cessna. “Where are you staying?”

I roll my eyes upwards, trying to remember the name of the place my manager had booked for me. “I think it’s Stony Lodge.”

“Oh, really?” The man’s face lights up and there’s a twinkle in his eyes. “It’s the best in town.” He’s trying to hold it back, but the smile still escapes him. “You’re going to love it there. It’s comfortable and clean. The staff is courteous and helpful.”

“I’m sure I will.” The expression on Mr. Cooper’s face gives me high expectations for this place. “What about the trekking company?” I ask with my eyes wide. “I hired a guide from there.”

A small chuckle escapes the elderly man right before he answers. "That is actually one of my son's companies. Cameron. I have another son who works with him too, Damien. I don't know which guide Cameron assigned you, but they are all good, well versed in everything Stony River. Don't worry. You will be in safe hands."

I tuck my hair behind my ears and raise my eyebrows. "How many sons do you have? Should I expect a line of them in town?" As soon as my question comes out of my mouth, I regret it. It's meant as a lighthearted joke but could easily be seen as offensive.

I'm happy when my pilot bursts out in laughter. "I have seven sons. And more than likely, you'll meet them around town, since they own a lot of local businesses."

"You must be very proud." I am simply stating the obvious, but the man's face lights up even more.

"I would have been proud even if they all didn't follow my footsteps into the army. But I'm ecstatic now that they have all settled in town and have families of their own."

I nod my head but say nothing until the plane lands and taxis to the hangar at the airport. Mr. Cooper takes my bags and leads the way out of the airplane.

"Damien." He walks up to a dark-haired man with gray eyes and a well-sculpted body. There is a gentle smirk at the corner of his lips as he adopts a relaxed stand. He has a presence that calls to me, sending sensations to places neglected for a long time.

"I see Cameron has sent out his best guide for my client." Mr. Cooper gives Damien my bag, and he takes it with his eyes on me. "Take care of her. She's a good one."

"Oh, I intend to," Damien says, his words causing a shiver to pass through my body.

I shift onto one leg and offer him my hand. "Hello, Damien. I'm Faye. It's nice to meet you."

The moment Damien accepts my greeting, an electric surge originates from his touch and settles at my center. "It's good to meet

you, too.” I hold his gaze, getting lost in his eyes. “Are you ready to go to the lodge?”

It takes a while to recover from my daze, causing Mr. Cooper and Damien to stare.

Even without the guide, I couldn’t miss my home for the next few weeks. It’s prominent as we turn the corner and the enormous sign only makes it all too obvious.

Damien checks me in and escorts me to my room himself. “I’ll be back tomorrow to show you the town. You must be tired from your trip, so I’ll leave you to rest.”

Damien’s concern for me warms my heart, leaving me speechless even after his departure.

Chapter 2: Damien

“Damien. Damien.” I hear Cameron calling but I don’t respond, so he repeats several times before I give him my attention.

“What’s up with you today?” Cameron’s lips are pressed together, and he’s watching me with sharp eyes. “We’ve got a group coming shortly and we need to prepare, so snap out of it.”

“Sorry man,” I apologize to my brother and continue gathering our equipment, but he is still watching me with narrowed eyes.

“Are you sure you’re ok?” I know my brother enough to know he won’t let this go. I give him a half response.

“I’m a bit tired. My boss has been working me hard.” A smirk forms on my lips as I analyze my brother’s reaction.

Cameron pushes up his nose and glares at me. “Well, as your brother, I suggest you tell your boss where to shove it, but as your boss, I’ll fire you if you do.”

We both laugh, but as silence takes over the room again, Cameron asks, “You met with that private customer, right?” When I shake my head, my brother continues. “How was it?”

I clear my throat before I answer, while avoiding eye contact. “Well, she’s clearly not accustomed to small-town life. I mean, she showed up at the airport with the tallest heels I ever saw. And ...” My voice is rising. “She has pink hair.” I snort. “Pink hair like a flamingo with creamy skin and chocolate brown eyes.” I stop myself then, but heat rushes over me when I think about her tiny waist and rounded backside.

Cameron must have noticed something because he blurts out, “You like her?”

I shake my head, convinced that my brother’s statement isn’t true. How could I possibly have a feeling for a woman when my former

fiancé became pregnant with my best friends before they left town together?

“Definitely not,” I say with a firm voice, and my brother drops the rope in his hand.

Cameron breathes out hard and tilts his head as she speaks to me. “I hope you’re not still hung up about your ex. You know, not every woman is like that. You shouldn’t let her ruin your view on love and family.”

I fold my fingers into a fist and release them, memories of the past taking me down a path I shouldn’t be. “I don’t know, man. I’m not sure about starting anything with Faye. I mean, I barely know the woman.”

“Well. You can always get to know her,” Cameron probes. “Invite her to lunch or something. You’re clearly attracted to her.”

I take a step forward. “Ok, so I admit I’m attracted to her, but I don’t think that’s enough. Love is not something I’m looking for again.” Avoiding my brother’s eyes, I look at my watch and inform him, “I have to go. Can’t keep the client waiting.”

Cameron keeps his eyes on me until I exit the building. Even then, I can’t shake the lingering feeling of being watched. It stays with me long after I go to meet Faye.

Chapter 3: Faye

“So, you’ve settled in alright?” my manager asks, her concern for me clear in her voice.

“Yes. The trip here was quite pleasant, and the lodge is just as described.” I walk around the desk and peer out the window to the neighboring mountains. “No complaints from me.”

“And the guide I hired? How is it with him?” I should have expected the question. Iris is always meticulous in her work. That’s why I hired her.

“He’s great.” I try to keep my voice at an even tone. “He’s coming by today to take me into town.”

I know I’m caught when I hear her notorious, “Hmm,” Iris speaks to me in a teasing manner. “You know you’re not there to find love and start a relationship. You’re there to rest and disconnect from the pressures of your fame before coming back afresh.”

Breathing out hard, I reiterate, “I still haven’t decided if I want to continue my singing career. It was nice when I was younger and I thought I would always want this kind of life, But....” I pause for a moment, considering my words. “Being a star is not as glamorous as I thought it would be, and all I want now is just to get away from it all.”

“And that’s exactly what you’re doing in that Alaskan town, but it’s not where you belong. You have a gift and you’re meant to share that with people.” Iris is using her sales pitch voice. The same one she used on me all those years ago when she told me she could turn me into a star.

I hear a knock on my door then, and I know exactly who it is before answering it. I end the call with Iris and grab my coat on the way out.

My breath catches in my throat at the sight of him as I take my place at his side.

“I trust you had a good night.” Damien smells like freshly fallen rain on mountain trees. It’s a scent I realize I quite enjoy.

“Yes, I did. The most sleep I’ve had in years.” I allow all my energy to flow into my steps and I begin to skip.

Damien leads me down a narrow path and I can see the crystal stream intersecting the field of wildflowers. “You must live a really hectic life.”

“You have no idea.” There is a lot of scorn in my words and it surprises me. “Sometimes I don’t even know what country I’m in. I’m always on the move, sometimes working thirty-six hours continuously.”

“Wow.” Damien opens his eyes wide at my comment and our eyes lock. My lips part as a rush of heat overwhelms me. At this moment, the surrounding mountains shrink away and the cool air fades into the background and all I see is this incredible man standing before me.

Damien turns away first, his eyes revealing something unsettling below the surface. When he walks away from me without a word and with a grim expression on his face, I know something is wrong. It’s not the first time I’ve seen that look in his eyes. I noticed it yesterday, right before he left me at the lodge.

I make longer steps to catch up with my guide.

“How about we go trekking tomorrow? I’ll start you off with a light trail, and if you like it, we can take a more challenging one.”

Damien’s tone has lost its buoyant flare and is weighed down with indifference.

“Sure.” I force my concerns to the back of my mind. “I would love to.”

Damien shows me more of the town, including the dock packed with boats before we part ways. I can feel the tug of my heart pulling me

towards Damien, but at the same time, the wall he has erected is quite obvious.

Chapter 4: Damien

I put two bottles of water into my backpack before slinging it onto my back.

Faye is a very attractive woman. Maybe that's why I can't get her out of my head. Since the first day I saw her, she's been intruding on my dreams and I find myself looking forward to the nights now.

I shake my head, trying to push the thoughts away. "*What are you doing? Snap out of it.*"

A few more pieces of equipment, then I hurry out of the building before my brother comes along.

Faye is waiting in the lobby when I arrive at the lodge and we leave immediately, diverting out of town on the first turn. Faye doesn't say much on the drive, and I worry that I might have done something to upset her.

We take the track leading away from the stream and I take it slow at first, making sure she can keep up with the pace before moving more briskly. She does well and I could see she spends a lot of time working on her endurance.

When I reach on top of the hill, I stop and Faye joins me a second after. "Oh my goodness," she squeals at the view below. "This is amazing."

There is so much excitement on her face and I can't get past her widened eyes and full cheeks. Faye closes her eyes briefly and takes in a deep breath. The entire time, I glue my eyes to her lips. "It's so quiet here. I wish I could stay up here forever." Her arms are open wide and she's completely engrossed in the scenery.

I can't help but grin when I look at her. "Well, you wouldn't want to do that. There are a lot of dangerous animals living in these woods." My

words cause Faye to jump as her eyes scan the area for the creatures I speak off. “Don’t worry. I’ll protect you if a bear shows its face.”

“But who’s going to protect you?”

It takes a while to realize she’s joking. I can’t smile, though. Faye is looking at me in a way that makes me want to strip her right now.

I wonder if she knows how sexy she looks while biting her lips?

I turn away from her then, directing my attention to the view, but Faye comes closer for a better look, brushing against me. Her touch feels like I’ve been struck, but she pulls away instantly.

“Thank you, Damien,” Faye speaks after a while. “I really enjoyed this.”

Her eyes are so bright they captivate me and my mouth opens before I realize what I’m doing. “My brothers and I are going camping this weekend. Would you like to come?”

When Faye watches me slack-jawed, I continue, “You don’t have to come if you don’t want to. I just thought you might enjoy it because you seem to enjoy trekking so much.” I pause. “It’s not only us. Their partners will be there too. I mean, who else will keep them under control?”

Faye twists her lip and I scold myself for being so presumptuous, but I’m filled with excitement when she answers.

“I would love to.”

Chapter 5: Faye

“It wouldn’t be so bad living in a small town like this,” I tell myself as I gather my things for the camping trip with Damien and his family. “I could live a normal life without people trying to take pictures and disturbing me all the time.” I’ve been in Stony River for a few days now and no one has approached me as a fan. Maybe that should hurt my ego, but I find it relaxing.

When Damien comes for me, I am ready for my weekend in the woods. I don’t mention the excitement which induced a restless night, but I’m practically bouncing on my toes.

“Are you ready for an amazing weekend?” he asks as he starts his truck.

“Most definitely.” The high pitch in my voice gives me a slightly childish demeanor, but I don’t care.

When Damien drives through the town, he points out different hotspots, including his brother’s café. I make a note to support the family as my mouth waters for a hot cup of coffee.

Damien introduces me to his brothers, Rowan and Cameron, and I notice Cameron’s eyebrows raise at the mention of my name. Then it clicks. Mr. Cooper mentioned he had a son named Cameron, the one who owns the trekking company.

Kayla and Lilly, who hook me into their arms and commandeer me on the hike to camp, accompany the two men. The women are friendly and with them, there is no doubt that they enjoy my company and aren’t faking it for a chance to get my money. Still, I miss the sensation of having Damien next to me.

At the campsite, the only time Damien is at my side is to help me with my tent. After that, he leaves me in the care of the two energetic

women and goes to join his brothers. His lack of attention leaves me with a hole inside. A hole not even Lilly's creative stories can fill.

"Excuse me a minute," I say to the women as they laugh out loud, clinging to their chests. Mines feel tight and I need to take a little stroll to feel like myself again.

I don't mean to wander too far, but before I know it, the campsite has disappeared and I'm surrounded by the creaky sounds of the massive birch trees.

My heart begins to race. Even more so when I hear the cracking of twigs followed by the grumbings of a creature at my back. I turn around as my energy seems to escape me. All I could do is shiver in fear as a massive bear slowly closes its distance towards me.

Chapter 6: Damien

My heart momentarily stops beating when Faye finally comes into view and a bear is approaching her. The first thing I notice is her eyes. They are wide with fear, matching her open mouth. She is frozen, but I notice her shiver and sweat as she contemplates her next move.

I walk slowly towards her, intercepting the bear's path. I'm acting on instinct now, with only Faye's safety as my concern.

I wave my hand, encouraging her to slowly back away. She takes a moment before she moves though, and it is enough for the bear to lose interest in us.

"Are you okay?" I grip her shoulders the moment the bear disappears into the trees. "Are you hurt anywhere?" I'm inspecting her body now, my heart rate still elevated.

"I'm fine. Just a little shaken," she stammers, and I can still see the terror in her eyes.

Without thinking, I pull her into my arms and wrap her tightly until she stops shivering. Almost losing her has made me realize how much I care about this woman. Just knowing I could have lost her has put fear in my heart. I don't ever want to lose her and I'm going to do everything in my power not to.

Faye and I walk silently back to camp, but I don't leave her immediately. I serve her the stew the women had been preparing with the grilled lobster and shrimp. Faye eats it all, and I am happy to see she has not lost her appetite.

I am still sitting beside her when Cameron joins us. "Hey. We've spoken and decided in light of what happened, it would be best if we went back to town. Give Faye some time to process it all."

Faye's eyes are resting on Cameron, but she doesn't seem to see or hear him, so I am the only one that answers. "I think that's best."

We pack our belongings. I leave Faye to rest and pack everything for her. On our way down, the women work their magic, and a smile spreads across Faye's face again. By the time we arrive in town, she is laughing loudly and seems to have returned to her normal self.

"Hey, Faye." Lilly offers her bag to her husband, who packs it in their truck. "Some of us are going to a bar tomorrow. We would love it if you came along."

Faye looks at me first, and I nod my head, causing a smile across her lips. "I would love to."

"And I promise, we can consume the only beer that will be there." I'm worried Lilly's joke might be a little too much for Faye, but she burst out laughing, grabbing her stomach as she gasps for air.

I accompany Faye to her room when the rest of my family leaves. When I drop her things onto the table, she turns to me. "Thank you for everything, Damien. I appreciate it. I guess you meant it when you said you'll protect me from a bear, huh?"

Faye's eyes are filled with that sparkle again. The sparkle that is urging me to wrap her into my arms and inhale her subtle floral scent. My cock twitches in my pants, but I force it to relax. Faye may still be shaken from what happened in the woods, and the last thing I want to do is take advantage of her emotional state.

Backing away, I respond to the unusually colored hair woman. "It was nothing. I will do it again if I have to." I pause. "Good night Faye. I'll see you tomorrow at Night Haven"

Faye's lips curve into a smile that emphasizes her lips. "Good night."

Chapter 7: Faye

I wake the next morning to my phone screeching in my ears. “Hello,” I say in a sleepy state.

“Well, hello to you,” Iris’ voice blares from the other end. “You’re sleeping at this hour? Glad to see you’re enjoying your time away.”

“Actually, a bear scared the shit out of me yesterday.” I sit up in bed now, fully awake as I recall the moments of that time.

“What?” Iris screams out, terror shaking her voice. “Are you alright?”

“Yes, I am.” I put my hand to my chest, feeling the beat of my heart. “Damien saved me.”

There is confusion in Iris’ voice. “Who’s Damien?”

“The guide.” When I hear the knock on the door, I assure my friend I am alright. Iris doesn’t sound completely convinced, but she allows me to end the call.

“Damien,” I squeal after opening the door to my room. “I wasn’t expecting you so early.” Still, I open the door so he could enter as I wrap a robe over my two-piece short pajama set.

“I wanted to ensure you’re ok.” I haven’t secured the robe at the front and Damien’s eyes drop to my braless chest.

“I’m fine.” I take a few steps until I am standing right in front of him. “Thanks to you.” My breath is becoming increasingly labored as the seconds pass by.

Damien reaches out and takes my hand, my body reacting with a shiver. “I don’t know what I would have done if I’d lost you.”

He’s close now, so close I can feel the warmth of his breath and all I want to do is reach up and pull his lips onto mine. However, I

hesitate. After last night, when he suddenly withdrew from me, I don't want to push my luck.

My mind is still racing when I feel Damien's lips on mine. It's sweet and earthy, like the taste of coffee, and I allow my body to sink into his, wrapping my hands around his neck. With our lips still connected, Damien grabs my ass and lifts me so my leg wraps around him. His cock stiffens at the feel of my body and I cling to him even more, before he drops me onto the bed.

Damien stands, taking me in before caressing my body. Impatient as I am, I reach for his jacket and pull it off. I'm unbuttoning his shirt when Damien chuckles and removes it for me. He continues until we are both naked.

"You're so beautiful," he says. I answer him with a kiss and soon we're wrapped up in our lovemaking and I close my eyes slightly as Damien's hand finds my breast, caressing it.

When he enters me, I gasp. His penis is stiff and large and stretches me, but I love the feel of him and move along with his strokes. Damien wraps his arms around me and stares into my eyes as if I am the only thing that matters. This drives me wild.

When I feel the sensation, I grab onto his ass and pull him from his pinnacle with me.

Chapter 8: Damien

Faye and I make love for the entire day and leave the bed only to have dinner. Reluctantly, we dress and head to the restaurant associated with the lodge.

This restaurant is beautiful, recently renovated to suit a wider clientele. The chef works magic to produce delicious aromatic food which is now widely acclaimed around town.

“So, what is it like living in this small town?” Faye asks the moment our server leaves. Since we haven’t eaten a full meal all day, Faye chooses the salmon with rice and I’m having the seafood platter with extra sides.

“I absolutely love it. I don’t have to stress and hustle.” To emphasize my point, I leaned back in my chair. “I can just relax.”

“Even with the wildlife around?” She watches me from the corner of her eyes and I notice the effect the previous event still has on her.

I think a joke is the best way to reduce her concerns. “Now you can’t blame the bear. It’s not its fault you’re sweet like honey.”

Faye bursts out in laughter, catching the attention of a nearby couple. “That must be the tackiest thing I’ve ever heard.”

I pretend to be hurt by her words. “I got you to laugh, didn’t I?”

Faye looks at me, a smile on her lips now. “Your father told me you were in the army. I bet you have some experiences to share.”

“Indeed, I do. Sadly, the most dramatic one occurred after I left the service.”

I look into Faye’s wide eyes, and I want to tell her about my ex. I want to share that part of my life with her, but I just can’t bring myself to say the words.

Faye keeps her head low, but looks at me. "I actually have a couple of stories myself." She's toying with the napkin wrapping her fork and I know she's uneasy about whatever it is she's about to say. "I left out a few details when I told you the reason I came to Stony River."

I say nothing, giving her time to get out her words. "I came here to relax, but the life I live is more hectic than I let on." She takes a deep breath. "In the music world, I'm famous and I have several Grammy's ." Faye raises her head to me now. "I've had trouble in the past with people hanging around because of my money or fame, so these days it's hard to distinguish if people are around me expecting something in return."

I must admit, Faye's confession catches me by surprise. I did not know she was so successful. Still, I don't want to appear star crazed. Faye is obviously craving normalcy, and I am going to give it to her.

My throat is dry, so I take a sip of my water. "I can only imagine what life is like for you. Not knowing who you can trust."

She smiles, her voice filled with passion as she speaks. "There is one person I know I can trust." She points to me. "You. I know for certain you are not like those other people." Then she opens her arms. "And the rest of Stony River, too. Without knowing who I am, they've taken me in and treated me so welcoming. It's refreshing."

"I'm happy for you," I say, but shift uncomfortably in my seat. With such a famous life, seeing Faye again after she leaves would not be easy. "We have to meet the others in an hour. Maybe we should go separately. My family has a way of escalating situations."

"Sounds like a good idea to me," Faye says, whipping out her fork as our server approaches with our food. Part of me is disappointed she was so quick to agree.

Chapter 9: Faye

When I enter Night Haven, Damien is already there. I immediately eye the pool table and the dartboard, making a mental note to partake in some games before I leave Stony River. The rest of the bar is like any other, with a counter at the far side and tables with chairs closer to the entrance of the building.

I join the group and the women cheer me on, announcing, "City woman survives the bear encounter." The others cheer me on and I sit opposite Damien with a broad smile on my face, after, of course, taking a bow.

Drinks are already lined up on the table and Damien gives me one, keeping his eyes on me a little too long and I notice a raised eyebrow from Kayla. I immediately turn away, not wanting to draw any more attention to us, though I stare at him during the night. I can't help myself. Damien is by far one of the most attractive men I've ever met, and all I want is to bring him back to my bed.

After a few beers, I stand with a slight sway. "Excuse me for a while. I'm going to the bathroom."

Kayla springs from her seat immediately. "I'll go with you."

The woman leads the way to the washroom and I smile at her. I go into the first stall, but Kayla remains by the sink. Alarms should have gone off then, but I was too consumed with other thoughts.

"So," the woman begins when I emerge from the stall. "What's going on with you and Damien?"

Busted.

I smile. "Let's just say Damien has moved past being my guide." I brush past her to wash my hands.

"So you two..." Kayla's eyes are bright.

“I don’t know what we are,” I fill in. “It’s not something we’ve discussed. But...” I swing around her again to dry my hands. Kayla simply turns in my direction.

“But what?” she prompts, too eager for patience.

“I don’t know.” I pass my hand through my hair. “Sometimes I feel he’s keeping a distance from me. That he’s not completely letting me in.”

When Kayla’s eyes drop, I know she’s aware of something. “There is a reason for that,” she whispers, as if afraid others would hear.

“Maybe you should ask him about it. It’s not my place to tell.”

Kayla’s words do nothing to relieve my concerns. In fact, they increase it, but I know she’s respecting Damien’s privacy, so I do not pry her.

Damien is ready to leave by the time Kayla and I return to the table.

“I think I’ve had enough for the night. I’m calling it a day.”

“Come on, man,” Rowan pleads with him. “It’s still early.”

“I’ve had a tiring day.” He glances at me before his eyes rest on Cameron, who knows Damien did no work for the day.

“Fine.” Rowan pouts. “But you’re not taking our company. I’m quite enjoying Faye’s company.” Rowan’s reference to me causes me to smile.

“You can stay with them,” Damien tells me. “Stay and have some fun. They’ll take good care of you.”

I nod my head in response, but I don’t want him to leave. Without him at my side, I feel empty.

Chapter 10: Damien

I know I should have stayed last night, but I couldn't stay there any longer, staring at Faye and not being able to touch her, to take her into my arms. I guess I should get used to it.

My ex left me damaged. I'm not naïve to not know it. I'm too afraid to open my heart to anyone. That is why I have remained single since her betrayal. But now, with Faye in my life, it's bringing up all kinds of emotions.

"Here. I brought you some more." Phoenix drops a few logs between us and steps back as I lift my ax.

In my mind, he completely fades into the background, and thoughts of Faye take over. She will be leaving soon. She has a life to get back to, a very prosperous life, with people looking forward to her return.

My ax goes up in the air and swings down in frustration as I slice another log clean through.

"Ok, so what is going on with you?" Phoenix's voice startles me and I swing around with the ax still in my hand. My brother watches the ax I'm gripping so tight my knuckles are losing color, then my face with my forehead scrunched. "It's Faye, isn't it?"

"What?" I ask, dropping the ax to the ground and sitting on a log. I grab my bottle of water, consuming it as Phoenix comes beside me.

"Any fool could see the looks you were giving each other last night." Phoenix rests his elbows on his knees. "What's going on between you two?"

I shake my head, confused. "We slept together." Then I add, "Well, technically, we didn't sleep, but you get the idea."

Phoenix watches me, his eyes squinting. “I can’t see a problem there. Faye is a wonderful woman.”

“She has a life outside of Stony River. She’s a famous singer.” I’m stressing on my words. “That’s a life she will eventually have to get back to. What will happen to us then?”

Phoenix rests his hand on my shoulder. “I’m sure you guys can make it work. You two look great together. And last night was the first time I’ve seen you laugh like that since—well, in a while. You shouldn’t just give up on that.”

“And that’s the other thing.” I allow the bottle to drop from my hand, falling onto the ground. “I’m not sure I can give my heart to her, not in the way she deserves.”

Phoenix’s voice gets softer, comforting. “What happened with your ex was not your fault. You did nothing wrong and you shouldn’t punish yourself for it.” He sighs. “They were the ones who betrayed you and now they’re out there somewhere living life together. You deserve to be happy, too. You need to give yourself a chance.”

I don’t reply as someone bangs on my front door. Phoenix swings around the house to the front where I hear him having a murmured conversation with someone and I tune them out, consumed by my own thoughts.

“Faye’s here to see you,” he announces as he returns. “I let her into the cabin so she’s waiting for you there. You should tell her about your concerns.” Phoenix grabs his jacket. “I’ll leave you two to chat in private.” Before he leaves, he says, “I hope everything goes alright with you.”

Chapter 11: Faye

Damien walks into the cabin bare-chested, and I have to force myself to focus on the real reason for my visit.

“Sorry, I’m such a mess.” He dries himself with a towel. “If I had known you were coming, I would have been more prepared to host you.”

“That’s ok,” I say, knowing he can see the lust in my eyes. “I quite like this look on you.” Then I get serious before I sink too far into my urges. “I wanted to talk to you about something.”

Damien sits beside me on the sofa. His cabin is small, but comfortable. There are only two chairs in the sitting room and I noticed on my way in that his dining room and kitchen are together. I don’t see any bedrooms, so I assume they are at the back.

“What is it?” He looks at me with wide eyes, making it harder to get the words out.

“I was just wondering if you had any reservations about what happened between us.” I swallow hard. “I noticed you seemed distant, and I was just wondering if it has something to do with me.”

Damien’s face falls, and I can sense his hesitation. I’m suddenly apologetic for bringing it up. “I’m sorry if I’m alarming you. It’s just that I really like you.” I play with the hem of my shirt. “And I get the feeling you like me too, but sometimes it feels like you’re holding back, refusing to let me in.”

Damien releases a heavy breath and makes himself more comfortable on the chair. “You don’t have to apologize. I should.” He closes his eyes for a moment, then opens them again while I wait for him to continue. “I’m sorry for giving you mixed feelings. It’s just that I’ve had an unpleasant experience in the past.” He sighs, a heavy

weight seemingly settling on his shoulder. “I was engaged once, but then she told me she was pregnant with my best friend’s baby.”

My hand flies to my mouth to stop myself from gasping. “I’m so sorry. That must have been terrible.”

“You don’t have to apologize. You didn’t do anything.” He swallows hard. “And although I know you’re not that type of person, I’m not sure I can bring myself to completely give my heart to another woman. Plus, you will be leaving Stony River soon.”

I look at him now, my heart slightly breaking. “What are you saying?”

“I think we should end what we have between us now. Before one of us really gets hurt.” Damien keeps his eyes away from me, so I doubt he fully supports what he’s saying.

I shake my head. “Don’t you want to know how I feel about all this? Do I get a say?”

Damien’s body is rigid, and it aggravates me how he can be so emotionless at a time like this. “It doesn’t matter. I’ve decided. I prefer to end things here.”

My heart is hurting, physical pain, and I cling to it as I make one last plea to Damien. “We can get past all this. We don’t have to end things.”

Damien doesn’t even look at me. He simply stands and disappears into the walkway leading to the back of the cabin. Heartbroken, I gather my things and leave.

I’m so broken. When I reach my room, I call Iris and update her on all that happened between Damien and me.

“And the funny thing is that I was thinking about changing my life.” I sniff and wipe my nose with my hand.

“I know you were, honey, and I was cheering for you. I’m so sorry this happened to you. Maybe you should come back now. Maybe this is just a sign that you shouldn’t change your life. You need to get back to the studio and forget about him.”

I shift my weight onto one leg, my hand going up to my hip. “Are you just my manager because I thought you were my friend? I thought you wanted me to be happy.”

“I do. It’s just that...” Iris begins, but I cut her off.

“It doesn’t matter, anyway. I have to go.” I cut my phone off without another word and throw myself onto the bed.

Chapter 12: Damien

“I don’t see why you simply can’t give someone else this task.” I’ve been following Cameron around the store the entire morning to no avail. Today is the boat tour Faye booked sometime back and knowing how things ended with us, I think it’s best if someone else takes her.

“First of all, this is your assignment.” Cameron turns to me so I can see the seriousness on his face. “Second, you need to do this. You can’t keep running from love forever.”

“Who says I’m running?” My head is turning away from him.

“I am,” my brother voices. “And that you can’t even look at me now proves I’m right.”

I swing my head around, desperate to prove him wrong, and he continues. “You need to go to her, go for love. No one is asking you to jump into it. You can take it slow, work up to building trust.” He pauses. “You were devastated after the encounter with the bear. You were so scared of losing her.”

I am about to counter when my phone rings. I look at the number and take a deep breath before answering it. “Hello.”

“Hello.” Faye sounds choked, as if she has been crying. “I just wanted to call and inform you I’m canceling the boat trip today and I will no longer require your services.”

“Listen Faye. If this is because of me, you don’t have to. I’ll be happy to take you on the boat ride.” This is contrary to what I have been saying all morning, but the sound of her pained voice is too much for me.

“I’m leaving Stony River. I just wanted to let you know before I went.” She pauses. “Thanks for everything Damien. I truly had a wonderful time, but I think it’s time I went back to my life now.” Faye laughs, but

it is distressed. "I can't be on vacation forever. We both knew this was going to happen eventually. Take care of yourself."

She doesn't wait for me to respond before she hangs up.

Cameron pierces my eyes then, obviously knowing exactly what we discussed on the call. "Are you really prepared to lose her because that is what will happen if you let her leave like this?"

I think back to the times Faye and I shared, how she felt so comfortable in my arms as if it was where she belongs. Faye was willing to open herself to me.

I think it's time I do the same.

I leave for the airport immediately, not prepared to lose the love of my life.

Chapter 13: Faye

I watch as the elder Cooper packs my bags into the aircraft with a frown on my face.

His question comes as no surprise. “How was your stay in Stony River?”

“It was fun. I had a marvelous time,” I say, but do not smile.

The elder man continues what he is doing. “I don’t have you scheduled for departure for some time still. Did something happen with Damien? Was he a terrible guide?”

I raise my hands and wave them in the air. “Oh no, it’s not that. Damien is a terrific guide. He even took me hiking and to the bar with his family.” Then my voice quietens. “It’s just that I need to get back to my life now. I can’t stay any longer.”

My pilot settles my last bag and turns to face me. “Well, you must be excited to go back to your life to leave your vacation early.” Then he starts doing his preflight checks on the aircraft.

Mr. Cooper’s comment leaves me with doubts. If going back to my life is what I really want, shouldn’t I be happy? Shouldn’t I be thrilled to resume my life of stardom, instead of standing here with a sting in my heart? Then it all comes rushing towards me and I see it so clearly. I love Damien. And I want nothing more than to have a life with him.

I am still mulling over my revelation when Damien appears at my side.

I am ecstatic, but restrained myself from clinging to him. Damien takes my hand, though, just as his father appears from the back of the aircraft.

“I’ll just go check on the flight plan,” the older Cooper says, ignoring our linked hands.

“I’m so happy you’re still here. I thought I’d lost you,” Damien says in between breaths. He’s breathing hard, as if he ran here. “I’m sorry it took me this long to figure it out, but I am in love with you, Faye. I have been in love with you for some time now. I’ve just been too afraid to trust another woman. I convinced myself otherwise.” He holds me tighter. “But I don’t want to have any regrets with you and that’s what I will have if I don’t try to make this work.” He smiles and it warms my heart. “I want to have a relationship with you, if you will have me.”

I don’t answer, but when I notice my pilot returning, I address him. “I’m sorry for all the trouble, Mr. Cooper, but I guess I won’t be leaving today.”

The older man watches us and smiles before tapping his son on the shoulder. “I’m happy the both of you have found each other. Don’t worry about the bags, I’ll get them to you. You kids go have fun.”

Damien leads me away then, to his cabin.

Chapter 14: Damien

I feel at ease with Faye in my arms, naked on my bed, with my body covering hers. She stares into my eyes before kissing me hard on the lips. A kiss that reveals how much she loves me, so I hold her even tighter, causing my ready cock to moisten her entrance and tease my libido.

“I love you so much,” I tell her right before I plunge into her. Faye clings to my shoulders, her breath rapid in my ears as she follows my rhythmic thrusts. Her moans drive me wild as I cling to her waist, the passion causing me to shiver. “Harder,” she urges me and I forget restraint and give this lovely woman exactly what she begs for, until our release.

Faye and I lie in each other’s arms, caressing, until she breaks the silence. “For months I’ve thought about retiring from the business and now, with you, I have all the reasons to. I want to start a new life with you here, in Stony River, but I can’t abruptly leave my life behind. I need to go back and arrange my retirement.”

I caress her cheeks. “I know. And I’ll miss you the entire time.”

This earns me a smile. “I promise to come back once I’ve rearranged my life.” She snuggles closer. “I love you so much. I can’t believe this is happening.” Faye makes a line with her fingers along my stomach, and my manhood springs upright.

“If you continue like this, I might never let you go,” I threaten the one I love with a kiss, which she willingly yields to.

“If you keep kissing me like I might not want to go.” Faye bites her lip and all my restraint disappears. I pull her on top of me, convincing her to stay.

Epilogue: Faye

“I must admit, I was so thrilled when I learned you were the passenger on this trip. It’s good to have you back. Maybe now my son will stop moping all the time.” I burst out laughing at the father of the love of my life. “Seriously. If I had to hear him one more day, I might have packed him in a box and shipped him to you.”

The older Cooper had greeted me at the airport with an enormous hug, welcoming me to the family. It has been three months since I left Stony River, promising to return.

I lift my chin high. “Well, you are annoyed with it, but I am happy.”

My pilot smiles at me, saying nothing until he lands the aircraft. As soon as the plane comes to a stop, I undo my seatbelt and scamper out of the small aircraft. Damien is waiting on the ramp with open arms and I leap into them.

“I miss you so much,” I say, not caring that our greeting has got the attention of airport workers.

Damien brushes my hair out of my face. “I miss you more.” He kisses me on the forehead, then asks, “Are you ready for the quiet life as a singer at Night Haven?”

I stare into his eyes. “As long as you’re in the crowd cheering me on.” Then I wrap my hand around his waist. “Come on, let’s go home.”



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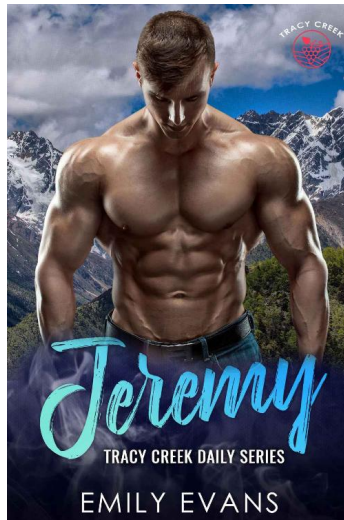
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