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Description: On June 14, 2014, the band Maine Event performed their last show together.

Ten years later, the band is trying to get back together for a reunion tour.

Skylar Ford never planned on touring with Maine Event ever again. The band was in the past and her present was running the local record store with her dad in Moonflower Cove, Maine. She doesn't want to relive the memories from the last tour and the beautiful woman she walked away from. Instead, she would prefer the past to stay in the past.

However, there's one person who could get Skylar to do anything.

Elena Cruz needs the reunion tour to happen. After the band broke up, she went from performing sold out arenas to playing in run down bars. She knows she's made for more, she just needs to make a plan to get Skylar to agree to join the tour.

But what Elena didn't plan on was falling back in love with Skylar.

As rehearsals fade into the tour, Elena and Skylar find themselves back in all too familiar territory. But things are different this time around; they're no longer kids in love but adults. Will this time around be different? Or will they face the same ending as the last time?

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Prologue

Skylar

Skylar Ford was pissed.

No.

That wasn't the right emotion. Skylar was livid.

Her anger had been bubbling since the moment she saw the damned picture in the magazine she'd snuck into her cart at the grocery store the day before. She'd stayed up all night looking at it and reading the accompanying article about how in love the couple was. Every time she looked at the picture, her stomach churned.

How could she do this to me? To us? Again.

Skylar snatched the magazine off the table in the tour bus and stormed out to the tour bus parked beside hers. She didn't bother to knock; she knew Elena Cruz would be having her mid-afternoon nap before their sold-out show later that day. Elena jumped up from the couch as Skylar slammed the magazine down on the table.

"Geez, Sky, way to give me a heart attack."

"What the fuck is this?"

"It's a magazine."

“With a really great picture of you in it.” She flipped through the page that her eyes had been locked for the last few hours. Skylar pointed at it and watched as Elena looked down at it.

Elena’s expression flickered from confusion to understanding in the blink of an eye. Skylar knew her well enough to know that she would have a perfect excuse as to why Peter Hamilton’s hand was on her ass and his tongue down her throat in the paparazzi picture taken a few weeks ago in Vegas. She knew that because Elena always had an excuse as to why she was seen with men out in public.

It will help people stay off the trail of me and you, Elena had whispered each time Skylar struggled with their relationship.

Having been out of the closet since her teenage years, Skylar hated having to hide her relationship with her bandmate. She wanted to be out and proud and let people know the love songs they wrote were about each other, not some nameless man.

The problem was Elena wasn’t out yet. In fact, she had all but pulled Skylar back into the closet with her. Not that Skylar protested; she would have gone anywhere to be with Elena.

But that was all about to change.

Skylar had had enough of pretending she and Elena were just best friends and bandmates. She was tired of singing love songs every weekend to sold-out arenas while her muse stood five feet away from her. Nothing would ever change her love for Elena; Skylar knew that. But it was past time she made a stand and told Elena exactly how she had been feeling the last six months on tour.

“It’s just publicity, Sky.” Elena’s eyes softened as she closed the magazine. She lifted her hand, presumably to touch Skylar’s cheek, but Skylar swatted it away.

“I can’t keep doing this.”

“Doing... what?”

She knew Elena knew what she meant, despite the confused look on her face.

“This...” Skylar waved back and forth between them. “Me and you. I can’t keep doing this. I can’t keep pretending that seeing you with him doesn’t bother me. I can’t keep singing love songs we wrote together about each other when you won’t say you love me outside of the lyrics. I’ve kept quiet long enough because I love you, Elena.”

Her voice cracked, and Skylar could feel the tears welling up in her eyes. She hated how she always cried when she was angry. Skylar also hated the way she wanted to tell Elena never mind—things were fine. But she knew they weren’t. They hadn’t been for a while now.

Elena’s brown eyes narrowed. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that we need to come out. Together.”

“No,” Elena shook her head and crossed her arms. As the de facto leader of the band, Elena always had the last—and often only—word. It was her way or the highway, which was why Skylar had been stuck in the closet for years with Elena. “We’ve already been through this.”

“I know,” Skylar sighed, “but this time, it’s different.”

“How so?”

“Either we go public, or I’m leaving the band.”

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She watched her words hit Elena.

Skylar had mulled over her decision all night. She loved their band, Maine Event. They'd all been playing together since high school, and Skylar always imagined them growing old together and having reunion tours after their inevitable falling out. What she hadn't planned on was the falling out coming at her own hand. After all, it was Skylar who had gotten Elena and their four bandmates together back in high school.

Back then, none of them imagined they'd be where they are now. They were selling out venues around the country, and their albums and singles had hit the top of the charts several times. Everyone in the band loved their job, even Skylar. She just didn't love being Elena's secret lover. Not anymore.

Elena tucked her long dark brown hair behind her ears. It was a nervous tick; Skylar knew that. She knew Elena better than anyone.

"Sky," Elena's voice was barely a whisper, "I can't."

If Skylar wasn't still running off the buzz from drinking all night, she might have caved in. She wanted nothing more than to pull Elena into a hug and tell her that she was sorry for getting angry. Because that's what Skylar always did. Giving into Elena's wants and needs had been something Skylar had been doing since she first met Elena in high school.

But it was time for things to change. Skylar had to start putting herself first. If she didn't, she was destined to be Elena Cruz's secret lover for the rest of her life. She'd have to deal with more paparazzi and interviews where they were asked if they were

dating anyone. Skylar would have to listen to Elena nervously laugh as she told interviewers the love songs she wrote with her were fictional. All the while, Skylar knew better.

“And I can’t keep doing this. It’s been two years, Elena. Two years you’ve pulled me back into the closet, and I let you because I love you. I’ve watched you hook up with different men...”

“Which I’ve done for you,” Elena interrupted. There was a fire behind her brown eyes that hadn’t been there before. She was angry, just like Skylar. “Do you know what being out would do to our career? We’d be finished. I know things are changing, but not fast enough. People still hate us. They don’t want to go to shows where two gays are singing love songs to each other.”

“How do you know? Are you some genius all of a sudden who knows exactly what music does and doesn’t work?”

“Name another gay couple who sings together in a band.”

Skylar assumed there was one, but she couldn’t think of anyone.

“Exactly,” Elena scoffed. “Our arrangement has been working. You know I love you. You know I go on dates with those men to keep us safe. I do it all for you.” Her eyes lowered and softened, and Skylar knew she’d have to steal herself from caving in. “I love you, Sky.”

“I love you, too. But...”

“No. No buts.” Elena took a few steps toward Skylar. It was at the point in arguments that Skylar usually gave in. But not today. She took a step back from Elena.

“See, this,” she motioned between them again, “is why I can’t keep doing this. You dismiss my feelings because you think you know what’s best for me. But I’m not a kid, Elena. I know what I need, and this isn’t it. Not anymore. I need more. I want more with you, but it’s clear you don’t want that, too.”

“Sky...”

“Please,” Skylar held up her hand, “don’t.”

“So, what does this mean? You’re just going to quit the band? Let me, Andy, Erica, Michael, and Gordon down? Just because you can’t handle me being seen with a man?”

Skylar sarcastically laughed.

“God, Elena, for once, I wish you’d step down off your high horse and see things from a different perspective.”

Storming out of the bus, Skylar could hear Elena following her.

“Skylar Ford, don’t you dare walk out on me.”

“Too late.”

“Skylar!” Elena called after her, hot on her heels. She had no intention of continuing her conversation with Elena until she felt her hand on her shoulder. Skylar spun around to face her.

“What?”

“So, this is it? You’re just going to walk out on the band with two weeks left in the

tour?” Her voice softened, and a tear spilled over from her eyes. “You’re going to walk out on me?”

“I have to put myself first. You should know what that’s like.”

“Just like you know what it’s like to walk out on family,” Elena spit the words at her. It was a low blow, comparing Skylar to her mother like that. Skylar resisted the urge to snap back. Her heart was too busy breaking as she finally realized everything she was destroying by walking out on the band.

“I’ll finish the tour, and then I’m done.”

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Yanking open the door to her own bus, Skylar went back inside and slammed the door shut. Through the curtain on the door, she could see Elena's silhouette, and she wondered if she would knock.

But she didn't. Instead, Skylar watched her walk away, probably for the last time.

Chapter 1

Elena

Sound check had barely begun, and already Elena Cruz was over it. Not only was the bar much smaller than any venue she'd ever played, but it also smelled much worse. She wiped a disinfectant wipe on the microphone as her bandmates warmed up behind her.

"This place is a dump," Gordon Raines whined from behind the drum set as he tapped out a light beat. His long, shaggy hair was bouncing along to the rhythm.

"And we thought the last place was bad." Andy Wallace was tuning his guitar for the third time after saying he was ready to go. Elena rolled her neck, trying hard to keep from saying the thoughts that echoed throughout her mind.

But what was the use of keeping quiet? They all knew playing shitty bars was the biggest step down from the days when they were selling out arenas across the country.

Those were the days...

And they were, but there was no time for reminiscing now.

“I know, guys, but a gig’s a gig, right?” She was trying to hype up her bandmates as much as herself. “I know it’s not up to our usual standards, but it keeps us in front of the crowd.”

“Yeah, all twenty people that can fit into this bar.” Gordon’s snotty comment made Andy laugh while Elena rolled her eyes. She tossed the used wipe onto the floor. “See, even you don’t care, Ellie.”

“I do care very much about this band, which is why I booked us this gig.” She took her position at the microphone before looking over her shoulder at the boys once more. “Now, you ready to play?”

Gordon nodded his head, counted down for them, and then they were off. Elena got lost in the music. It didn’t matter to her soul if they were in an empty bar or a packed arena. Music set Elena on fire.

All her life, all Elena wanted to do was sing. She was always the first to sign up for karaoke or to audition for the school musical. It didn’t matter the genre; Elena loved singing any song set before her. As she got older, she learned to write her own music, which allowed her an escape into her own world. Writing set her free in a way Elena had never experienced.

Then there was writing with Skylar.

Skylar.

Elena didn’t dare let her heart or mind go back to Skylar. Not again. Not when she was finally getting over her messy divorce from Peter Hamilton. Damn, that had been a disaster. And definitely not when she and the boys were trying to reinvent

themselves.

After Skylar abandoned them, Elena and the boys kept making music together. They enjoyed it, for the most part, but it was never the same. Erica Miller and Michael Webb quit after a few years. The last Elena had heard, Michael was the bassist for a new band while Erica had settled in California with some man she met online. She was happy for them; she truly was. But a part of her would give anything to have the whole band back together again.

Even Skylar.

Skylar.

Her mind started drifting again, and Elena motioned for the boys to stop playing.

“Sorry.”

“It’s fine.”

“You’re good.”

Even if they didn’t mean it, they always understood her stopping and starting rehearsals or sound checks. The cousins had been with her through it all. They had watched her live in a loveless marriage and helped her realize she deserved more. And she did. They all did. They all deserved to be playing sold-out venues again.

“You know what we need?” Andy was strumming the tune to one of their biggest hits.

“Skylar?” Gordon joked, which made them both laugh.

“Hey!” Elena snapped. “What have I said about mentioning her name?”

The shock and borderline terror on both their faces told Elena she’d overreacted. As per usual when someone mentioned Skylar. She tried to compose herself and forced a smile.

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“Sorry, I just don’t like talking about that traitor. Besides, we’ve done just fine without her.”

“Would be doing better with her,” Gordon muttered as he hid behind his drum set.

She flipped him off, which made Andy laugh.

“Okay, let’s get back to it.”

Thankfully, the rest of the rehearsal and their set went by smoothly. By the time the last chord was played, the measly crowd actually applauded for them, and even a handful stood up applauding. Elena felt her heart soar with happiness because no matter the crowd size, she loved what she did.

Making their way to the bar, Elena sat down between Andy and Gordon.

“You all were good,” the lanky bartender couldn’t be much more than twenty-one. His dusty blonde hair was shaggy like Gordon’s. “Do you have any music on Spotify?”

“We do.” Andy pulled out the band’s business card from the pocket of his jeans and handed it to the bartender. “It has a QR code on the back.”

“Cool. Thanks.” Taking the card, the bartender put it into his pocket as he made his way down the bar to the next patron.

“I told you that QR code was genius,” Andy gloated. He’d designed the cards himself

and made it a habit to hand them out to anyone who came within arm's reach of him.

Elena had to give him credit for getting their music out to people who might usually not have listened to them. Even their older hits were getting love on the streaming services, which meant they were all still getting paid royalties. That helped the bottom line, especially for Elena.

Her divorce from Peter had taken more time and money from her than Elena had been prepared to give. She hated him for how he'd used her and her status all the years they were together to boost his own career. But Elena mostly hated herself for letting him use her.

Even two years after the divorce was final, Elena still grappled with who she was back then. She barely recognized that woman anymore. Elena had come into her own after divorcing Peter. She'd cut her long hair into a short blunt bob that had the slightest curl by the end of every night and finally adopted a cat. Her nights were no longer spent wondering when her husband would come home, but, instead, she planned the next stop for the band.

Despite lacking an agent, Elena thought they still did well for themselves. They were booked most weekends and had the occasional weekday gig. It was nothing fancy, but the trio enjoyed it.

"I'm gonna turn in." Gordon stood and stretched his arms above his head. His short-sleeved shirt raised slightly, revealing the abs he still sported. "I'm tired."

"You're old," Andy teased, then yawned.

"Yeah, look who's talking."

Gordon playfully put Andy into a headlock and ruffled his shaggy hair. Despite being

in their early thirties, the two acted more like kids sometimes. Elena enjoyed it most of the time. They definitely livened her life up, especially since they were all touring in one bus now. The boys had kindly opted to sleep in the bunks while Elena took the room in the back for herself. Along with their driver, Elena spent more time with them than anyone else.

“I guess we should all get to bed early since Ellie has us booked tomorrow night, too.”

“I didn’t hear a thank you in that sentence.”

“Thanks, Mom,” the boys teased as they each placed a kiss on her cheek.

“You all shower and sleep. I’m going to get another drink, and then I’ll be there.”

“Sure thing.” Gordon squeezed her shoulder before he and Andy exited the bar. Their bus was parked around back, but Elena knew they had to get a move on soon if they were going to make it from Texas to Illinois before their set the next night.

But one more drink would be fine.

She ordered another martini from the bartender just as a well-dressed man sat down beside her.

“Put it on my tab.”

Elena resisted the urge to roll her eyes. She hated being hit on by men. But she always tried to be nice; it just seemed safer that way. Granted, Elena didn’t feel unsafe in the bar. Just on edge, as was her usual feeling in life.

“You didn’t have to do that, but thank you.”

“My pleasure.” The older gentleman smiled, and something about him seemed vaguely familiar. “I’m not sure if you remember me, but I used to work with Shannon Brooks.”

Yes. That’s where I know him from.

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Shannon Brooks had been their agent back before Skylar quit. Once she was gone, Shannon wasn't far behind. Ever since then, they'd been mostly agentless.

"Oh, yes. Hello..."

"Johnny. Johnny Lundy."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Lundy."

"Oh, please, call me Johnny."

Elena smiled, but her mind was running wild trying to figure out why Johnny Lundy was in a rundown bar in West Texas, of all places. He must have sensed her question as he reached into his pocket and pulled out a business card.

"I've been wanting to hear you all live again for a while. When I heard you all were coming to Texas, I made it a point to stop in at a few shows. You all still sound great."

A few shows? Johnny had been to a few of their shows in Texas? They'd easily done a dozen shows in the Lone Star State over the last few years. Exactly how many had he been to? And why?

"My wife died a couple of years ago, and she always wanted me to get back out there and tour again. She knew how much I loved it, but I quit when she became sick. I promised her I'd find a new band and get them on tour. And then I found one of your albums in her chest of drawers, and an idea hit me."

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yep,” Johnny’s chuckle was coarse, probably from tobacco if Elena had to guess. “I think Maine Event needs to do a reunion tour.”

“What?” Elena couldn’t contain her shock. There was no way he just suggested they get their old band back together for a reunion tour?

Sure, back in their prime, Elena wondered what it would be like to one day do a reunion tour with her bandmates years down the road. But once Skylar left the band, she assumed they’d never all get back together. Like, ever.

That was until now.

Elena mulled over the idea. She knew Gordon and Andy would be on board. And Erica and Michael would probably come back as bassist and piano. But Elena knew Skylar wouldn’t come back. It didn’t matter that she hadn’t seen her in nearly a decade. Elena knew Skylar. Or, well, she used to know Skylar.

“I was thinking we take the show back on the road. We can get you all into venues all over the country, and we can even do a recorded album with your hits. I’m sure we could add some of your solo songs on there as well. Reunion tours are big right now, and Maine Event has stayed in the charts on some level all these years.”

“Most have been my singles.” Elena was proud of her solo career, and she wasn’t going to let that be diminished. “Gordon, Andy, and I have worked hard these last few years. I’ve written several hit songs, some even for other artists. I’d want those to be included on the tour and record, assuming we do it.”

“Ahh, so the great Elena Cruz is interested in getting back to bigger venues.” Johnny laughed as he looked around the bar. “Bars are great for small bands, but Maine

Event was always destined for more. You know that I know that, and most importantly, your fans know that.”

Elena bit her lower lip.

“You’d never get Skylar on board,” she flatly stated as she picked up her martini glass.

Even nine years later, Elena still knew people speculated about her and Skylar and the true reason behind their breakup. The formal statement had been that the band decided to go their separate ways. Over the years, Elena had dodged questions from fans and interviewers about if she still had contact with Skylar. The last Elena had heard, Skylar was back in their hometown teaching guitar and piano lessons to kids. It was a noble job, but Elena knew Skylar wanted more.

“Assuming I could get Skylar,” Johnny paused, seemingly for dramatic effect, “would you be interested?”

Taking a sip of her drink, Elena tried not to show any interest in Skylar being back with the band. She shrugged nonchalantly despite the fact her heart was fluttering at the mere possibility of seeing Skylar again.

“Sure.”

Chapter 2

Skylar

There was no place in the world that Skylar would rather be than in Moonflower Cove, Maine. Growing up, she hated how small her hometown was. Everyone knew everything about everyone, and it always annoyed Skylar she couldn’t go anywhere

without seeing someone she knew. But now, at thirty-two, Skylar loved it. The Cove was her home, the place that had raised her into the woman she was today.

Walking down Main Street, Skylar took a turn onto Third Street toward the record store.

Set the Record Gay had been in her family for decades. Or, well, Set the Record Straight had been in the family for years. But when Skylar came out to her dad, Steven Ford grabbed a bucket of red paint, a paintbrush, and a ladder and changed the business name.

At sixteen, Skylar had been extremely embarrassed by the gesture. However, it grew sweeter with each passing year. Her dad had stood by her through every up and down in her life, and he never made her feel as if she wasn't completely and totally loved. Hell, Steven even helped organize the Pride events held every summer in the Cove. He was the best dad, and Skylar was thankful to be able to spend her time with him.

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The bell over the door chimed as Skylar let herself into the shop. The smell of older vinyl albums mixed with the fresh lavender Skylar had placed around the shop. While the front wall was entirely windows, the other three walls were covered with albums throughout the decades. There were also photos of patrons in the shops throughout its long history. Steven had even dedicated a mini section to Maine Event, Skylar's old band.

Skylar tried to avoid that corner of the shop as much as possible. She didn't want to be reminded of what she once had. Maine Event had been a top band many years ago. They were top of the charts and selling out venues within minutes of tickets going on sale. Deep down, Skylar knew they could still be big if her own emotions hadn't gotten in the way.

Gritting her teeth, Skylar kept her eyes away from the picture of her and Elena under their first album—Moonstone—at the release party. Steven had taken it, but Skylar knew even he didn't know the whole history behind their smiling faces.

“Hey, Peanut,” Steven's husky voice startled Skylar as she meandered through the store to the counter. He was wearing his usual attire of pressed khaki pants and a button-up shirt, along with a pair of tennis shoes. As he always did, Steven pulled her into a quick side hug and kissed the top of her head.

“Hey, Dad. How are you?”

“Same as always. You?”

“Same, same.”

They had the same interaction every day, and Skylar found herself looking forward to it.

After her mother left when Skylar was four, Steven stepped up and became the best dad a girl could ever have. He learned how to fix her hair, how to paint nails, and read all the Nancy Drew books so he could talk with her about them. All her friends loved him and were always fighting to spend the night at Skylar's house because they knew Steven would build an epic blanket fort for them. Skylar was blessed to have such a great relationship with her dad, that much she knew for sure.

"That agent man called again."

Skylar grit her teeth again.

"Why don't you take his calls?"

"Because I don't want to talk to him."

Sitting in the unsteady office chair behind the computer, Skylar turned it on as she avoided her father's gaze. She knew him well enough to know he was giving her an I-raised-you-better-than-this look. And it was true. Steven had raised her better than to ignore the phone call from an agent.

But Skylar had been avoiding his call for weeks. She'd only listened to his first voicemail, while the rest remained unheard with antagonizing red exclamation marks beside them. Skylar had told the agent, Johnny Lundy, that she had no interest in going on tour with Maine Event again. She told him she had responsibilities and a life in the Cove that she couldn't up and leave.

While that wasn't a lie, Skylar would never dare tell him the real truth. There was no way Skylar could handle singing love songs with Elena again. Let alone be in the

same room as her. Her love for Elena never died over the years. In fact, it stayed like a warm fire that kept her company on long winter nights.

Elena had been Skylar's best friend from the moment she showed up at Moonflower Cove High School during their freshman year. She was a transplant from Malibu, which seemed to be a world away for Skylar. Skylar was smitten with Elena immediately, but Elena made it clear she was straight. So Skylar respected their boundaries, and the two quickly became best friends.

By the time they teamed up with a garage boy band featuring four of their classmates, they both knew they wanted to perform for the rest of their life. Maine Event grew from a garage band singing cover songs to a small-town band singing their few handwritten songs at the local bar. After graduation, they hit the road in a beat-up van and played bars all over the northeast.

It was four long years of playing bars, small venues, and opening for the opening acts on tours before they finally hit it big. Their second album, *Gold Rush*, hit number one on the charts, and the rest was history. Before any of them had time to process, they were selling out venues all over the US and Canada, and even Europe. They'd been called "a new Fleetwood Mac," and they all thought they'd live on that high forever.

But life always has different ways of playing out.

Because when Elena came into Skylar's bed and confessed that she loved her, it was all over for Skylar. She fell head over heels for Elena, who had accepted her bisexuality. Elena and Skylar's song writing excelled as they wrote love songs about each other. When their third album—*Moonlight*—came out, Skylar knew she wanted to spend the rest of her life with Elena.

That was until she realized Elena wanted to keep their relationship a secret. Skylar knew, on some level, Elena had a point. Back then, it felt harder to be gay and in the

spotlight. But it was harder with Elena constantly pulling Skylar back into the closet with her. They would sing their love songs to sold-out crowds before falling asleep in each other's arms.

Then the morning would come, and Elena went back to acting like she and Skylar were nothing but friends and bandmates. Skylar tried not to let it bother her; she truly loved Elena after all. But after two years of being Elena's secret lover, Skylar wanted more.

No.

She needed more. Skylar needed Elena to show her that she wanted more than just stolen glances across the stage. But in the end, that had been more than Elena had been willing to give.

The memory of leaving Elena still broke Skylar's heart. She forced the memory back into its cage in the dungeons of her memories as she turned to face her dad.

"You can give me that look all you want, but I'm not calling him back."

Steven held up his hands. "I didn't say a word."

"Yeah, but your face did."

"I can't control my face," he chuckled. He was shifting through a box of donated records, weeding out the ones they could resell versus the ones that would get put into their free bin. "I just know you're destined for more than working here with me."

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“But I love working here with you.”

“I know.” He ran a hand through his thinning gray-speckled hair. “I just know how happy you were when you were with them.”

Steven paused, and for a moment, she thought he was going to bring up Elena. Aside from the band members who had front-row seats to her life, Skylar could count on one hand the number of people who knew about her and Elena. Well, that was only those that Skylar had told. She assumed others knew; it wasn't like it was hard to figure out after all. As for Skylar, she'd confided in her dad and her friends about her relationship with Elena.

She was thankful she had such an open relationship with her father. But it meant that at times like today, he was a little more pressing about her personal life.

“I just want you happy, that's all.”

“I know, Dad. And thank you for that. But I am happy. I love my job here with you, and I love this town. And I just got my fishing boat motor replaced, so I'm all good.”

Steven nodded, seemingly not convinced by Skylar's words. “Well, I still think you should at least call him.”

Shrugging, Steven picked up a stack of vinyl and took them across the room to the free bin. Thankfully, the rest of the day went by without any mention of Maine Event.

Since Skylar also sang weekly at the local bar and taught music lessons after hours at

the store, she often left the store early to decompress. With the spring sun finally warming up, Skylar knew exactly where she wanted to be. She'd load up her fishing gear and dog in the back of her Subaru and head for the marina.

Lake Monroe was gorgeous this time of year. The trees and flowers were all starting to bloom, and the birds all seemed to be tweeting a happy little song. Skylar waved a few other people out on the dock as she made her way to her boat, which she had named Flow.

By her side, as always, was Atlas. He was a lanky dog with floppy ears and big paws he still couldn't fully control at four years old. As a rescue, Skylar assumed he was part Great Dane due to his size and part German Shepherd due to his coat coloring. But the lighter gray his formerly black fur had changed into as he got older made her wonder if he had more breeds in him than she could decipher.

Atlas was well trained, which meant she didn't bother with a leash as they walked down the dock to her small pontoon boat. He found his favorite spot at the stern of the boat as Skylar turned on the motor. As Skylar headed out to the middle of the lake to do some casual fishing, she made it a point to put her phone on Do Not Disturb. That way, the only person who could get through would be her dad, and she knew he wouldn't call unless there was an emergency.

Skylar wasn't sure when she fell in love with fishing. Her father had fished while growing up, and Skylar had loathed the quiet mornings on the lake as she impatiently waited for him to catch anything. But as she got older, she began to love and crave the quietness that being on the lake could offer. It was just her, Atlas, Flow, the fish, and the water. That's all she needed. She didn't even care if she caught anything. Skylar would return it to the lake anyway.

Although she'd rolled the sleeves up on her plaid shirt earlier in the day, the afternoon sun was proving to be hotter than Skylar had anticipated. She discarded the

flannel, leaving her in a black tank top, jeans, and Chacos. Skylar wore the same attire all year round, except during winter when she swapped the sandals for a pair of Doc Martens. The sun's rays felt good against her skin, and she soaked up the feeling of being alone on the lake.

After catching a few fish, Skylar checked her phone and saw she'd been out on the lake for over two hours. Atlas was snoozing a few feet away from her, soaking up the sun's warm rays. There were several missed phone calls and voicemails waiting for her, but she ignored them all. She knew by the area code nine of them weren't local, which meant she didn't want to deal with any of them.

They were all probably Johnny Lundy, anyway. Or one of the boys in the band. Gordon had left her a message the week before, but Skylar hadn't called him back. She didn't know what to say if she did. Skylar knew Gordon had been touring with Elena for the last few years as she tried to make a new name for herself. Elena and the Cruzers were what they'd called themselves, and Skylar had to admit that she'd listened to their album that came out a couple of years ago.

But she'd never admit that she still kept up with Elena's social media pages.

Skylar knew more about Elena than she'd like. She knew about the marriage and ultimate divorce. It wasn't a surprise to Skylar, after all. She knew where Elena was on tour and that she'd recently adopted a cat named Leo and had sold her house in Brentwood. There were still questions Skylar had about her former friend and lover, but she assumed they would also understand.

Hell, Skylar didn't think she'd ever see Elena again.

Except for the fact she was standing on the boat dock tapping her foot impatiently as her brown eyes bore holes into Skylar from behind designer sunglasses. Atlas must have noticed her, too, because he ran to the edge of the boat and barked.

Fuck.

Chapter 3

Elena

Elena couldn't believe she's flown across the country to convince Skylar to come back to the band. It was only temporary; that was going to be Elena's selling point. They had twenty shows scheduled over three months. Most were on Friday and Saturday nights. That would mean Skylar could be home Sunday through Thursday.

At least, that was the agreement Johnny had landed on as a way to get Skylar back. If it were up to Elena, she'd have gone forward with the tour without Skylar. It was clear from Skylar repeatedly ignoring every attempt at contact that she wasn't interested. But Johnny had been insistent they needed the whole band back together, so here Elena was.

In Moonflower Cove.

On a boat dock.

Watching Skylar fucking Ford pull a fishing boat into the dock.

She looked exactly like Elena remembered her. Her long blonde hair was pulled back in a ponytail, while her black tank top showed off her strong, tanned arms. Elena forced herself not to pay attention to how damn hot Skylar still looked and instead focused on the giant dog that was happily wagging its tail.

As Skylar stepped off the boat, the dog ran toward Elena. She took a step back, not wanting to be jumped on by the large canine. Thankfully, Skylar called it back to her.

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“Since when do you fish?”

“Since when do you show up unannounced?” Skylar walked past Elena, bumping her shoulder into her. Elena spun around.

“Since you won’t answer any of your phone calls.”

“Maybe you should stop calling then.”

Skylar didn’t look back as she responded. She kept walking up the dock as if she had no interest in seeing Elena or hearing why she was in the Cove. The least she could do was listen to her. After all, Elena had made the long trek out here.

“Could you at least stop for a minute and listen to me?”

Elena watched as Skylar spun around to face her. Nothing but contempt was on her face, and it caught Elena off guard.

“Oh, like you listened to me nine years ago?” She scoffed. “Go home.”

“I can’t go home without you.”

The fuck, Elena? Way to make this sound like some Hallmark movie.

Even Skylar seemed confused by her choice of words. Elena pressed on, not wanting to give into the awkwardness she’d just created.

“The band needs you. I know you know about the tour.” The way Skylar gritted her teeth only confirmed that for Elena. “You know I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t have to be. But the management company won’t go forward with the tour unless you agree to do it.”

Skylar shifted her weight from one foot to the other but remained silent. So, Elena continued.

“It’s twenty shows. That’s all. Less than four months and you’ll never have to see me again. But the band needs you. This is a big chance for all of us. Even you. I know things are probably great for you here with your boat and your dog, but this is big. Not many bands get a second chance, especially after the way ours ended. Everyone else is on board. We just need you. I know things ended badly between us, and I can’t change that, but this is bigger than that. How long are you going to make me grovel before you agree to come back?”

A slight smirk appeared on Skylar’s face, and for a moment, they weren’t two former lovers who now hated each other. They were simply Sky and Ellie. Elena almost let herself get pulled back into her memories, but Skylar’s response stopped her.

“I can’t just uproot my life here.”

“Well,” Elena returned the smile, trying to show Skylar she wasn’t here to start a fight, “who would want to leave the smell of fish behind?”

Is she smiling?

Skylar Ford was smiling. And not a forced smile, either. Elena had learned the difference. No, this was a genuine smile. It made Elena’s own smile widen. Maybe this visit was going to be easier than Elena had anticipated.

“I’m going to need time to think about it.”

Elena’s smile turned upside down. “How much time? I know you’ve known about this for weeks. Hasn’t that been enough time?”

“My life is here, Elena.”

Hearing her name on Skylar’s lips again did something to Elena that she wasn’t prepared for.

“I have a job, my dad, and my dog. I can’t just uproot those things because you decided to make a decision for everyone without running it by everyone first.”

Elena knew the dig was deeper than just their current conversation, but she wasn’t in the mood to rehash the past.

“All the shows are on Fridays and Saturdays. That means you’ll get to be home the other days of the week. You’d just need to be at soundcheck early Friday morning wherever we’re playing.”

Elena crossed her arms over her chest. It was warmer in the Cove than she was prepared for. She’d dressed in a gray sweater and yoga pants, which seemed to take up most of her wardrobe these days.

“Of course,” she took a cautious step toward Skylar, “we’ll have rehearsals for a few weeks before the tour starts.”

“So, more time I’d spend away from here.”

“What do you want from me, Sky?” Elena threw up her hands in frustration. “You can bring your dog and your dad on the tour for all I care. If that gets you out of this

small town and back out where you belong, then do it.”

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“And how do you know where I belong anymore?”

Her words cut through Elena like a knife.

Once upon a time, Elena and Skylar had their whole future planned out together. They’d imagined their dream wedding and what their house would look like. They had discussed the possibility of kids or at least a few dogs. Never in Elena’s mind did she think it would all blow up the way it did. If only Skylar hadn’t been so jealous, they could have still been together.

“I’m going to need time to think about it.”

A glimmer of hope! That’s all Elena needed. Anything that wasn’t a flat out No was good enough for her.

“How much time?”

“I don’t know.” Skylar shrugged. “A few days?”

“Days?” Elena gasped, frustrated. “Skylar, come on. I told Johnny I’d have an answer by next week.”

“Well,” Skylar’s eyes sparkled as she looked down at her bare wrist as if a watch were there, “last time I checked, it’s still this week.”

“Do you expect me to stay in the Cove until you figure out what you’re doing with your life?”

“You’re a big girl, Elena. I can’t tell you what to do.” She laughed sarcastically.
“That much has been proven.”

Turning on her heels, Skylar and her dog headed toward the parking lot. Was that really how they were going to leave things? Was Elena just supposed to go back home to California and hope Skylar would go on tour? Elena needed answers now.

“Where are you going?”

Skylar stopped walking, and for a moment, Elena wondered if she was going to tell her she didn’t have a right to know.

“It’s Thursday,” she flatly stated as she turned around. “It’s my night to sing at Straight to Ale. Believe it or not, Skylar Ford is still a big deal around here.”

The sassy, confident attitude was too much for Elena. She rolled her eyes and laughed.

“Oh, I have no doubt.”

Skylar licked her lips. “You should come.”

Elena stopped laughing. “What?”

“Come to Straight to Ale. You can grab a bite to eat while I perform.” She shrugged.
“Might do you some good to be at a bar and not performing.”

Oh, so Skylar knows about my career these days. Great.

“Maybe I will.”

“I’ll see you later. Come on, Atlas.”

Turning to go for real this time, Elena watched Skylar load up her dog in the back of a SUV before leaving. Elena stood motionless on the dock as she tried to figure out what she should do. She’d flown to Maine on a one-way ticket, knowing she might not get the chance to talk to Skylar right away.

But now, Elena was wondering if she should use her free time to actually relax. Maybe she should go to the bar tonight. It might actually do her good, as Skylar insinuated.

Which was why Elena wasn’t surprised that later that night, she found herself in a corner booth at Straight to Ale. She’d opted for a baseball cap, hoodie, and jeans in an attempt to disguise herself. Not that she cared if people saw her normally. Elena just didn’t need people to see her at the bar while Skylar was singing when rumors of a reunion tour were all over the internet.

Thankfully, the Cove was more laid back than the hustle and bustle rumor mill that was social media and gossip columns. Elena had called the Cove home for only a few years before she and the band hit the road and never looked back. Or, well, Elena never looked back. She never imagined the small-town life was something she’d want, but she had to admit the charm of the Cove had grown on her as she got older. She’d even found herself reminiscing about it on her flight earlier. There was just something comforting about a place where everyone knew everyone and no one was out to trample you to become the next big star.

Elena sighed as she sipped her iced tea. She’d opted to stay away from the liquor, needing a clear head to focus on Skylar.

Skylar.

Her eyes had been locked on the small stage since Skylar had sat down on the stool with her guitar. Skylar's voice was a mix of Stevie Nicks and Faith Hill. While she could hold her own with the Stevie cover songs, she could also melodiously melt into a country cover as if it were no problem at all. Elena had always admired her versatility.

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She recalled all the shows the two played together where they would steal glances from each other while performing. It always made Elena's heart soar when she'd look over at Skylar during a love song they'd written together to find Skylar already looking back at her.

It was the same thing that was happening across the bar now. Skylar's eyes were locked with Elena's as she sang a Taylor Swift cover that seemed to please the young audience who were gathered around the stage dancing and singing along. Elena couldn't help but wonder if the song about how someone belonged to someone else was normal for Skylar's set or if it was added since Elena was there. She could have analyzed it for hours.

But, of course, the Cove was the Cove, and it was only a matter of time before she saw a familiar face hesitantly walking toward her.

"Elena?" Mallory Garden sheepishly asked as she kept her voice low. "Is that you?"

"It is." Standing, Elena pulled her high school friend into a hug. "It's good to see you, Mallory. Are you here with anyone? I have extra seats if you need a place."

"Oh, are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Thanks." Mallory motioned for another woman to join them. "Elena, this is Emery, my fiancée."

“It’s nice to meet you, Emery.”

“You as well, Elena. I’ve listened to all your albums.”

“Well, thank you.” She nervously laughed as they sat at the table. Emery and Mallory looked adorable together as if they were made for each other. It made Elena’s heart ache. She wanted that.

Although Elena would have been content to make eye contact with Skylar across the room the rest of the night, she was thankful she was at least getting to catch up with a friend. Mallory and her twin sister, Jones, were a year older than Elena but in the same grade. They had all been in school plays and musicals together throughout their high school years.

Elena enjoyed chatting with Mallory and Emery and learning about their relationship and how the rest of her old friends were doing. All the while, she was keenly aware that Mallory never brought up Skylar’s name, and Elena wondered if it was out of courtesy or because they weren’t friends anymore. She wasn’t sure which one she wanted to be true.

As Emery got up to go to the restroom, Mallory and Elena settled into a comfortable silence as they focused on Skylar. She was still going strong, still captivating the crowd in a way few people could. Elena felt someone watching her, and this time it wasn’t Skylar. She turned back to Mallory.

“She does this every week; she has for years. Everyone loves her. The crowd eats her up.”

I can see why, Elena wanted to say. But she didn’t want or need to open up to Mallory. Especially not when she had no idea how much Mallory or anyone else in the Cove, for that matter, knew about Maine Event’s demise. She didn’t think she’d

want to know that information either.

“I saw the rumors about the tour. Is that why you’re here?”

“Yeah,” Elena sighed and leaned back into the cushioned seat. “We need Skylar on board, or the management company isn’t interested.”

“Well, you know Skylar. She won’t do anything she doesn’t want to do.”

Elena did know that. She just wished she still had an ounce of pull to get Skylar to see how much she needed her. Or, well, how much the band needed her.

Looking back at Skylar, their eyes locked once more as she sang The Archer by Taylor Swift. Elena had never considered herself a Swiftie, but she had to admit she loved listening to Skylar cover her songs. The words hit their mark on Elena’s heart as she listened to them.

And for the first time in nine years, Elena realized Skylar wasn’t the villain in her story.

Chapter 4

Skylar

Singing at Straight to Ale was the highlight of Skylar’s week. The area in front of the stage was sunken, allowing patrons in the main part of the restaurant to see over the tables below them. Skylar loved the layout. It allowed her to see everything, and she worked hard to captivate the whole audience.

It also allowed her to see Elena sneak into the restaurant and make her way down the small set of stairs to a booth across from the stage.

Is she going to stare at me all night?

It was the question that had been bouncing around Skylar's mind for her entire set. Every time she looked Elena's way, she found Elena looking right back at her. Skylar felt they were back in the band when they'd steal glances without anyone else knowing the depth behind them.

And even in her crowded hometown bar, Skylar couldn't help but look for Elena's dark brown eyes.

Ugh. Come on, Ford. Focus.

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Skylar ended a song and waited for the applause to die down before smiling out at the crowd.

“You all are awesome,” she laughed as she soaked up another round of applause. No matter how many times she’s performed for an audience, Skylar would always bask in the feeling of people loving her art. “How about we do something new tonight?”

Skylar had been tossing an idea back and forth in her mind all night. It wasn’t uncommon for her to throw in a Maine Event song into a set list. The audience always loved it, and it gave Skylar a chance to plug the fact her record store had signed copies of albums if anyone was interested.

And tonight, a special guest might actually help boost the record store’s sales.

“As you all know, I was once a part of Maine Event.” Another round of applause, another glance at Elena across the room. “So, I’m assuming you all might like to hear a song from our hit album, Moonlight, right?”

Skylar strummed a few chords on her guitar as she watched Elena sink into her seat a little more. But there was no way she was getting out of it. If Elena could just show up out of the blue in the Cove, then she could sing a song with Skylar.

“And judging by your enthusiasm, I’d bet you’d really love it if Elena Cruz were here to sing with me.”

The crowd’s cheering and clapping intensified to a level Skylar hadn’t heard in years. She watched as nearly everyone in the bar looked around to see where Elena was. But

Skylar knew exactly where she was. Elena was staring right at her with daggers in her eyes.

“Elena, why don’t you come on up here and sing a song with me?”

Oh, she’s pissed. Skylar tried to keep herself from enjoying the fact she’d embarrassed the glorious Elena Cruz.

She watched as Elena sulked out of the bench seat and transformed into her onstage persona. Casual Elena was different from Stage Elena, and the latter would have never been caught dead in a hoodie and jeans. It made it that much better for Skylar, even if she knew that made her a bitch. She was still pissed that Elena had shown up in the Cove unannounced.

“What are you doing?” Elena hissed through a poised smile. She waved around the room, seemingly enjoying the attention.

“We better make sure we can still sing together before a tour.”

Elena snapped her head toward Skylar. “Are you being serious?”

“As a heartbreak.”

Skylar didn’t have to explain her response. The look on Elena’s face told her she knew exactly what song they were about to sing. Motioning a microphone behind her, Skylar watched Elena take it and turn it on.

“This is a song called ‘Heartbreak’.”

Elena smiled—the legitimately sexy smile—and Skylar started playing the song. Even after years apart, their voices still sounded amazing together. As Elena belted

out the bridge about how she wished she had a roadmap to deal with the heartbreak, Skylar felt chills all over her body.

Dammit.

Skylar wanted to do this every night again. She wanted to share the stage with Elena again.

But could she handle that? Could she deal with being mere feet away from Elena as they sang the songs they wrote for or about each other? Skylar honestly didn't know. A part of her still loved Elena; part of her always would.

Skylar just had to figure out if she could handle keeping her feelings bottled up for the tour.

If she agreed to do it, that is.

Oh, hell. Who am I kidding? There's no way I'm saying no to Elena.

"What do you say? Do you want more?"

Elena was playing in the audience now, which had legit turned into a crowd. People had left their seats in the restaurant for a chance to get closer to Elena. Skylar wasn't naive enough to think her hometown had suddenly gained more interest in her career. She knew they were there for Elena.

"Let's do 'Moonglow'," Elena whispered, and Skylar nodded. Skylar tried not to overthink why Elena chose that song. They'd written the song for the first album while on the deck of Skylar's back porch looking up at the stars. Elena's voice was just as beautiful singing the song now as it was over a decade ago, singing it for the first time.

Kissing in the moonglow

Feels like we're the only ones who know

The magic that surrounds us now

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With you, I'm walking on a cloud

Skylar sang the words as her mind flashed back to that night wrapped up in Elena's arms. Their relationship—if it could even be called that—was new, and they were insanely in love. So in love that Skylar never imagined it would end. She was Elena's, and Elena was hers. That was all that mattered in the world.

But Elena always put her career and image first. While Skylar thought announcing their relationship would help make them more inclusive to their fans, Elena argued it would cause them to lose their more close-minded audience. Skylar always protested that no one would question their relationship if they were a man and a woman.

She hated the way society treated lesbians. Or anyone who didn't fit into the cisgender category. It's why Skylar had spent a lot of time performing for LGBTQIA+ events around the state and even beyond. Skylar was passionate about making the world more accepting of people who didn't fit into a perfect checkbox with their sexuality or gender.

Maybe she could bring that passion onto the tour. She was publicly out and had been since before the band broke up. Skylar had dated a couple of people over the years but never loved them the way she loved Elena. Maybe now that Elena was divorced and the world was a little more accepting, they could actually use their platform for good.

Skylar could only hope.

But she knew the brown eyes beauty beside her would protest.

Not once in the last nine years had Elena made a comment on the LGBTQIA+ community. Skylar assumed it was because she still didn't want to ruin her image. But Skylar had also seen the photos of Elena and actress Fallon Rogers together too many times to assume the two had been just friends.

For the next half hour, Elena and Skylar played a mini Maine Event set. The crowd loved it, and if they hadn't called the last call for drinks, Skylar was sure they would have played well past midnight. By the time she packed up her guitar and gathered her bag, Skylar was basically floating on a cloud.

And the fact Elena waited for her before leaving made the feeling only intensify.

"I think we still got it." Elena playfully bumped her shoulder against Skylar's as they walked out to the parking lot.

"Yeah, it was fun."

"It was amazing," Elena clarified. "So, does this mean you'll do the tour?"

Skylar stopped at her car, propping her guitar case up against the hood. She crossed her arms over her chest and looked at Elena. Gone was the angry woman she'd seen at the dock, and in its place was the same woman Skylar had fallen in love with many years ago.

"Why didn't you just call me?"

Confusion flashes across Elena's face in the moonlight. "What?"

"You could have called me. Everyone else did. Gordon, Erica, Andy, Michael. Even that Johnny guy called. But you never did."

Elena swallowed as the corner of her mouth twitched ever so slightly. She shrugged, looking down at the ground so Skylar could no longer see her eyes. When she spoke again, her voice was softer than usual.

“Would you have answered if I did?”

The question was one Skylar knew she couldn't answer. She honestly didn't know. Part of her wanted to think if Elena had called, she'd have picked up. But Skylar knew she most likely would have let the call go to voicemail like she did every other call regarding the tour and Maine Event.

An answer didn't matter anyway. Because Elena closed the space between them and kissed her. It was the same warm and soft kiss that Skylar still dreamed about. She wrapped her arms around Elena's waist and pulled her closer. Elena ran her hands through Skylar's blonde hair that she'd let loose on the way to the bar earlier.

Skylar couldn't help but wonder if she was dreaming. How in the world was she currently lip locked with Elena Cruz? It was as if nothing else in the world mattered. She and Elena were back together, and if only for a moment, that was all Skylar needed.

When Elena finally pulled away, Skylar couldn't help but want to pull her right back in.

“I'm sorry.”

“I'm not.”

Elena's eyes softened, and Skylar was almost certain she saw a tear slide down her cheek.

“Sky...” her voice trailed off as she took a moment to compose herself. “I’m sorry I kissed you because I don’t want you to get the wrong idea.”

“What do you mean?”

“I didn’t come here to rekindle what we had. I came here to...”

“Get me to go on tour.” Skylar nodded curtly. “I know.”

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Skylar was angry for letting herself think that, even for a moment, there could still be something between them. Elena had made it very clear nine years ago that she didn't want to be in a relationship with Skylar. At least not a public one. And nothing seemed to be different now. Elena was still all business, and Skylar tried not to let the dejected feeling show on her face.

More than her own sad feelings, Skylar hated to see Elena sad. She always had. Her heart always ached when Elena's heart did. It was no different now. And Skylar knew just what she had to do to make Elena happy again.

"I'll do it."

"What?"

"I'll do the tour."

"Really?" Elena's sadness melted away. Anyone who didn't know her might assume she had been lying about her emotions. But Skylar knew her better. "Are you sure?"

"Did you not see that crowd tonight?" Skylar laughed, trying to make the conversation lighthearted. "They loved us. It would be an injustice to deprive the world of that."

Elena chuckled. "Yeah, you have a point there."

A comfortable silence settled between them as they stared into each other's eyes. Skylar resisted the urge to run her hands through Elena's brown hair. It was shorter

than the last time Skylar had seen her.

“You cut your hair.”

“I did.” Elena twirled a piece of hair around her finger. “Do you like it?”

“I do.”

“Thanks.”

It was clear to Skylar they would try to make as much small talk as they could so they didn't have to say goodbye. And, once again, Skylar didn't let herself think about why they were doing that.

“I should probably get home. I need to let Atlas out.”

“You mean your horse?”

“My... horse?” Skylar laughed. “He's not a horse.”

“He's as big as a horse.”

“Well, you're not wrong there.”

“I know I'm not.”

“Maybe you two will get along.” Skylar stuffed her hands into the pockets of her jeans to prevent them from reaching back out to Elena. “How long are you in town?”

“I was only going to stay until I had an answer from you.”

“Well, you got that.”

“Yeah,” Elena sighed. She shrugged her shoulders, and Skylar noticed the sadness fall back over her face. “I guess I’ll head back home.”

“I’m sure Leo misses you.”

Skylar knew that saying Elena’s cat’s name would let her know she had indeed been keeping up with her social media. But she didn’t care. After nine years of having her guard up in regard to Elena, it was nice to actually put them down for once.

“I know he does.”

They were still stalling. If Skylar didn’t force herself to leave, she knew they would stay there until the sun came up.

“Well, if you’re still in town tomorrow, you should stop by the store. We could grab lunch.” She shrugged as if she didn’t care if Elena showed up or not. “You can tell me about the tour. If you want.”

“That sounds nice.” Elena’s smile could light up the darkest nights. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“See you then.”

Skylar forced herself to load her guitar in the SUV as she watched Elena walk down to a black car in the parking lot. She waited until she could no longer see the car’s tail lights before heading home herself.

All the while, the feel of Elena’s lips on hers lingered in her mind.

Chapter 5

Elena

Moonflower Cove looked nothing like Elena remembered. Elena wasn’t sure if that was because her surly teenage self hated the idea of living in a small town or if the Cove had magically transformed into the most picturesque town she’d ever seen. And Elena had seen a lot of towns. After touring for over fourteen years, it felt as if she’d seen every town from Bangor to Seattle to El Paso.

Having parked her car along Main Street, Elena had walked up and down the streets as she admired all the various shops. There was a bookstore, a flower shop, and an ice cream shop that Elena vaguely remembered from her high school days. Granted, they all looked different now. Clearly, they were all under new management.

She grabbed a cup of coffee at Carlson’s Cafe—a place she actually remembered from her youth—before heading toward the record store. Elena had no idea what time Skylar ate lunch. Their plans had been vague. Without a firm meeting time, Elena didn’t know if her assumption to arrive at noon would be too early or too late for

Skylar.

Well, if she wanted a specific time, she should have asked for it.

She didn't know why she was mentally playing hardball with Skylar. After all, she had kissed her the night before. Elena still couldn't believe she had done that. She'd not expected to kiss Skylar. Definitely hadn't planned on it. But it happened nonetheless.

And, dammit, if it wasn't a good kiss.

Elena sighed. There was no denying she still had feelings for Skylar. It was hard not to have feelings for someone when most nights she was paid to sing songs about their love affair. Or whatever it was called. Calling it a relationship seemed too far off, but Skylar was so much more than a casual hookup.

No, Elena had loved her.

Still loved her.

But Skylar had made it clear that she didn't want to be in the closet with Elena any longer. Even though years had passed, Elena still sat locked in her own closet while she held the key.

The truth of the matter was Elena had yet to accept her sexuality. She'd told Skylar when they first got together she was bisexual, and for years Elena believed that to be true. Elena had loved both men and women in her life, and she'd enjoyed being with each of them.

No one compared to Skylar, though.

Not even Elena's ex-husband.

Peter Hamilton had been an up-and-coming actor when he and Elena first met. His dashing good looks and quick wit made him a delight to be around. When the rumor mill started to circulate, the two were an item. They both noticed how it advanced both of their careers. This led to the arrangement that worked for them for years. They would be seen with each other, let the rumors be that they were dating, while they each dated whoever they wanted in secret.

It worked for a while. Even Skylar had been on board with it. Well, maybe she was not on board with it, but she stopped protesting after a while. Skylar had been passionate about her and Elena coming out as a couple, but Elena had seen what that could do to a career. She wasn't about to let it happen to herself or Skylar.

Skylar struggled with her jealousy every time Elena was photographed with another man. Especially Peter. Peter bugged Skylar the most because she knew he and Elena had slept together. Elena had told her as much when they first started being intimate together. She would watch Skylar grit her teeth at award shows as Peter would walk with Elena down the red carpets.

At the time, Elena didn't think much of Skylar's jealousy or how she was essentially leading Skylar on. That guilt came later as Elena was crying on her bathroom floor after her divorce was final, and the only person she wanted to talk to was Skylar.

She'd made a lot of mistakes in her life, but letting Skylar Ford walk out of her life would always be the biggest one.

Letting out a deep breath, Elena rounded the corner toward the record store. The large, handpainted sign still hung over the door, and Elena smiled at the name change. Skylar had been so embarrassed when her father first publicly changed the name, but Elena always thought it was sweet.

Her parents were never as involved in her life as Skylar's dad was in her life. As the youngest of five, Elena's parents were tired of raising children by the time she came along. She knew that because they'd told her as much. After her father took a job in the Moonflower Cove University's science department, Elena and her mother moved with him to the Cove. All of Elena's older siblings were in college or had their own homes in cities across the US. They all had their own lives, but at fifteen, Elena had to start over in the Cove.

Thank God Skylar and her friends befriended her so quickly. Their love of Fleetwood Mac, Carole King, and Journey all brought them together. It was only a matter of time before their band formed, and the rest, well, that was history now.

And Elena was trying hard not to focus on the past anymore.

Opening the door to the store, Elena immediately felt at peace with the world. There was something about record stores, especially Set the Record Gay. The store was well kept, but it also had an air of unrest as if, at any moment, a band would come alive from an album and start playing. Somewhere in the store, a vinyl record was spinning on a player. Elena immediately recognized it.

It was a Maine Event album.

Of course it is, she laughed to herself.

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“Hey, Steven,” Elena called to him behind the counter.

“Well, if my eyes don’t deceive me.” Steven Ford’s booming voice echoed throughout the store. He walked over to her and wrapped her in the biggest bear hug. “Elena Cruz, back in the Cove.”

“Only long enough to convince your stubborn daughter to go on tour with us.”

“Well, I think Skylar’s made up her mind.” Steven crossed his arms over her chest as he looked Elena up and down. She’d once again chosen jeans, sneakers, and a sweatshirt to attempt to conceal her identity, but after last night, Elena knew it was useless. “It’s good to see you, Elena.”

His voice was so sincere it made Elena’s heart swell. “It’s good to see you too, Steven. The shop looks great.”

“It’s been a blessing. Even with everyone going to streaming services, we’ve still managed to keep our sales up. Skylar even set us up an online shop.”

“That’s fancy.”

“Isn’t it?” Steven chuckled. “I think Skylar’s finishing up some work in the back. She mentioned you two were going to lunch.”

“Yes, we are.”

“Well, I think that’s great. And hey, I hate that I missed your performance last night.

Skylar didn't tell me about it; I had to find out in the Gazette."

Because, of course, their impromptu jam session made the Moonflower Cove Gazette.

Steven didn't wait for Elena to say anything before he clapped his hands together excitedly.

"Hey, would you care to sign some of these?"

He nodded for her to follow him to a corner of the shop that could only be described as the Maine Event section. All the albums were hanging on the wall behind nice glass frames, and several pictures of the band were framed alongside them. There was even a decent stack of CDs and vinyl from their Maine Event days, and Elena noticed Skylar had signed all of them already.

"We still get the occasional fan that travels through here because they've heard Skylar works here. I'm sure they'd love it if your autograph were on there too."

"Dad," Skylar laughed as she walked out of the back room, "don't make her sign those so that you can charge more."

"I'm not," he defended. "I'm just thinking of your fans. Hell, we've sold two CDs already this morning to people who were there last night and saw you two singing. That could be great publicity for the tour if you two would sing there again tonight."

"I'm sure the regulars would love that."

Skylar crossed her arms over her chest, and for the first time, Elena could see how much she resembled her father. They were both tall and muscular with blonde hair, even if Steven's was grayer now. Both were even wearing T-shirts and jeans with

sandals as if it were the uniform for the store.

She looked over at Elena and smiled.

“Anyway, we should probably get to lunch. I have a music lesson later, and I need to finish up the inventory for the new shipment.”

“Oh, I can do that.”

“Dad, I’d let you teach piano lessons before I let you deal with inventory.” Although Skylar laughed, Elena could tell she was serious. “You hungry?”

“I am.”

“Good. Let me grab the boat keys and the Crock-Pot, and then we can go.”

“Boat keys?”

Steven laughed. “Skylar spends most of her lunches out on the boat. Didn’t she tell you?”

“No,” Elena arched an eyebrow at her as Skylar smirked, “she didn’t.”

“I made lasagna,” she said with a shrug as she disappeared back into whatever room she first appeared from. Elena assumed it was an office.

“She makes really great lasagna.”

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Steven's sweet compliment made Elena smile. He was so proud of Skylar; in his eyes, she could do no wrong. Elena loved that for her, even if it did make her slightly jealous.

Skylar came back out the door with a small Crock-Pot under one arm and was holding up a set of keys with the other.

"Okay, let's go."

"Say goodbye before you leave town, okay?" Steven gave Elena another hug.

"I will."

"Have fun!"

Elena smiled back at Steven and waved as she followed Skylar outside.

"So, were you going to tell me that one, we were having lunch on a boat, or two, that you can apparently cook now?"

"I got a Crock-Pot recipe book for Christmas last year, and I've been obsessed." Skylar strapped the pot into the backseat, seatbelt and all, as Elena watched from the sidewalk. "The lasagna is my favorite, and I know you love Mexican food."

"I do."

"Good." Skylar smiled again, melting even more of Elena's heart. For a moment,

Elena thought Skylar was going to open the door for her. But alas.

Elena got into the SUV and buckled up as Skylar drove them to the marina.

Or, well, that's where Elena thought they were going. But Skylar's turn away from the water indicates otherwise.

"Are you kidnapping me?"

"No," she snorted a laugh, "I'm picking up Atlas. He always goes to lunch with me."

"Of course, he does."

"He's my child. Leave me alone."

"I didn't say anything," Elena smirked and enjoyed the way that Skylar smiled back at her.

God, how were things so easy between them?

They had fallen into a comfort that Elena hadn't thought was possible. She assumed Skylar would be pissed at her for showing up in the Cove. And she might have been yesterday. But everything changed when they were up there singing together. Elena knew Skylar felt it too. She knew their chemistry was still palpable. Hell, she bet the Gazette even said as much.

Skylar pulled the car to a stop at a townhouse.

"I'll be right back."

Elena waited in the car as Skylar bounced up the stairs and into the house. It was a

nice neighborhood, close to downtown and the town's square. The townhouses looked older, but all seemed to be well-kept. Skylar's even had gorgeous flowers outside, along with a bird feeder hanging from one of the trees out front.

She watched as Skylar and Atlas walked back out to the car. Skylar loaded him inside, and he instantly stuck his nose in Elena's ear.

"Oh, goodness."

"Atlas, be nice."

"Yeah," Elena laughed as she turned in her seat to give the dog a pat on the head, "be nice to me. I'm your mommy's friend."

A silence hung in the air between them. Could she still call herself that? Were she and Skylar friends? Elena didn't know. But she'd sure as hell mull over that as they drove in silence to the marina.

Chapter 6

Skylar

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Never in a million years would Skylar have imagined she would be in the middle of Lake Monroe on her boat with Elena Cruz sitting elegantly on the stern. She'd befriended Atlas, whose head was on her lap as Elena petted his head. Skylar tried to keep her eyes on the water, but the scene in front of her was just too damn perfect.

She had dreamed of one day settling down with someone and starting a family. They'd spend their free time on the lake or by the ocean. A couple of kids would be running around having fun. At least one—probably more—dogs would always be with them. It was a great image, one Skylar still hoped would happen.

Once upon a time, Skylar assumed her future was with Elena. They used to talk about their days once the band was over and when they'd actually settle down. Skylar still remembered the type of house Elena wanted and what she'd wanted to name their kids. It seemed like useless information now. Surely her brain could let that go.

But alas. It remained along with song lyrics from every nineties boy band.

“Are we going to drive all day, or are we going to stop and eat?”

Elena looked at Skylar through designer sunglasses. They looked out of place with her otherwise casual attire. Skylar had to admit that she liked the casual Elena better. She seemed more relaxed, happier even.

“We will when we get there.”

“Get there?” Her brow furrowed in confusion. “I thought we were eating on the boat?”

“Nope,” Skylar smirked. “I know the perfect spot for a picnic.”

She expected Elena to protest, but instead, she nodded her head and went back to petting Atlas.

Arriving at a rickety dock on a small island in the middle of the lake, Skylar grabbed the Crock-Pot and whistled for Atlas to follow her. The two had picnicked here hundreds of times before, so he knew his way around. Skylar looked back at Elena, who was slowly walking toward the back of the boat. She had her arms out to her side to keep her balance.

“Nice sea legs.”

“Yeah, thanks,” she grumbled. “I wouldn’t have worn these shoes if I’d known we were going on an adventure.”

“What is life if not an adventure?” Skylar held her hand out to Elena to help her off the boat.

“I prefer a planned adventure.”

“Where’s the fun in that?”

“There’s excitement in planning.”

“Not as much as there is in spontaneously doing.”

Walking a few feet up a small embankment, Skylar sat the Crock-Pot down on the ground before heading back to the boat for the rest of the supplies. She’d packed a cooler of drinks, a blanket, and dishware for them to eat with. Elena waited for her by the Crock-Pot with her hands on her hips.

“You could offer to help, you know.”

“Why would I?” She laughed. “You drug me out here. You can set up the picnic.”

Skylar chuckled as she set the blanket on the ground and arranged everything. Plopping down on the blanket, she looked up at Elena. “You joining me?”

“You put a lot of thought into this.”

“So?”

“Are you trying to apologize for springing the surprise jam session last night on me?” Elena sat on the blanket beside Skylar and crossed her legs. They were close enough that Skylar could smell her perfume.

“Oh, come on. You know you enjoyed it.”

“Well,” Elena shrugged, a slight smile forming on her face, “maybe a little.”

Skylar playfully bumped her shoulder against Elena’s. “I know, right? We still got it.”

“We do. It should make for a great tour.”

“We always put on one hell of a show.”

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“But it’s been years since we’ve been together.” Elena paused, then shook her head. “The band, I mean. It’s been a while since the band was together.”

Skylar responded without thinking, “And us, too.”

Elena looked over at her, and Skylar met her brown eyes. There was a hint of sadness still in them, and Skylar wished she still was the remedy for making Elena’s sadness go away. But things were different now. They were different. Life was different. It was all... different.

Skylar knew she needed to change the subject. “We should eat.”

They ate their lasagna in silence. The only sound between them was the wind gently rustling the leaves over their head and Atlas crunching on the kibble Skylar had brought with her. She thought several times about asking Elena how she was doing after the divorce, but that information seemed too personal for Skylar to be asking already. So, instead, they sat in silence.

By the time they were finished, Skylar assumed they would pack up and head back to town. But Elena found a ball and tossed it with Atlas as Skylar watched.

This. This is how I thought our lives would go.

There was no denying the pain in her heart. It crept up on her at the most random of times. Granted, it wasn’t entirely random today. She was with Elena, after all. But the other times were random. Like every time she heard their song playing in a store and froze in her steps. Or when she was at a New Year’s Eve party with her friends and

saw Elena and Peter on the TV screen in Times Square, and she proceeded to lock herself in the bathroom and cry.

Even after all the years, Skylar hadn't figured out a way to move on from Elena. A part of her would always be twenty-three and begging Elena to be with her. Truly be with her. Not just in secret.

But Elena never did.

A slobber-covered ball landed in her lap as Atlas bounded over to retrieve it.

"Come play with us," Elena called out.

As if I'm going to say no to this.

Standing, Skylar held the ball above her head as Atlas anxiously bounced on his front feet. He always did that when he was excited. She tossed the ball to Elena, who caught it just as Atlas reached her.

"Throw it into the water."

"The horse can swim?"

"He's not a horse," Skylar laughed. "He loves the water."

Elena shrugged as if not believing her. But she threw the ball into the water anyway as Atlas went diving off the dock as if he were a pro. He grabbed the ball in his mouth before coming back on shore and dropping it at Elena's feet.

"I think he likes me," she giggled and tossed the ball again.

“Does he ever get tired?”

“My arm usually gets tired before he does.”

“Well, good thing he has me here. Now he can play twice as long.”

Elena seemed to be genuinely enjoying herself, which was a relief to Skylar. She'd only seen Elena's life in pictures the last few years; she had no idea if being out in nature was still something she enjoyed. She got her answer when Elena said, “I've missed this. Being out in nature. Being by the water. We used to do this all the time in high school.”

“I remember.”

“Do you remember,” Elena could barely ask the question through her laughter, “that time we got caught skinny dipping down by the campground?”

“Do I remember?” Skylar pulled up the hem of her shirt to reveal the scar on her side. “I still have the scar from where you and Jones Garner pushed me down to run from the cops.”

“Oh, I forgot about that.” Her laugh was still as infectious as it ever was. “Man, we had some crazy times together, didn't we?”

“We sure did,” Skylar chuckled as she threw the ball once more.

When Atlas brought it back to shore, he dropped it before running a few yards away to do his business. Skylar picked it up and threw it back into the water. She wasn't expecting Atlas to charge after it like a bullet out of a gun.

And she really didn't expect him to knock right into Elena.

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Which then sent Elena right into the water with a loud scream.

“Shit.” Skylar ran toward the end of the dock where Elena had fallen in. The water wasn’t super deep there, but it was definitely too deep for either of them to reach the bottom. She quickly knelt down at the end of the dock. “Are you okay?”

Elena was bobbing in the water and then suddenly burst out laughing.

“God, I forgot how good this water felt.” She laid back on her back and floated as Atlas swam over to check on her. “Yeah, you knocked me in, but it’s okay.”

“Come over here, and I’ll pull you up.”

When Elena reached the dock, she held up her hand to Skylar. But the moment Skylar took it, she knew she’d made a terrible mistake. Elena pulled her into the water with her as she laughed.

“I don’t know why I didn’t see that coming.”

“I honestly can’t believe you didn’t.” Elena was breathless from all the laughter. “You know me too well.”

“Yeah,” Skylar felt her smile and eyes soften as she looked into Elena’s eyes, “I do.”

For a moment, Skylar thought they were going to kiss again. She watched as Elena swam closer to her, and she wanted nothing more in the world than to kiss her. Just as she was about to lean in, Atlas jumped into the water not far from them and splashed

them both.

Skylar knew she needed to keep her distance from Elena, but, dammit, she didn't want to. Why couldn't they just fall back into the relationship they had before? Couples do that all the time, right? Why did they have to be different?

Because she broke your heart and never apologized, she reminded herself.

Pulling herself up onto the dock, Skylar turned around to help Elena up. They were both dripping wet as they gathered up the leftover items from the picnic and put them back onto the boat.

"Here." Skylar tossed Elena a T-shirt that she kept on the boat for emergencies. "You can change into this if you want."

"Thanks."

Skylar was about to tell her there was a small bathhouse on the island now, but Elena pulled off her soaking wet shirt right in front of her. It took everything in her to keep herself from staring. She tried to fiddle with the key in the ignition as she tried not to focus on the way Elena's black lace bra looked against her olive-colored skin.

When Elena caught her looking, she didn't turn away. Instead, they held eye contact while Elena slipped the shirt on tantalizingly slow. There was no way it wasn't intentional, and Skylar didn't know what to think about that.

As Skylar drove the boat back to the main dock, she couldn't keep her eyes off Elena lounging on the stern of the boat. Atlas was stretched out beside her, each drying off from their swims.

How am I going to be able to handle being on tour with her again? Clearly, there are

still feelings there. But should I act on them?

Skylar knew the answer, whether she wanted to admit it or not. She shouldn't act on them. The kiss last night was all that should happen. Elena had broken her heart once, and there was no proof that she wouldn't do it again. Somehow, some way, Skylar would have to turn off her feelings for Elena.

At least she had time before the tour to figure out how to do that.

After docking the boat and loading up the SUV, they headed back downtown toward the record shop. Skylar pulled the car into the spot behind Elena's rental and put it in Park.

"I had a lot of fun today." Elena's sweet smile told her she was genuine with her compliment. "Even if I am soaking wet."

"Well, it's not a day on the lake with me unless you end up wet."

She instantly regretted the double meaning in her sentence and felt herself blush. Elena's smile spread wider, letting her know she caught it too. Skylar cleared her throat and turned slightly in her seat.

"So, when are you leaving?"

"I fly out of Portland tomorrow morning."

"Ahh," was all Skylar could say.

"Johnny is getting the tour dates nailed down right now. Once we have that, we'll start rehearsals. I have a studio attached to my house, so we'll use that. There's an extra bedroom, so you're welcome to stay there instead of a hotel if you want." Elena

shrugged. “It doesn’t matter.”

But it did matter to both of them. Skylar knew that by the dejected sound in Elena’s voice and the way her own heart sank at those last three words.

“Thanks. I’ll think about it.”

“Well,” Elena placed her hand on the door handle, “I guess I should change out of these wet clothes.”

“Atlas is sorry about that.”

“It’s okay.” She turned around and patted his head one last time. “He’s a good boy.”

Skylar wished they could make more small talk so Elena didn’t have to leave. But Elena seemed to be in a rush to change her clothes.

“So, I’ll see you soon, Sky.”

“Yeah, see ya, Ellie.”

Smiling once more, Elena opened the car door and got out. Skylar watched as she closed the door, then walked up to her rental car and drove away. She leaned back into her seat and sighed. Atlas put his head on her shoulder and sighed too.

“I miss her too, buddy.”

Chapter 7

Elena

Elena’s Santa Barbara estate had felt bigger and lonelier since she’d arrived back

home a few weeks ago. She still had no idea why she'd purchased such a large home. At over three thousand square feet, the home had four bedrooms and as many bathrooms. Large windows on both the main floor and the basement overlooked the ocean.

The view has been the selling point for Elena. Being near the ocean had always grounded her. And after her divorce, Elena needed to be grounded. She needed that safe place to come home to that was all her own. Especially after how badly things had ended with Peter.

Once upon a time, Elena had thought she could love Peter like a wife should love her husband. But the truth of the matter was Elena never truly loved him because her heart always belonged to someone else. Peter knew that. Hell, he'd even had his fair share of affairs with women he claimed to love while he was married to Elena. All the while, Elena tried to act like it didn't bother her. She knew their relationship and marriage were more out of convenience than love.

That was why it had been years since she and Peter had shared a bed, much less been intimate. They had tried to seem in love while on the red carpets of his movie premieres, but that never went farther than a quick peck of a kiss. Needless to say, it was nothing like the kiss that she and Skylar had shared that night at the bar.

Elena always wanted more than what she knew Peter could give her. It was why their divorce wasn't a surprise for either of them. What had been a surprise was the fact Peter had taken her for a ride during the court proceedings. His lawyer had managed to get him half of Elena's money as well as the house they'd purchased together. She'd been crushed by Peter's callous behavior in court to the point she wasn't sure she'd ever be willing to open her heart or life to anyone else again.

Granted, that was before the now infamous kiss with Skylar. Elena had thought about it every day since it happened. When she closed her eyes, she could still feel the way

Skylar's kiss felt on her lips. She'd even gotten off to thoughts of Skylar several times since she arrived back home.

That was the last thing Elena had expected to come out of her visit to the Cove. She'd thought she'd argue with Skylar about the tour, win that argument, and then be on her way with a tour in the future. Elena hadn't expected all her anger toward Skylar to dissipate so quickly. But that was the pull Skylar had always had over Elena. She could turn any of Elena's bad days around simply with her smile. And it was clear that was still the case today.

Which meant Elena had to figure out how she was going to make it through the tour without letting herself fall back in love with Skylar.

The fact that Skylar had up and left the band and Elena was still a bitter pill for Elena to swallow. She could trace all of her abandonment issues back to the moment of watching Skylar walk off the stage on their last night on tour and subsequently walk out of Elena's life.

A part of Elena had assumed Skylar would come running back to her. What they had was that once-in-a-lifetime love. Elena knew that because she'd never experienced it again. But Skylar never came back. She never called, never messaged, never came back to the band. As the years passed, Elena assumed she'd never see Skylar again.

That's what made the idea of a reunion tour so exciting for Elena.

Sure, she was excited to play venues that were larger than a bar. But she was even more excited she would be singing at those venues with Skylar by her side.

The doorbell ringing brought Elena out of her thoughts. She'd invited Gordon and Andy over for dinner since Erica and Michael were finally in town for rehearsals. Skylar was set to arrive the next day, which brought a smile to Elena's face. She

eagerly bounced over to the door and opened it.

“Skylar,” Elena gasped. “What are you doing here?”

“I heard there was a dinner party, and you know I love free food.” Skylar shrugged as she laughed. She had a suitcase by her side and a backpack on her shoulders. “Is it okay that I came here early?”

“Absolutely.” Elena shook her head as she snapped back into hostess mode. “I’m so glad you’re here. Come on in.”

Judging by the fact Skylar had her suitcase and no car in sight, she must have decided to take Elena’s offer to stay at her house while they were in tour rehearsals. The thought of being in the same house as Skylar sent a warm wave through Elena’s body. She tried not to let it show as she opened the door wider for Skylar to enter.

Skylar looked around the house with her mouth slightly agape. Elena knew her house was too extravagant. She’d hired a top interior designer to set up the entire house, so it looked more like the cover of a magazine than a lived-in home. The large, open-concept living space greeted people as soon as they walked in. A kitchen sat off to the right, while two bedrooms were off to the left. Another bedroom was downstairs, while Elena’s bedroom was on the top floor. Artwork dotted the white walls, and Elena suddenly realized how devoid her home was of any personal touches.

“I’m still working on making it a home.” Elena didn’t know why she felt the need to lie to Skylar. Until that moment, Elena never thought her house wasn’t a home. But seeing it from someone else’s eyes made her realize how almost sterile the place felt.

“It’s nice.”

“Thanks.”

“So,” Skylar dropped her backpack by the front door, “is it still okay if I crash here? I can get a hotel if not.”

“No, stay,” Elena blurted out. “You’re totally welcome to stay here. I have three rooms that aren’t being used. Gordon and Andy live nearby, and Erica and her family have rented an Airbnb.”

“What about Michael?”

“He’s staying with Andy.”

“So, the gang’s all back in town.” Skylar slowly walked through the house as Elena followed her. “Did you make dinner?”

Elena snorted a laugh. “Please. I hired a catering company. You know I don’t cook.”

“I see some things never change.”

She tried not to linger too long on Skylar’s comment. There was no point in overanalyzing it. They had to work together for the next few months, and the last thing either of them needed was to fall back into their old ways. As much as Elena wanted to be with Skylar again, she knew it would only lead to her heart being broken once more.

And she wasn't going to let that happen again.

Thankfully, the doorbell rang again, and within fifteen minutes, the entire band was literally back together. Everyone was busy catching up on their lives since the last time they'd seen each other, and Elena was grateful for the presence of more people to keep her mind off Skylar. Erica, their backup singer, and pianist, had brought her husband and three kids with her, which definitely livened up the place. Until that moment, no kids had even been in Elena's house as far as she knew.

It felt incredible to sit around her oval dining room table with all her old friends. Elena was keenly aware that Skylar had chosen to sit by her.

Erica clearly noticed it too. She had been shooting Elena daggers from across the table since they'd sat down. Out of all the band members, only Erica knew the truth about Elena and Skylar. The boys were, thankfully, too oblivious to notice what was happening between the two lead singers.

But Erica knew. Mostly because she found Elena and Skylar fucking in a dressing room one night before a show. There was no talking themselves out of that situation. Thankfully, Erica didn't seem fazed by the news, so they all entered into an unspoken pact that they wouldn't talk about it.

Until now, that pact had remained in play. But Elena doubted that it would last much longer. She could tell by the way Erica kept looking back and forth between Elena and Skylar as if she knew they had kissed a few weeks ago.

Was it that obvious? Elena didn't think so. It wasn't as if she had a post-kiss glow. For all Erica and anyone else knew, this was the first time Elena and Skylar had been in the same room in almost a decade. Elena had no intention of clarifying that. They didn't know she had gone to Maine to convince Skylar to join the band.

“So,” Erica’s voice cut through the chatter that had lasted all through dinner, “what made you finally come back to the band, Skylar?”

Skylar sat up straighter in her chair. “Oh, well, honestly, I wasn’t planning on coming back. I thought Maine Event was just a part of my past. But then Elena showed up in the Cove and convinced me to come back.”

“I bet she did,” Erica smirked as Skylar and Elena looked at each other and then back at Erica.

Elena knew the Cove was small, but was it small enough that someone saw them kissing and told Erica? As far as Elena knew, Erica didn’t keep up with anyone in her hometown. But Elena had no idea what Erica had been up to the last nine years except getting married and having a family. She didn’t know anything beyond that.

“I didn’t do anything.” Elena picked up her wine glass and took a sip. “It was all Skylar’s call on if she came back or not.”

“Well, it’s good she came back,” Andy laughed. “I don’t think I could perform in another shitty bar without wanting to pull my hair out.”

“What hair you have left.” Michael playfully rubbed the balding spot on his head. Andy swatted his hand away as they laughed.

“So, Elena,” Erica turned her attention back to her, “have you dated anyone since Peter?”

What the fuck? Why would she bring up Peter?

Was it to show Elena that she had kept up with her life since the band broke up? Was it a way to slam that relationship back into Skylar’s and Elena’s faces? Elena didn’t

know. She shifted uncomfortably in her seat and forced a smile.

“No, I haven’t.”

“You should get back out there. You can do so much better than Peter.” Erica turned her attention to Skylar as she arched an eyebrow. “Right, Skylar?”

“Uh, yeah,” Skylar cleared her throat and smiled, “right.”

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Skylar looked over at Elena, sympathy in her eyes. She was clearly as caught off guard by Erica's questioning as Elena was. Yet again, the boys were all oblivious to what was happening right in front of them.

“What about you, Skylar? Are you dating anyone?”

At least that was a question Elena was also interested in. It was also one she should have probably clarified before she kissed Skylar. But alas, there was no going back now.

“No, I'm not. I have a dog, Atlas, and I run the record store with my dad and teach music lessons, so that's about all I have time for.”

“But apparently, you have time to sing with Elena at the bar.”

That seemed to gain the attention of Michael, Gordon, and Andy. They all looked at Skylar and Elena, waiting for answers. Elena looked at Skylar, and it was clear neither of them knew what to say. Obviously, Erica was referencing the night at Straight to Ale. She knew the Moonflower Cove Gazette had written an article about it, but she hadn't heard of it going further than that. Suddenly she was worried that she had missed yet another tabloid piece that disclosed her personal life.

“Yeah, the crowd loved it.” Skylar was leaning slightly only on the table, showing Erica that she wasn't backing down from her insinuations. “It proved to me that the tour is going to be a huge event. People still like to hear Elena and me sing, and I'm sure they'll really love it when the whole band is playing together again. So, we should probably focus on that instead of anything else. Right, Erica?”

Erica was clearly taken aback by Skylar's forcefulness. It was all that the group needed to shift the focus back to the band. They began to brainstorm about what songs they all wanted to play and in what order. Elena was keeping track of everything on her phone's notes app.

Under the table, she felt Skylar place her hand on her knee. She gave it a gentle squeeze, and Elena appreciated the small gesture more than she could express. Skylar knew her; she knew when she was upset, and clearly, Erica's questioning had annoyed her. Elena turned her head slightly toward Skylar and smiled.

This tour was going to be interesting.

Chapter 8

Skylar

If dinner had been any indication, the tour was going to be super interesting. The funny part was the band's dynamic hadn't changed a bit in the last nine years. Michael, Gordon, and Andy were still the three stooges who were oblivious to everything, while Erica picked up on every glance between Elena and Skylar. They would have to be careful around Erica. Hell, Skylar had to be careful around Elena.

The feelings she had sworn never to have again instantly came bubbling up the moment Elena opened the front door to her fancy house. Elena's red blouse and tight black pants had been a sight for sore eyes. Despite having only been a few weeks since Skylar last saw her, she couldn't help but smile at the memory of Elena opening that front door.

Skylar had chosen to come in early without warning to hopefully ease any awkwardness there might have been after their few days in the Cove together. Although they had only kissed once, there was a moment at the lake when Skylar

wanted to kiss Elena more than she wanted her next breath. She restrained herself, mostly because Atlas interrupted the moment, but Skylar had been thinking of Elena's lips ever since then.

And now she was following Elena down the stairs to a spare bedroom she'd call home for the next few weeks.

Elena's house was simultaneously exactly and nothing what she'd expected. It was expertly decorated with designer furniture and artwork. There were no personal details in the house aside from the occasional glimpse of Leo, the tabby cat, as he lurked about. Skylar assumed the pictures on the fireplace mantle were ones of Elena's family, but she hadn't gotten close enough to look at them yet.

The lower floor, however, was an entirely different story. Skylar didn't think it could be classified as a basement as there were large floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the ocean. Most of the lower floor was open, with two doors on the opposite wall as the staircase they were ascending. A comfy couch and recliner sat facing a TV in the corner of the room. There was even a mini kitchen.

But the thing that caught Skylar's attention the most was that each wall was covered in Maine Event memorabilia. Skylar wasn't sure if she should comment on it. A part of her felt weird knowing Elena had pictures of them on tour all over her house. Did she ever look at them and miss Skylar? Did she ever think about calling her when she looked at the albums they'd written together?

Skylar wasn't sure she wanted the answers.

"There's a recording studio over there." Elena pointed to a closed door under the stairs. "It's not big, but I think it'll work for rehearsals. Johnny is securing us a large studio to practice in once we get our songs down again."

“That sounds great.”

“And your bedroom is over here.”

Skylar followed her across the room to the bedroom door. As Elena opened it, Skylar noticed one of the framed photos on the wall. It was of them singing their heart out on tour. They were sharing the same microphone, their lips mere millimeters away from each other. Somehow, they always seemed to end up like that while performing live. A part of Skylar wondered if that chemistry would still be there on this tour.

She wasn't sure she could handle it either way.

“It's not much either.” Elena shrugged as she opened the door. Following her inside, Skylar put her luggage by the bed and looked around the room. “It has all you'll need, I think, and there's a bathroom attached to it. I keep it stocked for guests, so you're welcome to anything that's in there. Clean towels are under the sink, along with extra toilet paper. If you need anything else, just let me know, and I can Instacart it for you.”

“You sound so fancy.”

“You don't Instacart your stuff?” She looked genuinely confused as if going to the store was so far removed from her mind now she forgot people still did it.

“No, I generally just go to the store.”

Elena laughed nervously. Skylar could tell it was a nervous laugh because it was higher pitched than her normal laugh. “I guess I forget not everyone wants to keep people from seeing them out in public.”

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“Is it really that bad?” Propping her guitar up against the wall, Skylar plopped down on the surprisingly comfortable bed. “I mean, it’s been years since Maine Event.”

“Not everywhere is like the Cove.” The sadness was palpable in Elena’s voice as she sat down on the edge of the bed across from Skylar. “Especially in today’s world, there are fan blogs and people who still keep up with all things Maine Event and know everything about us.”

She laughed, but it didn’t sound like her normal laugh. It was sadder.

“Well, not everything between us.”

“Yeah, I’m sure I’d have heard about that if they did.”

Skylar tried to laugh too, but there was nothing funny about the situation. If things had gone the way they had planned, she and Elena could very easily still be together right now. They could be celebrating over a decade of loving each other. But that wasn’t in the cards life had dealt them.

Elena lay down on the bed and rolled her head toward Skylar. Her brown eyes were finally starting to look less sad.

“Did you know that people speculate about us?”

“Yep.”

“Really?”

Skylar tried to play it cool, tried to act like her friends back home hadn't shown her the fan-made videos of her and Elena on tour together back in the day. The videos might be grainy, but the memories weren't.

Slowly, Skylar laid down and propped herself up on her elbow. Elena did the same, rolling over onto her side to face Skylar.

"Yeah. They said we had chemistry."

"We sure did."

"And," Elena's eyes lowered, "they wonder if we were ever together."

"Mmm."

Skylar inched her hand closer to Elena's on the bed; all the while, their eye contact never wavered. She knew if they didn't separate soon that they would end up naked under the covers in no time at all. The chemistry was still very much still there between them, and Skylar wanted more than anything to touch Elena again.

As their fingers intertwined, Elena leaned in and kissed her again. It was more passionate than the kiss at the bar. The kiss was also less rushed yet more desperate. Skylar let Elena's tongue into her mouth as she slowly rolled over onto her back. She felt as if her mind and heart were being torn into pieces.

Because as much as she wanted to have sex with Elena, she knew it wouldn't help either of them mentally. There was still so much baggage between them; baggage they simply couldn't fuck away.

"Ellie," Skylar whispered as she gently pushed back on Elena's shoulders, "we can't."

“I know,” she whispered back as she hopped off the bed. She straightened her clothes and ran her hand through her hair. “I’m sorry.”

“It takes two to tango.”

“Yeah, and we’re just dancing with our hands tied.”

Skylar sighed and stood. “I know.”

“Well, I should go. There’s food and drinks in the kitchen down here, or you’re welcome to anything I have upstairs. Which I’ll admit isn’t much.”

“Thanks, Elena.”

She smiled softly at her. “You’re welcome. I’ll see you in the morning. Rehearsal starts at ten.”

“See you then.”

Skylar waited until Elena was out the door and back up the stairs before collapsing back into the bed. Even years later, she still couldn’t explain the pull that always brought her and Elena together when they were alone together. No number of songs could ever describe her love for Elena accurately. But Skylar would damn sure try until the end of her life.

Jumping out of bed, Skylar took her guitar and a notebook out of the case before walking outside. The moonlight always seemed to inspire her songwriting. She sat cross-legged on the outdoor couch as she placed her trusted notebook beside her. Skylar had always been a songwriter, but once she left Elena, she always lost her muse.

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Granted, that didn't mean Skylar stopped writing songs about Elena. On the contrary, most of her songs were still about Elena. But instead of love songs, they were more love gone bad songs. She strummed a few chords on her guitar as she tried to envision the lyrics.

There's a fire that still burns inside of me

For a love that I know I shouldn't keep

But try as I might to forget you

This feeling just won't let me rest

"Okay, not bad." Skylar shrugged as she sang the song and made up the melody as she went along. She mulled over whether to do the chorus or another verse before her subconscious made the decision for her by giving her the next verse.

They say that love is blind

And in my case, I know that's all too true

But I'm drawn to you like a moth to a flame

Even though I'm the one who'll get burned

There were few times in her life when Skylar felt more alive than when she was writing songs. There was just something about the openness she felt in expressing

herself through the music that set her soul free. And after that kiss, that's just what she needed.

As the chorus started to form in her mind, Skylar began to jot it down.

You were the one that got away

But my love for you still won't dim

I still dream about you every day

And wonder if you feel the same

"Eh, not perfect." Skylar shrugged. "But it'll do." She sang over what she'd written a few times before she realized it needed a bridge. All great songs had bridges, it seemed. But the right words weren't coming.

She tried to fine-tune the chords and give them the perfect melody instead. But something wasn't hitting right for Skylar. The song needed a bridge.

"It needs a bridge."

Elena's voice startled Skylar, and she nearly dropped her guitar. With only the moon and a small light inside the house lighting the porch, it took Skylar a moment to figure out where Elena's voice was coming from. It was then Skylar saw her descending from the outside stairs with a glass of wine in her hand.

"I'm sorry if I woke you up."

"You didn't." Elena shook her head as she sat on a chair across from Skylar. She'd changed into her pajamas, it seemed, and was wearing a robe over them. "I was

enjoying a drink on the patio and heard you down here. It's good."

"Thanks."

"Is it about me?" Her smirk told her she already knew the answer.

Skylar didn't know if she should be embarrassed or not. After all, she's written songs about Elena for years. It was nothing new that this one was also about her. Except this time, it wasn't a love song. That didn't seem to bother Elena, though.

"Play the chords for the verse again."

And Skylar did. First one time, then twice, then a third time. Finally, Elena nodded.

"Okay, what about this?"

Maybe we were meant to be together

But we took the wrong turn somewhere

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I still hold onto hope that someday

We'll find our way back to us again

As Elena sang, Skylar was captivated by her voice. Her voice could win over any crowd, and yet here she was writing a song with Skylar with no one else around. Skylar motioned for her to sing it again as she added chords to it.

"Back to us," Skylar repeated as Elena smiled, seemingly thinking the same thing as her.

"That's the title."

Chapter 9

Elena

Writing songs with Skylar had always felt so natural and easy. Back when they were still touring with Maine Event, barely a week would go by without them writing at least one song together. They'd write songs in all genres with all kinds of topics. Several of their songs had even been picked up by other bands or artists who went on to hit the top of the charts with their songs. Elena would never get tired of seeing those royalty checks coming to her mailbox.

But it had been years since she and Skylar had put pen to paper together.

When Elena first heard Skylar strumming on her guitar, she had been tempted to

ignore it and go back inside. The warm sea breeze mixed with Skylar's melodious voice had kept her seated on the second-floor balcony. Elena sipped her wine as she listened to Skylar effortlessly write out a song.

She had always been amazed at how quickly songs came to Skylar. While Elena had notebooks filled with verses and choruses with no melody, Skylar could put words to chords like she was breathing. Clearly time had not changed that. As Elena listened to her, she knew what the song needed. That's what made her mind up in regards to descending the stairs to join Skylar.

Seeing Skylar in the moonlight was a stark reminder of their song "Moonglow." They'd written it together on a beach in North Carolina after playing an event. The memory played through Elena's mind as she joined Skylar on the outside furniture.

"I love that one," Elena commented as she leaned back in her seat. The song they'd just written was good. Elena knew that. Skylar did, too, if her smile was any indication. "I forgot how good we write songs together."

"That's not all we did great together." Skylar's smile instantly fell as she blushed. "Sorry, I shouldn't have said that."

Elena waved her off. "It's fine."

She didn't have to clarify what Skylar was referencing. Her body still remembered exactly what they did well together. Elena would be lying if she said she still didn't pleasure herself to thoughts of Skylar. Not that Skylar needed to know that now or ever, though.

"Have you written anything recently?"

"Just checks to the man that mows my yard," Elena quipped. It made Skylar smile

again, so she counted it as a win.

“I’ve heard some of your new stuff. I know you’ve been writing some.”

Elena’s heart fluttered at the thought of Skylar listening to her new music. While her solo albums hadn’t peaked nearly as high as Maine Event’s, they still got decent airplay. One of her singles was even featured on a hit TV show, which helped boost album sales for a few weeks.

“How can you tell I write them?”

“I know an Elena Cruz penned song when I hear it.”

Skylar started to play her guitar, and Elena instantly recognized the song. It was her song that was on the TV show.

I’m gonna dance in the rain and sing like a bird

Spread my wings and fly, knowing I’ll never fall

I’ll seize the moment and capture the day

I’m gonna live my life in my own way

Elena clapped her hands as she giggled. Hearing Skylar play her song made her happier than Elena had felt in weeks. Hell, the last time Elena was this happy was the night at Straight to Ale. She almost told Skylar that but decided it was too much too soon.

Not for the first time, Elena wished someone gave former couples a timeline on when they could be open with their ex again. Elena knew all relationships were

complicated, but she and Skylar also had their professional relationship ruined by their breakup. While the blame sat with both of them, Elena knew deep down her behavior was a factor in Skylar's decision to leave the band. And, in turn, leave Elena.

“I really like that song. It's very Elena.”

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Elena smiled slightly and cocked her head. “What do you mean by that?”

Skylar shrugged. “A lot of your new stuff is about breaking free and being yourself and loving yourself. I love that, don’t get me wrong.”

“But?” Elena arched an eyebrow as she waited for the criticism to come.

“But it makes me wonder if you couldn’t use your platform for more.”

“What do you mean?”

Skylar didn’t respond; she simply lowered her eyes and started to strum on her guitar. But Elena wasn’t going to let her off the hook that easily. She wanted to know what Skylar meant. So she asked, “What do you mean?”

“Come on, Elena,” she laughed, although it lacked any humor, “you know what I mean.”

“Enlighten me.”

She shrugged again, setting the guitar on the floor as she spoke. “The world is different now than it was years ago when we were together. Those songs we were scared to write or put out, or the songs we changed to fit the market would do amazing now. There are people out there just like us that want to hear songs about love between two women. Your songs are great, but they could be more if you’d get out of your own way.”

Elena felt her blood start to boil. Was Skylar insinuating Elena wasn't good enough? That she could be better if she publicly announced her sexuality to the world? She knew that wouldn't do anything but turn some of her longtime fans against her, and Elena didn't want to risk that. She'd worked too hard for too long to be derailed by Skylar's agenda.

"My sexuality shouldn't be used to increase record sales."

"I agree."

"So, why are you insinuating I should change my lyrics?"

"Because, as a bisexual singer with a large following, you might help to make a difference for the queer community."

Despite having known she was bisexual for over a decade, Elena had never felt a part of the queer community. Especially since she was most often seen on the arms of men. That didn't change Elena's sexuality, though; she was still attached to both men and women, no matter who she was dating at the time. Even when she married Peter, she was still bisexual. But she found it hard to relate to the queer community because, on the outside looking in, she appeared to be in a very heterosexual relationship.

"It's not like I'm saying you have to go out on stage and kiss a woman. I'm just saying that maybe you could write a song with female pronouns. That's all."

"That might work for you in the Cove, but the mainstream doesn't often play songs like that."

"They would if it was the newest Elena Cruz song."

"This isn't the Cove, Skylar."

Standing, Elena sat her empty wine glass down on the table and crossed her arms over her robe. She wasn't sure why Skylar's comments were offending her so much. Maybe it was because, yet again, Skylar was trying to force her out of the closet when she wasn't ready.

"I know you live in your little gay bubble, but the real world isn't like the Cove. People lose their careers when they say anything about the LGBT community. I can't risk that. Not after how hard I've worked. I hope you get that, but I know you'll still be on their crusade tomorrow. It's always the same song and dance with you."

"Well, maybe if you'd finally accept your sexuality outside of a closed bedroom door when you're going down on me, we could change the tune."

Elena was literally too stunned to speak. Not a single word filled her brain as she narrowed her eyes at Skylar. Part of her expected Skylar to back down and apologize, but she didn't. She sat on the couch with her arms over the back and an annoying grin on her face.

"I don't have time for this." Elena tossed up her hands. Picking up the wine glass, she walked toward the stairs."

"Yeah, just walk away because you'd rather do that than admit your feelings."

Elena spun around on her bare feet. "Let's not forget it was you that walked away from me and the band. Not the other way around."

"And did you ever stop to think why I walked away?" Skylar stood, crossing her arms over her chest. "You were keeping me locked in your closet like I was Rapunzel. That was never fair to me, and even years later, you still don't realize that. Because to you, it's always what Elena wants and never what anyone else needs."

Every fiber in Elena's body wanted to respond. She wanted to yell back at Skylar and tell her how much her leaving had hurt. But instead, Elena stormed up the stairs and stomped to her bedroom. She slammed the door shut, startling Leo, who had been sleeping on the edge of her bed.

"She drives me fucking crazy," she said aloud in the empty room. Discarding her robe, Elena angrily got into bed and tried to force herself to go to sleep. Maybe if she could turn off her brain, she could turn off her feelings and thoughts about Skylar.

How dare she say those things about me, she scoffed.

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Throwing the sheets off her body, Elena stood and began pacing the floor.

“And has she forgotten that she left me? We were good. Things were great. And then she just left because she was jealous of Peter.” Another scoff. “That’s on her, not me.”

Opening her nightstand drawer, Elena pulled out her notebook and pen. She furiously flipped to an open page as the words began to flow out of her like an angry spout.

I gave you my heart, but it was all in vain

Why are we still playing games?

I’m tired of the pain, tired of the games

Maybe it’s time to quit you

Elena added two verses to the chorus before she felt satisfied enough with it to call it a night. Hopefully, Skylar would be off her high horse by rehearsals the next day. If not, Elena was fully prepared to knock her off.

Chapter 10

Skylar

Skylar was keenly aware that Elena hadn’t looked her way the entire time they’d been rehearsing. She’d talk to everyone else, even Johnny, who had arrived to watch, and

asked everyone else what songs they wanted to sing. Elena made a setlist with little input from Skylar, who was perfectly content sitting on the leather couch watching the scene unfold.

“We can’t follow ‘Always Dreaming’ with ‘Firecracker’.” Elena massaged her temples. “That’s two fast-paced songs back-to-back, and we should space them out more.”

“What about doing ‘Always You’ before ‘Firecracker’?” Gordon was playing air drums with his drumsticks as he spun around on a stool. “That’s how we did it on the last tour.”

“We want this tour to be different.”

Skylar snorted a laugh, and Elena finally shot her a glance.

“Do you have something to add, Skylar?”

“Nope.”

“Okay then.” Looking back at the notebook in her hand, Elena tapped the pen a few times on the paper. What about ‘Always You,’ ‘About That Night,’ then ‘Firecracker?’”

Each band member gave a nod of confirmation as Elena looked around the room. When she got to Skylar, her eyes narrowed.

“That okay with you?”

“Sounds great.”

She watched as Elena rolled her eyes and popped her neck, clear signs she was frustrated.

But the fact of the matter was Skylar was frustrated, too. She'd hoped that maybe—just maybe—things would be different this time around with Elena and Maine Event. Skylar had hoped that Elena would be more open to having a more diverse repertoire of songs on their tour, but if the setlist told Skylar anything, it was literally the same old song and dance. The same songs from the same albums were sung the same way they had ten years ago.

Skylar wondered if the fans would be as disappointed as she felt about the setlist.

“Are we going to play any new stuff?” Skylar chimed in, interrupting Erica and Elena, who were discussing which song to close out the setlist with. Both shot Skylar daggers. “I’m just saying it might be nice to throw in some new stuff.”

“It’s not like Maine Event is getting back together,” Erica pointed out.

“Like ever,” Elena sighed, annoyed. “So, why would we introduce something new? This is a reunion tour. Not a new album tour.”

“Fine.”

“Don’t pout. It’s not attractive.”

“I wasn’t trying to be attractive,” Skylar snapped back. She had enough sitting on the sidelines while Elena effectively led the band into a verbatim version of their last tour. Standing, Skylar pushed her black kimono cardigan out of the way and put her hands on her hips. “Also, how long does it take to make a setlist? Just pick the hits, and let’s move on.”

Elena scoffed, “Typical.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know exactly what it means. You’re always go-go-go, and you can’t stand it when someone isn’t at your speed. Well, Skylar, I’m sorry, but you’re back in a band now, so we all have to work together.”

“Granted, some of us don’t seem to have an input that matters.” It was Erica that piped up. “If this is how the whole tour is going to go, then I’m out. I have kids and a family now, and this high school bickering is so old.”

Skylar looked at Gordon, Andy, and Michael, all of whom had their eyes lowered to avoid her gaze. She didn’t dare look at Elena; didn’t dare find out if she felt the same way she did. Erica was right. They were being childish. But, dammit, if she was going to admit that to Elena. Instead, maybe she could cool off outside.

Pushing open the doors to the studio, Skylar walked out of the house and down the dirt path to the beach. Something about the sea always calmed her. Maybe it was the rhythmic motions or the way the water could go wherever it wanted whenever it wanted.

Skylar had longed to be like that. Back in her younger days, traveling with the band was all her heart desired. It had been years, though, since she’d traveled outside of Maine. She told herself it was because she couldn’t leave her dad with all the work at the store, but the truth of the matter was the Cove had become her safe haven. Nothing bad could happen to her in the Cove, she told herself.

Granted, she knew that wasn't true. She's had her heart broken in the Cove before, and it was bound to happen again if she ever wanted to settle down with someone. Of course, she'd have to get over Elena for that to ever happen.

Fucking Elena.

She had such a stronghold on Skylar's heart and mind that she couldn't think straight around her. Everything else in the world seemed to disappear when she was in Elena's presence. Even now, Skylar would do anything to make Elena happy. And if that meant she'd have to apologize and go along with whatever setlist Elena and the rest of the band came up with, then that's what she'd have to do.

Normally, Skylar hated confrontation. But there was something about the way she and Elena butted heads that admittedly turned her on. Back on the last tour, their sex was never better than it was following an argument. It didn't matter the topic; it all seemed to work as an aphrodisiac.

Skylar didn't know why she'd decided to be in a mood over the setlist. Sure, she was still salty over their conversation the night before, but that was no excuse. She couldn't expect Elena to up and change her viewpoint overnight. While Skylar had been out and living in the Cove, Elena had stayed in the spotlight and the closet. Although she wished she could help Elena see that her fans would still love her if she came out, Skylar would never force her to do that. It was such a personal decision, and Skylar knew it wasn't hers to make.

"Is this how it's going to be all tour?"

Turning around, Skylar saw Elena a few feet away from her. Her arms were still crossed, and her expression still held a look of annoyance. The ocean breeze blew through her hair, causing it to blow in front of her face slightly.

“I’m sorry.”

“What?”

“I said I’m sorry,” Skylar repeated.

Elena took a few steps closer to her. “One more time. Can you repeat that? Because I know there’s no way Skylar Ford just apologized to me.”

Skylar playfully shoved Elena’s shoulder as she rolled her eyes.

“You’re a dick.”

“Eh,” Elena shrugged, “we both are at times.”

“It’s that whole twin flame shit again.”

“One of us always has to be burning.”

“Or setting the other on fire.”

“Or bother.”

“Yup.”

With each line they spoke, they took steps toward each other until, finally, they were barely a foot apart from each other. Skylar wanted more than anything to kiss her then and there. To make both of them forget why they were fighting in the process. But if she did that, it really would be like the last Maine Event tour. After all, that was when they became a couple if they could even call it that.

“You’re not wrong, you know.”

“I rarely am.”

Skylar stuffed her hands into the pockets of her jeans to reduce the temptation of running them through Elena’s hair.

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“The setlist could use some newer songs. I can throw some of my solo hits, and if you want to, we could pick some that you’ve written to perform. Maybe even do a few different new songs and make a live album.”

“Elena Cruz, always thinking ahead.”

“That’s me.” Her smile softened, which made Skylar relax more. “So, what do you think?”

“If it’s cool with the rest of the band, then it’s cool with me.”

“Good.”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah,” Elena repeated and licked her lower lip. She took another step toward Skylar, who was frozen in place.

She’s going to kiss me. Should I move? Oh, my god. She’s so close to me. Maybe just one kiss...

When their lips met again after weeks apart, Skylar felt herself melting into it. Elena had such a hold on her. Being around her was like being caught in the Death Star’s beam. Fighting it was useless, and Skylar knew when to admit defeat.

“We shouldn’t be doing this,” she whispered as she moved her lips to Elena’s ear.

“I know.”

But neither of them stopped. Giving in to the temptation, Skylar put her hands on Elena’s hips and pulled her closer. Her entire body felt on fire with the contact. She could only imagine the sensation if their clothes weren’t in the way.

Don’t go there. You know what happened last time. She broke your heart.

Broke it so damn bad that all the king’s horses and all the king’s men still hadn’t been able to put her heart back together again.

“So, I guess this really is going to be a repeat of the last tour, huh?”

Erica’s voice called out from a few yards away as Elena and Skylar separated as if they were on fire. And, at that moment, Skylar felt as if she very much could be. She walked toward them with her arms crossed.

“I came out here to tell you two that the boys and I talked it over, and we want to include new stuff. If that’s okay with both of you.”

“Yeah, that’s fine.”

“I’m on board.”

“Cool,” Erica nodded, then pointed back to the house. “I’ll be in there waiting for you two to finish up whatever this,” she motioned between them and laughed, “is.”

“We’re done,” they responded in unison.

As they walked back to the house behind Erica, Skylar felt Elena’s hand brush up against hers. Skylar thought briefly about holding it before Elena wrapped her pinky

around Skylar's. She looked over at Elena, who was looking back.

Elena winked, and Skylar did the same. Skylar had no idea what that meant, but she hoped it meant they were in good—or at least better—terms now. And that maybe there would be more kisses in their future.

Chapter 11

Elena

Two days had passed since Elena and Skylar had butted heads in the studio. That also meant it had been two days since their kiss. Elena knew that if she were going to survive the tour, she'd have to keep her distance from Skylar. As much as she didn't want to, Elena would have to keep her lips to herself.

Even if Skylar was looking at her with dark eyes as they sang an upbeat, passionate love song together.

"Forever Doesn't Wait" had been their longest running number one hit. It spent thirty-seven weeks in the Top Ten, with over half of them in the number one spot. Every night they played the song, the crowd went wild. If Elena had bottled the crowd's energy as they sang along to the song, it could power cities across the county.

Elena and Skylar had written the song at the height of their relationship. Sparks were flying inside and out of the bedroom, and it was even more apparent in that song. Each time they sang it, Elena couldn't help but think of the passionate lovemaking that followed the initial writing session.

Judging by Skylar's look now, she was thinking the same thing. Her eyes had been locked with Elena's since the middle of the first verse. Even though the rest of the

band, Johnny, and several sound engineers were also in the room, Elena could only see Skylar.

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Forever doesn't wait for us to get our shit together

Forever doesn't wait for the exact right time

We only have today, so let's make it forever

Because forever doesn't wait, so why should we?

Skylar winked as the chorus ended, and Elena belted the bridge with all her might.

Kiss me swiftly

Tell me that you love me

I'm not waiting anymore

Forever is going to start now

As the song came to an end, Gordon hit the cymbal with his drumsticks. The sound startled Elena as she finally broke eye contact with Skylar. Everyone in the room erupted into applause as Skylar and Elena breathlessly laughed. They had somehow managed to successfully run through their whole set list without stopping after only two days of practice.

“Man, it's been too long since I've done that.” Skylar sat down on a wooden stool, picked up a bottle of water off a nearby sheet music stand, and downed half of it. “That felt good.”

“Hell yeah, it did,” Erica chimed in. She had plopped down on the leather sofa beside Andy. Gordon was still playing air drums, seemingly as hyped up with energy as Elena felt.

“You all were great.” Johnny stood in the middle of the room as he looked around at everyone. “I think this tour is going to sell out, no problem. Tickets go on sale this Friday, and the fan club presale will start tomorrow. Harlow, how many have already registered for tickets?”

Harlow Hawkins had been their tour manager years ago on their last tour. Elena had been thrilled when she'd accepted the job to come back.

“We have 287,938 people currently signed up for the presale tomorrow.” Harlow was hunched over a laptop on the folding table along with their leftover lunch.

“We’re also running a contest for two tickets to each show.” Riley DeLuca, their social media manager, chimed in.

As far as Elena could tell, Riley had been killing it. Elena had already noticed a bump in her followers on social media, and their songs were slowly starting to head back to the Top 100 charts. Riley had even created social media accounts specifically for Maine Event, which already had hundreds of thousands of followers.

Riley and Johnny had even concocted the contest as a way to boost interest in the tour. Fans had the chance to share, like, and comment on different posts to increase their chances of winning. Elena had been skeptical about it at first, but after Harlow explained how having such an interest before the tour would help boost their sales, she'd agreed it was a good idea.

“When are we picking that winner?” Andy asked. “And what if they’ve already bought tickets?”

“They’ll be refunded if they have already purchased them.” Harlow finally looked up from her laptop. “Don’t worry. Johnny and Riley have it all figured out.”

Andy held up his hands and laughed.

“Yeah, Andy,” Skylar chimed in, “they’ve got this. Let them do their job, and you do yours.”

“You wouldn’t have sounded so good if I didn’t do my job,” he quipped back, and Skylar threw her empty water bottle at him.

“Okay, okay, let’s not start throwing things. I need all of you healthy and ready for the tour next month.” Johnny was typing on his phone as he talked. “Let’s call it a day. You all did great, and I’m hungry.”

Elena and Skylar walked with everyone up the stairs and out the front door. They waved goodbye to them as if they were ending a dinner party and bidding their guests a good night. If that were the case, they would probably head back inside and watch a movie curled up under a blanket together on the couch.

But that wasn’t the case. Elena assumed Skylar would retreat back downstairs while Elena stayed upstairs. It’s what they’d done the night before. Nothing indicated now would be different.

That was until Skylar lingered by the front door once Elena closed it.

“What are you doing tonight?”

Elena shrugged, trying to remain casual. “Nothing.”

“Do you wanna go grab dinner?”

“Really?” she blurted out.

“Yeah, really.” Skylar nervously laughed. “I’ve eaten too many sandwiches the last few days, and I really want Mexican food.”

“Of course you do.”

“Hey now,” Skylar playfully flipped Elena’s shoulder, “you know you love a good queso dip too.”

“I do.”

“You’ll have to come back to the Cove sometime and check out this new restaurant. They have the best homemade tortilla chips and salsa. You’ll love it.”

“Next time I’m there, I’ll let you take me.”

“It would be my pleasure.”

Skylar took a step closer to her, and Elena knew what was about to happen. While her mind yelled at her to take a step back, her body leaned into Skylar’s kiss. It wasn’t as passionate as the kiss at the beach. Instead, it was softer. Tender even. And way quicker than Elena wanted.

“We’re going to have to keep this in check if we’re going to be on tour together.”

Skylar’s voice of reason wasn’t what Elena wanted to hear. Although Elena wasn’t

ready to be in a public relationship with Skylar, she also didn't want their stolen kisses to end. Maybe Elena should give in. Dating Skylar wouldn't be the end of the world, right?

But hell, Elena didn't even know if that was something Skylar would even want. Their lives were literally on different coasts now. It was also clear that Skylar wouldn't be satisfied with a closeted relationship, and, at the moment, Elena wasn't sure she could give Skylar more than that.

Ugh. You'll be unhappy forever like this...

Elena hated how she had always been holding herself back. The older she got, the more she could tell her insecurities kept her from living her life to the fullest. She'd dated men to keep up the persona she was straight. She had married Peter to fulfill some American dream bullshit she never believed in. Looking at Skylar now, Elena could fully see everything she'd missed out on.

The odds of Skylar and Elena still being together were high, she knew that. Their love had been so hot and heavy and perfect that it was destined to last a lifetime. Instead of spending her nights alone, Elena could have been living in the Cove with Skylar and their friends.

But there was no changing the past now. Sighing, Elena nodded her head.

"I know," she agrees with Skylar. "We need a five-foot rule."

"We don't get within five feet of each other?"

"Maybe that's best." Elena shrugged. "I really don't know."

"The only other option is we accept what this is and just dive in."

“You know that’s not me.”

“I know,” she sighed. “I wish it was, but I can’t force you out of the closet. I’m sorry if I ever made you feel like that’s what I was trying to do. Maybe subconsciously I was, and that wasn’t fair to you.”

She was taken aback by Skylar’s apology. Skylar must have noticed because she laughed softly.

“Don’t overthink it. Just accept it, and let’s move on.”

Elena nodded. “Okay, yeah. Come on. I know a great Mexican restaurant off the PCH. We can take my car.”

“Good, considering I don’t have one.”

“Oh, yeah,” she laughed. “Forgot about that.”

“Do I need to change?” Skylar looked down at her graphic tee, jeans, and sandals. “I’m not very dressed up.”

“It’s fine. You look great.” She tried not to linger on her compliment too long. “Go get your bag, and I’ll meet you in the kitchen.”

As Skylar headed downstairs, Elena walked into the kitchen and filled Leo’s water and food bowls as she made a call to reserve a table at Stephanie’s. Stephanie’s wasn’t a fancy place by any means, but Elena had built a rapport with them that allowed her to snag a table almost any time she wanted it.

“Okay, I’m ready.”

Skylar had let her hair down, and the ocean breeze had added a slight curl to it. Elena couldn’t help but take in the sight as she grabbed her bag and keys off the hooks by the garage door. She opened the door, letting Skylar out first. But Skylar stopped in her tracks, and her mouth went agape at the sight of the Brittany Blue 1968 Ford Mustang convertible Elena had purchased a few years back. It was her dream car, and she was damn proud of it. Even if she liked to act as if it were no big deal, she had it casually parked in her garage.

“You own your dream car.” Skylar was awestruck as she walked around the car. Her hand hovered over it as if she couldn’t touch it, which made Elena laugh. “I love it so much.”

“I do too.”

“When did you get it?”

“A few years ago. Here,” she said as she tossed the keys to Skylar, “you can drive it.”

“Oh, no,” Skylar nervously laughed. “No way am I driving that. A bug would hit the windshield, and I would cry.”

“Come on.” Elena opened the driver’s side door as Skylar slowly walked around the back of the car. “When will you ever get to drive one of these again?”

“Never.”

“So, what are you waiting for?”

Elena motioned to the front seat. With a bit more excitement in her step, Skylar rounded the car and got into the driver’s seat. Her smile was unmatched by any kid at Christmas. She ran her hands along the steering wheel and the leather seats.

“Holy shit, Ellie. This is nice.”

“Trust me, I know.” Closing the door, Elena walked around to the passenger side and got in. “I spent more money than I should have to buy it, then I could have bought a second home for how much it cost to restore it. You’d never believe it, but when I found this car, it had been totaled in a wreck for nearly twenty years and was sitting in a junkyard. But I saw its potential.”

“And rescued it.”

“Yup.”

“So nice of you.”

“I’m generous that way,” Elena laughed. She pressed the button on the garage door opener to open the door. Skylar was beyond careful backing out, and Elena tried to hide her smile. It was beyond sweet she was being so cautious in Elena’s car.

“So, where am I going?”

Skylar had her left arm on the wheel and her right on the armrest. She looked so damn cool yet so damn hot that Elena nearly told her to turn around right then and there to take her inside her bedroom. She envied the breeze for how it got to run through Skylar’s blonde hair.

So much for keeping our distance.

“Left,” Elena answered as Skylar pulled out of the driveway.

Chapter 12

Skylar

Stephanie’s Fiesta Bar was located off the Pacific Coast Highway between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. Skylar would have gladly driven to the Mexico border if they meant she could stay in the car with Elena longer. They had the radio up and were singing to every song that played. The wind had their hair blowing in all sorts of directions, but Skylar didn’t care. She was with Elena and having fun, and that was all that mattered.

In fact, if her stomach hadn’t been growling, Skylar might have suggested they keep on driving. But the smell of fajitas that greeted them when they walked into the restaurant told Skylar she’d made the right decision to stop.

“Hi, I have a reservation for two under Cruz. Thank you.” Elena leaned slightly onto the host stand as Skylar looked around the restaurant.

There was nothing spectacular about it; it looked like most Mexican restaurants Skylar had been in. Mariachi music played on the speakers, and different colors of glass globes adorned the lights over the tables. The place was packed, which was surprising for a Tuesday night.

Skylar followed Elena and the host through the restaurant and out onto a small patio. There were three other tables out there, but only one was currently occupied. The host sat them in the corner, which was the only table that didn’t have a window behind it to the main restaurant. Elena must have requested that seat specifically to avoid the

attention of any fans that might also be at the restaurant.

“Can I take your drink orders?”

“I’ll do a rum and Coke and an iced water, please.”

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“Queso dip tonight, Miss Elena?”

“Yes, please,” she blushed as she looked over at Skylar. “I come here a lot.”

“Once a week at least,” the host laughed. “What may I get you to drink?”

“I’ll have a water and a margarita, please.”

“Of course. Coming right up.”

As the host headed back into the restaurant, Skylar looked out over the Pacific Ocean. She still preferred the Atlantic, but she had to get the Left Coast ocean some credit. It was serene and beautiful. Granted, it was not nearly as beautiful as the woman sitting in the seat beside her.

Elena was pursuing the menu as she mindlessly twirled a strand of hair around her finger. She had very little makeup on, but her olive skin still looked radiant. Skylar couldn’t help but remember the times when they were together when they would hold hands under tables to keep anyone from seeing them. A part of her wanted to reach out and hold Elena’s hand once more, but she had to be smarter about her feelings.

Skylar wasn’t one to date around. She’d not been in any significant relationship since Elena. But she knew herself well enough to know that she had to keep her feelings in check. Elena had made it clear that she wasn’t going to come out of the closet, and there was no way Skylar was going to go back in for her. If Elena wanted to be with her, she’d have to be open about that. It wasn’t Skylar’s place to make that call.

Even if that meant she'd have to bury her feelings for Elena for the foreseeable future.

After the host returned with their drinks, he took their order before leaving them alone again. Elena leaned back in her chair as she sipped on her drink. Sipping her margarita with a straw, Skylar leaned onto the table slightly and smiled at Elena.

“What?”

“Nothing,” Skylar giggled. “You just looked like some regal 1950s movie star casually sipping your drink by the ocean.”

“Well, thank you, darling.” Elena flipped her hair over her shoulder as she laughed. “I’m really glad we got out of the house tonight. I feel we’re going to be sick of it by the time we get to stage rehearsals.”

“What made you decide to put a studio into your house in the first place?”

“You know me. I have no work/life balance.”

“Ahh, I see some things never change.”

“Nope,” Elena shrugged. “I liked having the space at my house because it meant I didn’t have to drive into LA if I had a new song idea or I needed to practice with Andy and Gordon. It just made sense at the time.”

“I get that. I practice at my house or the shop. So I guess I don’t have a healthy work/life balance either.”

“Maybe we should work on that.”

“Right after that whole five-feet rule.” Skylar winked, letting Elena know she was kidding.

“Damn rules.”

Their food arrived quickly, and their conversations shifted to the tour. Skylar had to admit that the closer it got, the more excited she got about it. Singing with Elena and the band again had been exhilarating. She couldn’t wait to do it for a few months in front of, hopefully, sold-out venues.

“I’m so nervously excited about the tickets going on sale tomorrow.” Skylar pushed her empty plate away. “Harlow thinks they’ll all sell out.”

“Johnny does too. And so do I.”

“I’ve been too scared to think about that.”

Elena cocked her head at her. “Why’s that?”

“You know me, Ellie. I worry about everything.”

“Well, hopefully, this tour will change that.”

Skylar was about to say she hoped so when someone caught her eye walking toward them.

Well, not just someone.

Peter Hamilton.

Elena's ex.

He was well dressed as usual in a tailored navy-blue suit, bright orange tie, and brown loafers. Skylar tried not to scowl at him as he approached the table.

"Well, well, well," Peter put his hand on the back of Elena's chair, and Skylar was instantly on edge. "Fancy meeting you two here."

"What are you doing here, Peter?"

"I wanted Mexican food."

"I meant here," Elena gestured at the table.

"I wanted to say hi."

"Well, I don't. So leave. Please."

Skylar could tell Elena was uncomfortable. Her voice was higher pitched than usual, and she was nervously bouncing her leg under the table. Peter was clearly not giving a shit that Elena had asked him to leave. If Skylar hadn't been in a public space, she would have slugged him.

"I heard about the tour."

“Peter,” Elena sighed, “please leave us alone.”

Skylar narrowed her eyes at him as he pulled out a chair and sat down at the table. “I’m just asking about the tour.”

“Which I don’t want to discuss with you, so please leave. I’ve asked nicely three times now.”

Peter blew her off—literally huffed in her direction with a wave of his hand—and turned his attention toward Skylar. She could feel her blood boiling, and she wondered if there was enough water left in her glass to toss on him.

“Skylar Ford, how long has it been?”

“Clearly not long enough,” she snapped. “Why don’t you leave, Peter? Elena’s asked you already.”

“Geez, apparently, the years have hardened both of you.” He reached for a chip out of the basket, but Skylar swatted his hand away. “Sheesh. Apparently, a good guy can’t catch up with his old friends these days.”

“A good guy could, but you are not a good guy.”

Peter looked taken aback by Skylar’s comment. For a seasoned actor, he clearly needed to work on his poker face. It made Skylar happy to know she’d gotten to him. Even Elena smiled slightly at the comment.

“I wouldn’t look so cocky if I were you, Skylar.” The way Peter’s eyes narrowed at her sent chills over Skylar’s body. “Don’t forget that I know the truth.”

Skylar tried with all her might not to let her face show her surprise.

“I could ruin Maine Event if I wanted to.” He quickly held up his hands. “Which I don’t.”

“Your ego is awfully big if you think you could take down the band with your jealous accusations.”

“Well,” his evil smile spread like a sinister Grinch, “isn’t that exactly how you ruined it?”

Skylar’s blood ran cold. She opened her mouth to respond, but Elena slamming her hand on the table stopped her.

“Enough, Peter.” The vein in her neck was starting to show, which meant she was beyond angry. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. There were a multitude of reasons why Maine Event broke up, and they don’t solely rest on Skylar’s shoulders.”

Peter started to speak, but Elena held up a shaking hand to stop him.

“Neither of us asked you to come over, and we definitely didn’t ask for your commentary about our tour. And don’t forget, I know the owner here, and it’s not below me to play that card and have you publicly escorted off the property and banned forever.”

Peter thought for a beat before standing. He straightened his tie, then nodded his head. “Fine.”

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Without another word, Peter huffed away, and it was then Skylar realized her hand was on Elena's knee. Elena reached under the table and squeezed her hand as her sad brown eyes looked at her.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm so sorry about him." Tears welled in Elena's eyes. "I didn't think he would be here. If I did, I wouldn't have brought you here, I promise."

"It's okay, Ellie." She scooted her chair closer to Elena's. "He's always been a dick, and it's clear nothing has changed."

Her comment made Elena laugh, even if it was a little sad. Skylar reached out and tucked Elena's hair behind her ear. She gently caressed her cheek as she wiped a tear from her eyes.

"Why don't we pay the bill and get out of here?"

Elena nodded. Skylar took her bag off the back of the chair and laid down a wad of cash that was more than enough for the bill. Taking her hand, Skylar led her out of the restaurant and into the car. The drive home was quiet, and Skylar held only Elena's hand the whole time.

Arriving back at the house, Skylar parked the car in the garage and closed the door. She looked over at Elena, who was still staring out the windshield.

"Do you think he's such a dick because his is so small?"

Elena busted out laughing, which made Skylar feel relieved. “Thank you, I needed that. And it was small.”

“I remember you talking about that.”

“Ugh,” Elena covered her face with her hands, “I can’t believe I ever married that prick.”

“We all make mistakes.” The truth of her sentence stung as Peter’s words came back to her.

Well, isn’t that exactly how you ruined it?

Peter had some damn nerve to say shit like that when he didn’t know the whole story. Skylar wanted to be mad; she wanted to rant about how much she hated Peter. But as she looked into Elena’s brown eyes, all she could think about was kissing her.

Leaning across the car, Skylar placed a gentle kiss on her cheek.

“What about the five-foot rule?”

“The fact you defended me to Peter meant I’m allowed to break that rule.”

“Yeah?” Elena’s eyebrow arched slightly. “Well, since you’ve already broken the rule, why don’t you really kiss me then?”

Every inch of Skylar’s body wanted her to kiss Elena. But if she were honest with herself, she knew kissing would only be the start of how their evening would do. And Skylar knew that had the possibility to be detrimental not only to the two of them but also to Maine Event.”

“Because,” Skylar sighed as she twirled Elena’s hair around her finger, “if I start kissing you, I know I won’t stop.”

Elena licked her lips. “How is that sexier than you just kissing me?”

“Because I’m good like that.”

Skylar all but forced herself to get out of the car as she and Elena headed inside the house. They lingered by the stairs, neither wanting to say goodnight but knowing that they should.

“We should have dinner again sometime together.”

“You still want to hang out with me even after all that craziness?”

“I’ll always want to hang out with you, Ellie.” Skylar knew she had to go; she had to leave Elena; otherwise, their five-foot rule would be blown to shit on day one. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow,” Elena’s voice was barely a whisper. Walking down the stairs, Skylar kept her eyes locked with Elena’s until she was out of sight.

Yeah, that five-foot rule might need to be fifty feet.

Chapter 13

Elena

Erica was on Elena's last nerve. They'd been in stage rehearsals for three weeks, and Erica kept whining about changing the location of her piano almost every day. Elena didn't remember Erica being such a diva the last time they were on tour together. She looked at Skylar, who seemed equally as annoyed.

Skylar shrugged. "I don't know, dude."

"She needs to get her shit together."

"Agreed."

They were standing by a fold-out table that contained various snack items. Skylar was munching on a handful of chips as they watched Erica boss around the stagehand to move the piano for the second time that day.

"At this point, why don't we put her front and center on a rotating stage? I think that's the only thing that'll make her happy."

Elena snorted a laugh at Skylar's comment.

"What? You know I'm right?"

"Has she always been like this? Or do I hold the past in some positive light?"

"The latter," Skylar laughed. "Erica's always been a diva. We just didn't care

before.”

Elena checked her smartwatch. “It’s almost noon. She’s literally been at this for half an hour now.”

“Yup,” Riley chimed in. She was eating a turkey sandwich and looked as annoyed as Skylar and Elena felt. “I’m supposed to be finishing up the band profiles for the social media posts leading up to the tour. But guess who can’t find the time in her busy piano shuffling to talk to me?”

“Oh, speaking of which,” Skylar pulled her phone out of her pocket and showed something to Riley. “Can we use this picture of Atlas for my post?”

“Absolutely!” Riley took her phone, admiring the dog. “He’s so big.”

“He’s huge,” Elena corrected. “And don’t play with him near water because he’ll knock you in. Fully clothed.”

Skylar chuckled as Elena looked at her and smiled.

A few weeks had passed since their dinner date at the Mexican restaurant, and somehow they’d managed to keep their distance from each other. It had been harder than Elena had anticipated. Every time she saw Skylar, a part of her wanted nothing more than to kiss her. But she’d made herself stay away. Skylar was right; they had to keep their distance for the sake of the tour.

Elena and Skylar were a lot of things, but twin flames were definitely one of them. Their chemistry had always been electric, and it was clear the years hadn’t faded that. While their love could have lit up the darkest nights, it also had the potential to burn everything down around them. And neither of them wanted that to happen to Maine Event. Not again.

“Elena, Skylar,” Erica called from the stage, “what do you think about this setup?”

“If she’s happy, I’m happy,” Elena muttered through her smile as she and Skylar walked out onto the stage. Somehow, Erica had managed to arrange the stage into exactly the first arrangement Elena had suggested. She resisted the urge to point it out and instead kept her thoughts to herself.

Unlike Skylar, who mumbled, “Looked great when you set it up that way the first time.”

“Just let her have this.” Elena smiled at Erica. “This looks great, Erica. Are you happy with it?”

Erica beamed from behind the piano. “I am.”

“That’s great.”

“Yeah, great.” Skylar’s voice didn’t match Elena’s mock enthusiasm. Elena tried to subtly elbow her side, but Skylar avoided it as if she knew it was coming. “Where are the boys?”

“I don’t know.” Erica looked around as if she just realized it was only her left on the stage. “Probably lunch.”

“Well, we need to wrangle them in because we need to run through the whole set list one more time. Our first concert is next Friday.”

Excitement mixed with fear as Elena thought about their first headlining tour in nearly a decade. Although Elena had still been performing, she knew it would be nothing compared to the adrenaline she’d feel standing in front of sold-out venues again.

After the tickets went on sale, Harlow surprised them with a large sheet cake with the words “sold out” in blue frosting. Elena immediately hugged Skylar, although it violated their five-foot rule. But Elena didn’t care; she had been too damn happy. That happiness has carried over all through rehearsals, and now, they were at their last one before the tour. Elena’s excitement was about to bubble over.

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“I’ll go track down the boys.”

Leaving Skylar and Erica on the stage, Elena made her way backstage, where she found Gordon, Michael, and Andy huddled around a table, all watching videos on one of their phones. She put her hands on her hips and laughed.

“So, you just left me and Skylar with Erica, huh?” Elena’s voice startled them out of their movie, but they all quickly realized she was joking. “You’ll be happy to know the arrangement is exactly like we first had, but Erica’s actually okay with it now.”

“Thank god.”

“She’s insane.”

“Be nice,” Andy quipped at Michael. “Are we ready to rehearse?”

“Yeah, we need to make sure we have everything nailed down.”

Gordon confidently nodded as he stood. “We do, Elle.”

“Then go show me.”

Leading the boys back out to the stage, they all took their positions as the lighting tech lowered the lights in preparation for the beginning of the show. Elena looked over at Skylar, standing almost exactly five feet away from her at the other microphone. Skylar winked as Gordon gave them a count-in on the drumsticks before the band erupted into their first song.

They were on fire for the entire two-hour set. Every note was perfect; every lighting effect was timed perfectly. The screen behind Gordon projected different visuals for the songs, which were also being shown to the band via a projector in front of them. Elena couldn't have been happier with their rehearsal, and she didn't stop herself from once again hugging Skylar.

"You were great," Skylar whispered in her ear. She hugged Elena tighter and longer than she was expecting, but Elena wasn't going to complain.

"So were you." She forced herself to end the hug and acknowledge the rest of the band, who were hugging each other as well. "That was awesome! I think this is going to be one hell of a tour. I can't wait to start this next journey with each of you."

Elena locked eyes with Skylar's blue eyes.

"It's going to be a great tour."

She tried not to let her emotions get the best of her. Embarking on this tour was such a pinnacle for Elena's career that she didn't want to mess it up. Of course, she always didn't want to mess things up with Skylar. Again.

With the tour starting in a little over a week, Skylar had arranged to go home for a few days to decompress before the tour. Elena wished she'd asked her to go with her. She would have said yes faster than a New York minute. But Skylar hadn't asked, and Elena tried not to overthink why.

Skylar most likely needed and wanted time to herself. After all, they'd been together nearly every day for the last few weeks with the band. Elena knew Skylar wasn't normally an outgoing person, so the tour prep had taken a lot out of her. She could see it in her eyes. They were tired.

As the band and crew gathered their things to call it a day, Elena found Skylar by the snack table, downing a bottle of water.

“Hey, you ready?” Elena was taking her to the airport on her way back to Santa Barbara. She’d even toyed with the idea of booking a ticket on the same flight but didn’t. “Your plane leaves in a few hours.”

“Yeah, I’m ready.”

Skylar said quick goodbyes to the rest of the band as they left the studio. Instead of the Mustang, Elena had opted for her all-black Dodge Charger with tinted windows. She felt it helped her blend in better than the vintage Mustang. As Elena got into the driver’s seat, Skylar tucked her guitar into the backseat.

“Can I leave this at your house? I don’t want to have to lug it across the country and back again.”

“Sure.”

With a flick of her wrist, Elena turned on the engine as Skylar buckled her seatbelt. The studio wasn’t far from LAX, but with traffic, it seemed longer. Well, the traffic and the silence.

Elena didn’t know why they weren’t talking. Maybe it was because they’d just sung for over two hours. Or maybe it was because what wasn’t being said was louder than any words could have been. Turning on the radio, Elena hoped the music would fill the space between them.

But, of course, a Maine Event song was ending as the DJ came on. Elena laughed at the coincidence.

“This is Cool Carl, and that, awesome listeners, is Maine Event. Their sold-out reunion tour is coming to LA, and we’re the only station in town that has your chance to win tickets. Stay tuned for how!”

“I’ll tell you how,” Elena rolled her eyes. “His brother is married to Erica.”

Skylar laughed. “Seriously?”

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“Yep. Riley wanted to give radio stations and some other businesses in each city we were touring. Carl is related to Jason, so that’s how he got them.”

“Riley’s done so much that I can’t keep up.”

“Me either.”

“Did you see the promos she’s been doing on the Maine Event social media accounts? Hundreds of thousands of people like each post she puts up.”

“You made a great call by hiring her as the marketing director.”

“Riley’s a great woman,” Skylar agreed. “I’m glad she has this chance to really show the world what she’s capable of.”

Silence settled between them again as some recent hit song played on the radio. Elena couldn’t help but notice how her right hand and Skylar’s left hand were both hanging over the center console. Without overthinking it, Elena wrapped her pinky finger around Skylar’s. It took her a moment to realize, but when she did, Skylar pulled away without a word.

Moving both hands to the wheel, Elena made a few turns into LAX. She parked in front of Skylar’s airline and unlocked the doors.

“Have a safe flight.”

“Thanks.” Skylar opened the door, started to step out, then stopped. Closing the door,

she looked back over at Elena. “I want to hold your hand, but I can’t. Because I want more than hand-holding when no one else is around, and I know you’re not capable of giving me that. So, this time around, I have to protect myself.”

Elena was speechless. She knew there was nothing she could say at that moment that would change Skylar’s mind. Because as much as Elena wished it wasn’t the case, she knew Skylar was right.

Opening the door once more, Skylar stepped out and retrieved her suitcase from the trunk. Skylar looked in the door once more and waved.

“I’ll see you on tour.”

“Yeah, see you then.”

Elena watched as Skylar shut the door and walked toward the sliding glass doors of the airport. Just before she stepped inside, Skylar turned around and waved once more. Waving back, Elena couldn’t help but wonder if maybe, just maybe, a second chance with Skylar would be worth stepping out of the closet for.

Chapter 14

Skylar

The serenity of the Cove was exactly what Skylar needed after the last few weeks. Sure, rehearsing six days a week for the tour had taken a lot out of her, but she was more mentally tired from keeping her distance from Elena. On more than one occasion, Skylar wanted to screw the five-foot rule and kiss Elena. And she knew Elena felt the same. She could still read her like a book.

With only a few days before the tour started, Skylar knew she needed to clear her

mind before they embarked on the journey. Thankfully, the Cove seemed to understand that and gave her the perfect weather for a morning run. It wasn't too hot yet, and the gentle breeze still held the coolness from spring. Skylar's headphones blared her running playlist as she rounded the corner onto Main Street and headed to the lighthouse.

Despite falling into disrepair years ago, Skylar still found her way to the lighthouse when she needed to think. It had become a hangout for a lot of kids in the Cove when Skylar was growing up. Even she and Elena had made their way up the spiraling staircase countless times together. Of course, that was before Elena first kissed her, and Skylar's world shifted off of its axis.

And even years later, Elena's kisses could still drive Skylar wild. That much had been proven each time they'd kissed the last few weeks and from the fact Skylar missed them now. If they hadn't been so practical in keeping their distance, Skylar knew they would have already slept together. Part of her wanted it to happen, while the other part knew she had to keep her heart from being broken again.

Skylar ran along the paved path toward the lighthouse as she tried to keep her mind off Elena. It was nearly impossible since every time Skylar blinked, she could see Elena smile at her from across the stage. Back in the day, the two often shared a microphone because it always added to the intensity—and, well, intimacy—of their performance. But Skylar had been keenly aware that she and Elena were several feet apart, and neither left their place behind their microphone for the entire set. It felt stiff to Skylar, but she didn't dare say that out loud.

Arriving at the lighthouse, Skylar took the creeping spiral stairs two at a time until she finally reached the top. Some of the windows were broken, while even more were haphazardly patched up with plywood. The city council had been talking about repairing it for years, but apparently, their funding has never come through. Skylar took a seat on the same old wooden bench she used to sit on and sighed. She wished

she'd brought Atlas along to keep her company. If nothing else, his lanky frame could have helped keep her mind off Elena.

Pulling her phone out of the pocket of her yoga pants, she pulled up Elena's text thread. There were no new messages, not that Skylar was expecting there to be one. The last she'd heard from Elena was a text asking how her flight was and if she made it home safe. Skylar had responded that the flight was good and she was home, and Elena sent a thumbs up in response. It was a little impersonal, Skylar felt, but she tried not to let it get to her.

She just wished she could think of something—anything—to say to Elena to start a conversation.

Sitting her phone down on the bench, Skylar stood and looked out the fogged-up window. The methodical sound of the ocean gently crashing into the rocky shoreline was calming to Skylar. She wished she could bottle the sound up and take it on tour with her. It was inevitable that the tour would get overwhelming, even if she did have plans to come home during their off days.

Her phone buzzed on the bench, and Skylar nearly fell as she bolted over to it. For whatever reason, she thought it was Elena. Much to her disappointment, it was Blake Calloway.

Skylar couldn't believe she was disappointed at Blake texting her. For years, Skylar had watched Blake on her hit sci-fi TV show and dreamed of meeting her. And now the two were friends. They'd gotten close after Skylar volunteered to sing at an event for Blake's sister's organization. Which was why the text asking if she wanted to meet up for lunch didn't catch Skylar off guard.

She typed out a message with a time and place, and Blake confirmed with a thumbs up. Glancing at the time, Skylar knew she needed to head home to shower before

going to lunch. Skylar tucked her phone into her pocket and headed down the lighthouse stairs.

The jog back to her townhouse was easy and mostly downhill, thanks to the slight slope in the Cove's geography. She kept her head down to avoid making eye contact with anyone as she ran. Not that she didn't want to talk to anyone. Skylar just wasn't in the mood to talk about the tour anymore. It had been the only thing on her mind for weeks.

Well, that and Elena.

Skylar shook her head to clear her mind as she bounded up the steps to her townhouse. The green pickup parked out front told her Steven was there. Opening the door, Atlas instantly greeted her, and she petted his head.

“Hey, buddy. Where’s Grandpa?”

She didn’t know why she paused as if waiting on Atlas to answer. Kicking off her tennis shoes, she meandered through the house until she found her dad in the guest bathroom fixing the leaking faucet.

“Hey, Dad.”

“Hey, Peanut.” Steven wiped his hands on his jeans before hugging her. “Did you have a good run?”

“I did. What made you decide to fix this today?”

“I had some free time since Walker is working at the shop now. You know, we might need to look at hiring her full-time after the tour. She’s great.”

Although Skylar and Walker Forsyth weren’t necessarily friends, they occasionally ran in similar circles. Especially since Skylar and Blake had begun to hang out. Blake’s wife, Alexis, had grown up with Walker and her wife, Maddie, so everyone knew everyone. Skylar was friendly with them, but she was never particularly close to Walker.

They'd agreed to hire her on a temporary basis while Skylar was on tour. From what Steven had told her, Walker had been an amazing asset to the store. So much so that Skylar teased him that she wouldn't be needed there anymore.

"It's so sad you've replaced me already," she joked again as Steven laughed.

"Oh, hush. Walker's great, but she's no Skylar, that's for sure."

"You're just biased."

"Well, I think I have a right to be when my daughter is the great Skylar Ford, who is about to go on a world tour with Maine Event."

"It's not a world tour," she laughed and rolled her eyes. "It's twenty US cities, and that's it. Then I'm back here in the Cove. Hopefully, still with a job."

Steven laughed again. "You'll always have a job here. But don't worry about rushing back here. Enjoy the tour. Enjoy living your dream."

I'm not sure if that's my dream anymore, Skylar thought to herself. She didn't dare speak the words out loud, especially not before the tour actually started. For all she knew, the tour could be the best thing that's ever happened to her, and she wanted to stay on the road forever. Skylar doubted that, but she also didn't know.

Steven finished fixing the sink and beamed at his work. Skylar applauded him as they made their way into the kitchen. She opened the fridge and grabbed a bottle of water.

"So, are you excited about the tour? How's being with the band?" Steven sat on a barstool and paused. "And Elena?"

Skylar tried not to react to Elena's name. But it was damn near impossible to stop the

smile from spreading. Her father knew her torrid history with Elena, but he also knew Skylar was still in love with her.

And even if he didn't, her smile and blush would have given it away.

"I don't know." Skylar shrugged, biting her lip in a vain attempt to stop her smile from spreading. "She's Elena. Nothing has changed since we broke up."

"I'm sorry, Peanut."

"It's fine."

"I wish things could be different for you two."

Skylar smiled sweetly at him. "Thanks, Dad."

"And who knows, maybe this tour will change things for you all."

"Maybe."

Skylar didn't feel like talking about Elena, at least not to her father. Maybe not to anyone. She didn't know.

"I'm meeting Blake for lunch, so I'm going to shower. Thanks for fixing the sink."

“Anytime, Peanut.”

Giving her father a kiss on the cheek, Skylar headed upstairs to get ready for her lunch date with Blake. Within the hour, she’d changed into a T-shirt, shorts, and sandals and let her hair down. They were meeting at Straight to Ale, and since they allowed dogs on the patio, Skylar decided to bring Atlas with her.

Blake was waiting on them when they arrived at the restaurant.

“Hey, Blake.”

“Skylar, hey!” They quickly hugged as Blake petted Atlas’s head. “Hey, Atlas.”

“I hope it’s okay that I brought him.”

“Of course it is. I’m sure you’ve missed him.”

Skylar followed Blake around to the patio entrance as they sat at a small table. Blake waved at the host to let them know they were out there. Atlas lay down on the cool concrete with a loud thud. They placed their drink and food orders quickly—iced teas and burgers for each of them—and leaned back into their chairs.

“So, how are things going with the tour? Are you excited?”

Despite the fact Skylar had previously told herself she wasn’t going to talk about Elena with anyone, she felt the floodgates start to open. She leaned across the table slightly as Blake did the same. When she spoke, she kept her voice low.

“Can I tell you something?”

“Of course,” Blake whispered back. “But why are we whispering?”

Skylar sat up straighter and nervously laughed. “I don’t know. I always feel like someone is listening.”

“I get that.”

“So, you know Elena, right? Elena Cruz?”

“Your bandmate?” Blake didn’t give her time to answer. “I mean, yeah, I know of her, but I don’t know her know her. Why?”

“Well, see,” Skylar inhaled sharply, “we kinda had a thing back in the day.”

“What?” Blake gasped before lowering her voice. “Holy shit. I mean, I knew there were rumors, but I didn’t think they were true. I would never speculate about that, just so you know.”

“I know. I’m not worried about that. I just really want and need to talk about this with someone, and I feel you get the whole being in the spotlight thing.”

“Boy, do I ever.”

“I don’t know how you deal with it. Especially not with Alexis and the kids.” Blake and her wife had an eight-year-old daughter as well as two twin babies. “I can’t imagine.”

“It’s not easy, but it’s worth it. I also haven’t been working as much since Alexis had the babies, so that’s helped to take the spotlight off me.”

“And here I am about to jump smack into the spotlight again.” Skylar sighed. “I just hate living under the microscope and always having to say and do the right thing so I don’t risk my career. That’s why Elena and I split. She didn’t want to come out of the closet, and I couldn’t force her, you know?”

“Oh, man, Skylar. I’m sorry. I had no idea.”

“That’s why Maine Event split up. I told her I wouldn’t stay in the closet for her, and she wouldn’t be out for me. I couldn’t keep doing that. It hurt. Hell, it still hurts. And being back with her now,” her voice trailed off slightly, “I don’t know how I’m going to make it through the tour.”

Blake kept her voice low as she asked, “Have you all, um, hooked up since you’ve been back with the band?”

“No.” Skylar firmly shook her head. “We have kissed, though. But we both agreed to keep our distance. Elena’s still not out, and I can’t go back into the closet for her. I know what that did to me then, and I won’t make that mistake twice. At least, I hope not.”

Blake’s eyes softened. “You still love her.”

Skylar blinked a few times. How had Blake picked up on that fact so quickly?

“I can tell by the way your eyes light up anytime you hear her name.”

“Clearly I need to invest in better sunglasses,” Skylar teased.

“I know it’s hard for us to be out in industries that aren’t necessarily kind to that. But I also know that denying your feelings will only make you miserable. And who knows, maybe this tour can help Elena open up. See that the world is more accepting now. She’s divorced now, right?”

Skylar nodded.

“And she’s been seen with Fallon Rogers multiple times. I know of Fallon, and I know she’s out. I try not to pay attention to the tabloids and paparazzi photos, but I saw those, and they looked to be more than friends to me.”

“Me, too,” Skylar sarcastically laughed. “I don’t know. I haven’t asked her about Fallon. Mostly because I didn’t know if I wanted an answer. But she’s made it clear to me she’s happy in her closed-off world.”

“You never know,” Blake’s eyes twinkled, “people change. I know it’s not exactly the same, but when I first met Alexis, she was dead set on not letting anyone into her life. But eventually, she realized I wasn’t going anywhere and that I truly cared for her and loved her, and look at where we are now.”

Blake paused and laughed.

“Sleepless with two eleven-month-olds and a kid who just decided she wants to play Little League.”

“That sounds like a dream, though,” Skylar laughed, but inside, her heart ached for what Blake had. “I want that someday.”

“You will,” Blake reassured her as their food arrived. She smirked at Skylar as she picked up a fry and popped it into her mouth. “And maybe it’ll be with Elena.”

If only...

“Yeah, maybe.”

Chapter 15

Elena

It had been too damn long since Elena had opened for a crowd that filled an entire arena. She could hear the crowd buzzing with anticipation as she nervously waited behind the curtain. Gordon, Michael, Andy, and Erica were all chatting off to her right, while across the room she could see Skylar talking to Johnny. She was wearing skintight jeans, a black V-neck, and heeled ankle boots. Her silver jewelry kept sparkling each time she moved, drawing Elena’s attention to her like a moth to a flame.

Smoothing out non-existent wrinkles in her dress, Elena forced herself to focus on anything but Skylar.

Elena had spent more money than she’d care to admit on her dress, but it made her feel stunning. The form-fitting black dress had a deep cut in the front with an even deeper cut in the back. One wrong move, and Elena would be showing all to the crowd. But she didn’t care. She looked damn good in the dress, and she was going to flaunt that.

Across the room, she caught Skylar's gaze again. And like clockwork, Skylar blushed before turning away with a smile on her face. Elena knew exactly what she was thinking. It was the same thing Elena had been thinking for weeks. But she knew they had to keep their distance.

Even if it killed Elena.

Skylar had broken her heart once by leaving, and Elena knew that after the tour, Skylar would go back to the Cove. There was no sense in starting any relationship. It didn't matter that their chemistry was off the wall or that every fiber in Elena's body wanted to touch Skylar, or the fact she pictured Skylar taking the dress off her when she bought it.

Elena had to keep it together.

Rolling her neck, she took a deep breath and tried to clear her mind. Her attempt failed miserably when she felt a warm hand on her back.

"You ready?" Skylar smiled, keeping her hand on Elena's back. Up close, Elena could see the slight sparkle in Skylar's makeup.

Elena nodded. "I am. Are you?"

"As I'll ever be."

"It's gonna be great."

"Yeah, it will be."

She was still keenly aware Skylar's hand was still on her back. Was she doing it on purpose? Or was it a habit? Elena wasn't sure she wanted to know the answer.

After not seeing Skylar for the past few days, Elena had actually begun to miss her. She missed not sharing a cup of coffee or a glass of wine together on the porch while they wrote songs they knew would never be recorded. Their time together—always at least five feet apart—had been a nice break after hours of rehearsal. And now they were only moments away from all their hard work coming to its crescendo.

The Footprint Arena in Phoenix, Arizona, was their first of many sold-out shows. Over two thousand fans filled the venue, and Elena was ready to get the show on the road. As she looked over at a giant clock by the stage curtain, she saw there were only three minutes left to show time.

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“I guess I should get ready.” Skylar must have noticed the time as well. When her hand left Elena’s back, Elena instantly felt the coldness. She longed for a longer touch from Skylar but knew she had to keep her mind on the show.

“I’ll see you out there.”

“I look forward to it.”

Winking, Skylar tucked her hands into her pocket as she walked away. They’d all planned their entrances, with half of the band coming from each side of the stage. That meant that Elena and Skylar were on opposite sides of the stage to start. Gordon and Erica joined Elena on her side of the stage, while Michael and Andy joined Skylar.

The lights in the concert hall dimmed, and the crowd’s cheering grew louder and louder with each passing second. Elena could almost feel the excitement as she eagerly bounced on her feet. Through the opening in the curtain, Elena watched Johnny walk out to introduce them.

As he spoke, Elena’s eyes locked with Skylar’s across the stage. She couldn’t register anything Johnny was saying. Something about how excited the band was to be back together and be playing for their fans again. The parts Elena heard sounded sentimental, and she knew if she’d actually paid attention to them, she would mean them too.

But Skylar’s blue eyes were holding her captive.

Johnny introduced the band, and they all made their way out onto the stage and into their designated positions. Elena found the X marked off in painter's tape that showed where she should stand in front of the microphone. Almost exactly five feet away was Skylar, standing at her microphone stand as Gordon counted them in for their first song.

Not only was the crowd electric but so was the chemistry radiating between Skylar and Elena. By song four, Elena was completely back into her groove with Maine Event. She was so in the groove that when Skylar closed the space between them and joined her at the microphone while they belted out "Heartless Nights," Elena didn't think anything about it. In fact, it wasn't until Skylar stayed at Elena's microphone for the next song that she wondered what she was up to.

She tried to telepathically ask Skylar as the band played the intro to the next song. Skylar winked as she joined in on her guitar as the song got started. Elena was torn between being pissed Skylar had broken the five-foot rule or that Elena wanted her to be even closer. Her mind was a jumbled mess, and it took every ounce of energy she could muster to stay focused on the words to the songs.

Their chemistry stayed palpable for the rest of the set. When the lights and curtain finally went down, Elena lingered on stage for a moment as she looked at Skylar. They were both sweating from the lights and the energy the show required, but Elena couldn't remember a time when Skylar looked more beautiful. It was as if they'd been transported back ten years, and nothing had changed. They were still Ellie and Sky, and nothing else mattered.

Skylar set her guitar on the stand as she exited the stage. Still frozen in place, Elena watched her walk away and tried to convince herself to go after her. She could use the guise of asking her while she'd decided to change up their positions and use the same microphone.

Yeah. That would work.

Following Skylar off stage, Elena immediately ran into Johnny.

“You all were amazing.” He high-fived her as he handed her a bottle of water. “Having Skylar join you at the mic was genius. Such a callback to the old Maine Event days. I loved it. This tour is going to be great.”

Elena wasn't in the mood to tell him she didn't know Skylar was going to do that, but she decided against it. After all, if Johnny liked it, they would probably keep doing it. Especially since the fans seemed to love it, too.

The whole situation threw a wrench into Elena's perfectly planned plan to stay away from Skylar. With Skylar no longer staying at her house, Elena assumed the temptation would be over. Sure, being on stage with Skylar was bound to stir up some feelings. But Elena had been resolved to ignore them. She'd naively hoped it would be easier than Skylar was making it out to be.

Sighing, Elena looked around the backstage area for Skylar. She found everyone else and decided to check the dressing room for her. Their names were scribbled on paper signs on each door, and Elena knocked twice on the one with Skylar's name.

Skylar opened it almost immediately. She licked her lips as she looked Elena up and down.

“I figured you'd show up to yell at me.”

Elena pushed the door open and walked into the dressing room. Closing the door behind her, Skylar put her hands on her hips and shrugged.

“So, go on. Yell at me. Tell me I screwed up, and we shouldn't have been that close

together on stage.”

“We shouldn’t have been,” Elena barely managed to say with the lump in her throat. The electricity between them seemed seconds away from bursting into a firework display not seen outside of a Disney theme park.

“But?” Skylar asked, cocking her head at Elena.

“You could have at least told me you were going to do that.”

“I couldn’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because you would have talked me out of it.”

Elena knew she couldn’t protest that. That is exactly what she would have done. If for no other reason than she didn’t want to rekindle the rumors that she and Skylar were together.

But, dammit, if Elena didn’t want to rekindle their love once more.

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Without overthinking anything, Elena closed the space between them and locked her lips with Skylar's. Skylar moaned as Elena pushed her against the wall, and it turned Elena on more than she was prepared for. There was just something about Skylar that made her different from anyone else Elena had ever been with. Elena moved her lips to Skylar's neck, then her ear, and back again.

"Elena..."

"Shh," she whispered as she covered Skylar's lips with her own again. Surprisingly, Skylar listened. Their kissing intensified until Elena knew exactly where they were headed if they didn't stop it.

And Elena wasn't going to stop it.

"What about the five-foot rule?"

"I say fuck it."

"Seriously?" Skylar pulled away just enough to see Elena's eyes. "I thought you didn't want this anymore."

Elena was fairly sure that was a statement and not a question.

"I thought my kissing would show you I've changed my mind."

"I was just making sure," Skylar smirked as they resumed their kissing.

A part of Elena knew she should clarify she wasn't ready to be in a public relationship with Skylar. But a bigger part of her just wanted to fuck her until neither one of them could move.

In the shortest battle ever, the latter won out.

Chapter 16

Skylar

Despite the fact Elena was currently ripping the clothes from her body, Skylar still couldn't believe that it was actually happening. She'd spent years wondering what it would feel like to be with Elena again, and now her dreams were coming true. Her brain ran rampant with thoughts of her lips on Elena's clit again as she made her come for the first time in ten years. Unable to handle the anticipation any longer, Skylar took Elena's dress off as the sight of her bare skin caused her breath to hitch in her throat.

Skylar was suddenly thankful she'd decided to rent her own tour bus for the tour. Although she knew she'd be spending relatively little time in it, having a space to herself would be nice. Especially if it meant she could make love to Elena without anyone walking in on them.

"Sky," Elena breathlessly moaned as Skylar cupped her breasts in her hands and squeezed. She felt Elena's body press into hers as they shuffled toward the back of the bus.

When the back of Elena's knees hit the mattress, she sat and scooted up on it as Skylar straddled her hips. Elena put her hand on the back of Skylar's neck as she pulled her down closer to her. Skylar wanted nothing more than to escalate their kissing to something more, but she had to make sure Elena was okay with it. Even if

her kissing was telling her she was.

“Ellie,” Skylar said between kisses, “wait.”

“No.” Elena shook her head, which finally broke their kiss. “I don’t want to wait.”

Skylar felt herself grow wet, but she needed the assurance that Elena was okay with the trajectory of events.

“I just want to make sure you want....”

Elena covered Skylar’s mouth with her hand. “Skylar, I’m an adult. I know where this is going. And I swear to God if you don’t fucking fuck me right now, my body will explode.”

Skylar laughed as she resumed kissing Elena. Sure, they had a lot of shit to talk about regarding their relationship, but Skylar didn’t care. At least not at that moment. She’d leave that for future Skylar to figure out.

Slowly, Skylar made her way down Elena’s body to her wet center. Elena was ready; Skylar could tell by the way she spread her legs and squirmed when Skylar entered her with her fingers. The moan that came from Elena was one that sent Skylar right back to the old days when they were first together. While Skylar was quieter in bed, Elena had the tendency to shatter glass.

Skylar hadn’t realized how much she’d missed making love to Elena. Their bodies were made for each other; even the years apart hadn’t changed that. She had missed the way Elena pulled her hair as she ran her thumb over her clit and the way she begged her for more when Skylar started to let up slightly.

“Sky, please,” Elena breathlessly pleaded, “I need to come.”

“You’re still as impatient as ever.”

“And you’re still as coy as ever.” Elena’s voice hitched as Skylar curled her fingers inside of her. She knew she’d hit the spot when Elena’s hips bucked off the bed and were followed by the loud moaning of Skylar’s name. “Fuck yes!”

“Not so coy now, am I?” Skylar teased.

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She watched Elena ride out her orgasm, but Skylar wasn't done with her yet. There was no way. Skylar was just getting started. Lowering her lips to Elena's clit, Skylar sucked as she ran her fingers around her wet center. Elena's moan started to grow in intensity again as Skylar made her come for a second time with ease.

“Fuck, Sky!”

“Another?”

Elena shook her head. “I have to catch my breath.”

Her shaking voice told Skylar she didn't want to tell Skylar to stop, so Skylar kept her fingers dancing around her wet center as Elena tried to regain her breath. When Elena's breathing became less labored, Skylar locked eyes with Elena as she lifted her fingers up to her lips. She put them in her mouth one by one, enjoying the way Elena seemed equally as turned on by the sight.

“You're so fucking hot.” Elena reached out, squeezing one of Skylar's breasts in her hand. She bit her lip as she ran her finger over Skylar's erect nipple. “I've missed these.”

“They've missed you too.”

Elena arched an eyebrow at her. “Will you do me a favor?”

“Anything.”

“Sit on my face.”

Skylar blinked once, then twice. Then a third time. Did she really hear Elena correctly? They’d never had sex like that before, but Skylar couldn’t deny she was insanely turned on by the possibility of the new position.

Straddling Elena again, Skylar looked down at her.

“I’ve never done this before.”

“Me either.” Elena sheepishly blushed. “But I’ve wanted to, and there’s no one else I’d rather try it with than you.”

The intimacy of Elena’s comment made Skylar’s heart sore. She trusted her. Even after everything they’d been through, everything that had happened between them, Elena still cared about her and trusted her enough to ask to try something she was unfamiliar with. Skylar took it as a sign that maybe—just maybe—things really would be different this time around with Elena.

“Okay, how’s this?” Skylar tried to position her center over Elena’s mouth, but it was almost impossible in the dimly lit room. She braced herself on the headboard as she felt Elena’s hands on her hips.

“Scoot up a little more.”

Skylar did, and Elena moved her hands around to her ass.

“Perfect.”

“Yeah?”

Elena answered by sucking on her clit.

There was no doubt in Skylar's mind that she could have stayed there forever. The feel of Elena's hands on her body and her tongue seemingly everywhere at once was driving Skylar blissfully wild. When she felt her orgasm building, she gripped tighter onto the headboard and rested her head on her arm.

"Ellie," she barely whispered as she came.

Skylar struggled to keep her balance and not literally sit on Elena's face. But her shaking legs were seconds away from giving out. She swiftly lifted one leg over Elena's body as she collapsed onto the bed beside her. While she expected that to be the end of that, Elena surprised her by spreading Skylar's legs and continuing.

Elena's fingers pumped methodically in and out as Skylar desperately clung to the headboard's spindles. It was not uncommon for Elena to come more than once, but for Skylar, a double feature was rare. So rare that Skylar knew it was the very person currently kneading her breast with one hand while inside her with the other that had made her come twice the last time.

She was just about to tell Elena she was sorry it was taking so long to get off again when it happened. It was as if Elena found a hidden button inside of her that only she had access to. Skylar moaned and squirmed as she rode out yet another orgasm on Elena's fingers.

"I've missed this. So much."

Skylar thought she'd only thought the words, but Elena's smile told her otherwise.

"Me, too."

As Elena lay down and snuggled up against her, Skylar put her arm around her and kissed her head. They'd fallen asleep like that so many times that Skylar was almost able to convince herself that the last ten years were a dream and they were still together.

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But lingering questions of what it meant now and how they move forward reminded Skylar she was not living in the past.

“So,” Skylar chuckled, “what do we do now?”

Elena giggled, rolling over onto her side as she draped an arm across Skylar’s bare stomach. “Hell, if I know.”

“We should have probably figured that out before sex.”

“Then we wouldn’t be us.”

Skylar laughed again because she knew Elena was right.

The first time they ever hooked up had been so spur of the moment that they didn’t have any time to discuss it beforehand. Their clothes were scattered across the floor of their hotel, and they were making sweet love to each other before Skylar fully realized that holy shit, she was having sex with Elena.

Of course, back then, Skylar had been naive enough to think that things would work out perfectly between them. She was convinced that nothing in the world could stop them, and they would be a power couple who took on the world together. And maybe in another life that’s what happened.

But in this one, Skylar knew the ending.

And she couldn’t help but wonder if maybe they could change this ending.

Running her hand mindlessly through Elena's hair, Skylar took a deep breath.

"Elena?"

"Hmm?"

"I don't want this to be a one-night thing. I know that might be all you think you can give me, but I want more. And I think you do, too."

She waited for a beat, but Elena didn't say anything.

"Ellie?" Skylar asked again. But the only thing Skylar heard was Elena's methodical breathing.

Sighing, Skylar kissed her on the head one more time and fell asleep beside her. They were on tour for months. There would be plenty of time to talk about their relationship. As for now, Skylar was going to enjoy the feeling of falling asleep next to Elena again.

Chapter 17

Elena

Elena was used to waking up alone. After all, she'd been doing it for more years than not. Even when she was married to Peter, their schedules rarely coordinated enough to allow them to share a bed. She was used to sleeping in the middle of the bed, sprawled out in a giant X.

What she wasn't used to was waking up in Skylar's embrace.

Cuddling closer to her, she sighed contently as Skylar wrapped her arms tighter

around her. She gently kissed her head, and Elena looked into her sky-blue eyes. Skylar's fingers ran through Elena's hair, tucking it softly behind her ear as she sleepily smiled.

"Morning."

"Good morning," Elena giggled. "I didn't mean to fall asleep here."

"I'm glad you did."

Elena arched an eyebrow. "Yeah?"

"Yeah, silly." Skylar leaned in and kissed her lips. It took every ounce of self-control Elena could muster not to have a repeat of the night before. "But the buses are gonna leave soon, so we need to figure out what this means."

She suddenly realized that Skylar was dressed in a T-shirt and sweatpants. How had she gotten up and changed without Elena noticing? And what did Skylar need to figure out? They'd had sex. That was easy to figure out.

"I don't want this to be a casual thing."

"I know," Elena softly responded. "But I don't know if I can do a public relationship. Not yet."

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Skylar sighed, gritting her teeth. She didn't say anything as she sat up on the end of the bed with her back to Elena. Picking up a pair of sneakers from the floor, Skylar began to lace them up.

"Sky, talk to me."

"I honestly don't know what to say right now, so I'm choosing to say nothing."

"Come on." Elena sat up, adjusting the sheet to cover her bare chest. "Don't shut me out like this."

"Shut you out?" Skylar snorted a laugh. "I can't shut you out if you won't even let me in."

Standing, Skylar crossed her arms as she looked down at Elena.

"What did last night mean to you?"

"What?"

"Was it just scratching an itch?"

"Skylar, no." Elena got out of bed, picked up her discarded dress, and quickly put it back on. "You know it was more than that."

"But you don't want to admit that to anyone. Not even yourself."

“I just don’t think it’s anyone’s business who I’m sleeping with. As long as it’s consensual, what’s the matter?”

“It mattered because you keep forcing me back into the closet with you, and I can’t do that. I can’t live my life there. Not with everything that’s going on in this world to shut a love like ours out.”

Elena was keenly aware of the love like ours comment but didn’t point it out to Skylar.

“I care about you, and I know you care about me.” Skylar huffed a laugh. “Hell, I might even still love you. And while I don’t regret last night, it can’t happen again until you accept that you might still love me, too.”

To say Elena was too stunned to speak would have been an understatement. Elena knew that, eventually, she and Skylar would have to talk about the elephant in the room. She just didn’t think it would come so quickly after their first time back together.

Maybe it was because they jumped into bed without talking first. Maybe Elena should have just gone back to her own tour bus and not confronted Skylar. She’d be lying to herself if she said that at least a tiny part of her didn’t think that maybe sex would happen if she showed up at Skylar’s door. There was so much chemistry between them it was almost inevitable.

But the hurt look on Skylar’s face made Elena wish she’d thought through her actions first and how they might affect Skylar.

Elena didn’t have time to form a response before there was a knock at the tour bus door. She watched Skylar leave the bedroom, closing the door behind her. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she listened to see who it was.

“Hey.”

“Hey, have you seen Elena?” Erica. “The buses are getting ready to leave, and she’s not on hers, and I can’t find her.”

“I haven’t seen her, but I’ll grab my phone and see if I can find her.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

Elena heard the door shut, followed by Skylar’s encroaching footsteps as she opened the bedroom door.

“Erica’s looking for you.”

“I heard.”

She snorted another laugh. “This is just like old times. Us sneaking around, trying not to get caught.”

“Right?” Elena laughed. Her eyes softened as she stood and placed her hands on Skylar’s upper arms. “I’m not ready to come out publicly yet, but that doesn’t mean I won’t get there. I feel if anything is said right now, it’ll overshadow the tour, and that’s not fair to any of us. Not after how hard we’ve worked to get this tour together. Just, please, Skylar, don’t give up on me. Let’s get through the tour, and then we can figure this out, okay?”

Skylar seemed to think about the proposition for a moment. She averted her eyes from Elena’s as she bit her lip. Her mind’s wheels were turning; Elena could see it in her eyes. Finally, Skylar nodded.

“I get the point about it overshadowing the tour.”

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“It doesn’t mean we can’t still be together, though. No one has to know until we’re ready for them to know.”

“Do you really think there will still be an us after the tour?” Skylar’s voice cracked as her eyes clouded with tears. “You’ll go back to Santa Barbara, and I’ll go to the Cove, and who knows when we’ll ever see each other again.”

“It doesn’t have to be that way.” Elena pulled Skylar into a hug. “We’ll figure it out. I promise. I want that.”

“Me, too.”

“Good.” Elena kissed her cheek. “We’ll figure this out. We have nineteen more shows to do and two months to do them in. That’ll give us plenty of time together to figure this out.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“I’m sorry,” Elena teased, “can you repeat that?”

Skylar rolled her eyes and laughed. “Shut up. And you better go before Erica comes back here looking for you.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

“But I’ll see you tonight.”

“See you then.”

After one more kiss, Elena cracked open the tour bus door and looked around the parking lot for signs that anyone was watching her. Assuming the coast was clear, she stepped out into the morning air.

“Hey.”

Erica. Shit.

“Hey,” Elena tried to play it casual. “I was just looking for you.”

“In Skylar’s tour bus?”

The look on Erica’s face told Elena she wouldn’t believe any excuse she attempted to make. Elena tried to think of something—anything—that would be a plausible reason for her being on Skylar’s bus. She nervously ran her hands over her dress to wipe the sweat from her palms.

Shit. I’m still wearing my dress from last night.

Erica’s impatience in waiting for an answer was almost palpable. She crossed her arms over her chest, waiting for a response.

“Well, um, Skylar called and said you were looking for me. I thought you might be on her bus.”

“Mhmm.”

“Yeah. And I fell asleep last night before I could change clothes, so that’s why I’m still wearing my dress.”

“I didn’t ask.”

“Oh,” Elena winced. Erica’s hardened face didn’t soften or anything. The woman could be one hell of a poker player if she ever wanted a career change. “So, anyway, what did you need?”

“We need to get going. It’s almost three hours to the next venue.”

“Right, right. Okay, well, I’ll see you there.”

Elena turned to leave but didn’t get far when Erica said, “You two better not fuck this up again.”

She spun around on her heels to face Erica again.

“I’m not an idiot. I know what you two are up to, and all I can say is it better not ruin the band again. Just because Maine Event is back together now doesn’t mean the last ten years didn’t happen. You and Skylar hurt everyone on tour when you two fucked it up the last time. Try not to let this tour be a repeat.”

This time it was Erica who turned and walked away. Elena was speechless. Of course, Erica had figured it out so quickly. She’d been the first to fit the pieces together last time too. But that didn’t stop the anger from rising inside Elena.

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How dare Erica try and tell her how to live her life. Elena didn't go around yelling at Erica's kids while they ran amuck during soundcheck. Or tell her husband that he was not the band's official photographer and, if he was, he should be taking pictures of everyone and not just Erica. But Elena didn't, because it wasn't her place to say anything.

Ugh.

Stomping off to her tour bus, Elena alternated between seething about Erica and reliving her night with Skylar as the bus headed for the next destination.

Chapter 18

Skylar

Arriving to sound check first, Skylar looked around the stage as she walked to her mark on the floor. The microphone was ready for her, and her favorite guitar was set on its stand beside it. Skylar was thankful for the few minutes alone to focus on the show. Picking up her guitar, Skylar strummed a few chords of a new song she'd been writing on the drive to Las Vegas.

Her mind had been so cluttered with thoughts of Elena all day that the only way Skylar knew how to process her emotions was through song. She played the chorus over again as she hummed the tune.

But then there was you, my flicker of light

The one who lit up my darkest night

I started to see what life truly could be

Now I'm finding myself with you again

The song lacked verses, but Skylar knew they would come eventually. Especially since all she had on her brain currently was Elena. Even if Skylar wished they could go public with their relationship, she understood where Elena was coming from.

And, hell, it wasn't like they were in a relationship yet, anyway. One night of great sex didn't constitute a relationship. Skylar knew it could easily head that way, but they weren't there yet. No matter how badly Skylar wished she was. She knew that Elena wasn't one to easily switch her way of thinking. Elena hasn't grown up in an open home. Things were very rigid in the Cruz household, so Skylar knew Elena really did need time.

Humming the chorus once more, Skylar slowly began to write the first verse.

Felt like I was running out of time

Lost in a maze, always searching for a way out

Wondering where the next turn would lead

Or if I would be lost in the darkness within

"Eh," Skylar sighed as she sat the guitar down and pulled out her phone to jot down the lyrics. They'd work, at least for now.

As Skylar replayed the verse with the chorus, Erica walked onto the stage from the

opposite curtain. Skylar nodded a greeting to her as she stopped playing.

“Hey.”

“Hey. You got a minute?”

Erica had her arms crossed over her button-up shirt. Her ripped jeans were the same ones Erica used to wear back on their last tour. And judging by Erica’s face, they were about to have a conversation like they used to have years ago.

“Um, yeah.” Skylar sat the guitar back down on its stand. “What’s up?”

“I know about you and Elena.”

Tact was definitely not Erica’s forte. Skylar tried to keep her face neutral from any reaction, but it was damn near impossible with Erica’s poker face staring back at her.

“I saw her leaving your bus this morning.”

“Oh,” Skylar barely whispered.

“And look, I know it’s not my business what or who you do in your spare time, but it is my business when it could affect my job.” Erica’s eyes narrowed at her. “Again.”

Skylar gritted her teeth. She knew exactly what Erica was insinuating, and she didn’t like it. It was Skylar’s business and Elena’s business only what happened between them. But Skylar also understood on some level where Erica was coming from.

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“Look, I love you and Elena and want you happy, and if being together makes you happy, then I’m all for it. But please,” Erica was almost begging, “for my sake and for Gordon, Andy, Michael, and all the Maine Event fans, please keep this on the downlow until after the tour. Then do whatever you want. Please.”

Although Skylar wanted to be pissed—and she definitely was on some level—she also knew that Elena’s and Erica’s concerns about all their careers being in jeopardy if Elena and Skylar came out as a couple. Yes, it would have its benefits, but Skylar didn’t know if they would outweigh the unknown risks.

“You know,” Skylar chuckled, “you have a lot of nerve.”

Erica laughed. “It’s a blessing and a curse. But I want to protect this,” she motioned around to the band’s stage setup, “as long as I can.”

Looking around the venue, Skylar realized she was still living the dream she’d had since high school. She was getting to perform with her friends in front of sold-out crowds every weekend. But was she really willing to give up the possibility of a life with Elena in exchange for her musical career?

Skylar wished she could confidently say she knew the answer, but the truth of the matter was she didn’t. Things hadn’t worked out with Elena the last time; there was no guarantee it would work out this time. But Skylar also didn’t think playing in a band for the rest of her life would keep her happy. Clearly Skylar had more to figure out than she thought she did.

“Anyway,” Erica sighed, “that’s all I wanted to say.”

As Erica took her spot at the keyboard, the rest of the band slowly trickled out onto the stage and into their spot. Elena was the last to make her way to the stage, and Skylar instantly locked eyes with her. The sparkling black top shimmered in the spotlights, lighting up the entire room.

And that smile.

That damn smile.

Skylar wished she could get lost in it forever. She winked at Elena as Gordon counted them in for their first song. But the vibe between Skylar and Elena was off the entire sound check. After the four songs, Elena made her way backstage without a word to Skylar.

Walking down the hallway to the dressing room, Skylar saw that the door to Elena's room was cracked open. Skylar knocked twice before slowly opening the door wider. Elena was sitting at a small dressing area, looking at herself in the mirror. She smiled at Elena in the mirror and was relieved when Elena smiled back.

"Hey, you okay? Things seemed off at sound check, so I just wanted to check on you."

Skylar stepped into the room and shut the door behind her.

"I'm okay. I've just been thinking."

"Uh-oh." Cautiously, Skylar sat down on a small couch beside Elena's chair. "That's never good."

Elena smiled slightly. "Does it make it better if I say I've been thinking about us?"

“Maybe slightly.” Skylar reached out and placed a hand on Elena’s knee. She was relieved when Elena covered it with her own and squeezed. “Talk to me.”

“I want to give us another try. I really do, and I need you to know that.”

“I do.”

Elena inhaled sharply, and Skylar felt her heartbeat quicken.

“But I also need you to realize that you’re farther along in your coming out journey than I am. I wish I could run and catch up with you, but I can’t. I have to do this in my own time, and right now, it just isn’t the right time for me.”

Skylar tried not to let her hurt play on her face. She knew it was hard for Elena to open up like this, and the last thing Skylar wanted was to make Elena feel she wasn’t receptive to what she was saying.

“You know my parents. They’re old school Catholics. We might not be as close as we once were, but I still don’t want them to find out about my sexuality on a gossip blog. I want to be the one to tell them.”

“I understand.”

And Skylar truly did. She’d never want to push someone who wasn’t ready, especially when so much was at stake.

“But,” Elena’s eyes and smile softened, “that doesn’t mean that I don’t want to work on us in the meantime.”

“Yeah?” Skylar couldn’t stop the smile from spreading across her face.

“Yeah, dork.” Leaning in, Elena kissed her lips. It was quicker than their kisses the night before, but Skylar savored it nonetheless. “Is that okay? I know it’s not ideal, but it’s more than I thought I’d be able to give to you right now. Especially since I was fully prepared to hate you the entire tour.”

They laughed, and Skylar reached out to take Elena’s hand.

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“I know we messed this up before, and I don’t want to do that again. I wish the world was different, and we didn’t have to hide, but I understand it. Our decisions affect not only us but the whole band as well.”

“I know,” Elena scoffed.

“And if this is going to work, I have to learn give and take.”

“I’m sorry,” Elena laughed as she reached for her phone on the table, “could you repeat that? I want to get the exact quote right so I can write it in my diary and never forget the day that Skylar Ford admitted she wasn’t perfect.”

“You know, this isn’t a great way to start off a relationship, right?” Skylar laughed along with her, but she noticed how Elena stopped and looked at her seriously. It caught Skylar off guard that she nearly snipped a, “What?”

Elena lowered her eyes from Skylar’s as she intertwined their fingers together. Slowly, she looked back up at Skylar with a shy smile on her face.

“Are we really starting off a relationship?”

“Hmm,” Skylar coyly pretended to contemplate the question, “let me think.”

Elena rolled her eyes and pulled her hands away from Skylar. She stood and waved a dismissive hand at her, but the smile never left her face. Standing, Skylar took hold of Elena’s hand once more as she spun her around into an embrace.

“That was a move straight out of a rom-com, you know that, right?”

“I do.” Skylar winked. “And I also know that I don’t want to be in a relationship with anyone but you. I’ve wanted a second chance for years and never thought it would happen. And, Elena, I can promise you I’ll do anything I can to make this time around different.”

“I will too.”

“Well, I’m glad we’re on the same page.”

“Ditto.” Giggling, Elena leaned in and kissed Skylar. She had no doubt it would have escalated to something more if Johnny hadn’t walked down the hall yelling it was five minutes to show time. “I’ll see you on stage.”

“And later tonight.”

Elena winked. “You know it.”

Chapter 19

Elena

The first two weeks of the tour were over, and Elena was thankful to be back home in Santa Barbara for a few days. After staying on the tour bus since the tour started, Elena had decided to take advantage of the weekend of shows in California to sleep in her own bed. Of course, she wasn’t in bed alone. Skylar had decided to stay with her as well, much to Elena’s relief.

Since they’d agreed to keep their relationship on the downlow, Elena had become keenly aware of how much she wanted to hold Skylar’s hand or kiss her while in

public. Now that they were in the safety of Elena's home, she felt freer than she had in weeks. She found herself sneaking kisses from Skylar as they made dinner together and holding her hand as they walked along the private beach at the house.

And the thing they'd done in the swimming pool the night before was definitely something Elena wanted to happen again later that day.

As for now, they were seated at Elena's normal table across from each other at the Mexican restaurant. A half-empty bowl of queso and an empty basket of chips sat between them, along with their two large margaritas. Skylar had convinced Elena to split the chicken fajitas with her, and she was certain she'd never been fuller than she was at that moment. Clearly Skylar didn't feel the same as she popped another cheese-covered chip into her mouth. Elena picked up her drink and leaned back in her seat.

"I honestly don't know how you're still eating."

"I love food," she shrugged with her mouthful of food. Skylar grinned, and Elena would know that sly smile anywhere. "And what can I say? I love to eat out."

Elena spit her margarita out of her mouth. "Skylar!"

Skylar chuckled as she handed Elena a napkin. She dabbed her mouth as she laughed along with Skylar. "You're ridiculous."

"Yeah, but you love it."

"I guess I do."

Skylar leaned in toward her as Elena did the same. They were mere centimeters from kissing before they remembered where they were and quickly pulled away from each

other. Elena quickly downed the rest of her drink, even if she knew that was the reason they'd almost crossed their No PDA line.

“We’ve got to be careful,” Skylar started with a defeated sigh. “I’m sorry.”

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“You have nothing to apologize for. That was on both of us.” Under the table, Elena put her hand on Skylar’s knee and squeezed. “It’ll get easier after the tour.”

I hope.

A sheepish young woman approached their table as Elena quickly removed her hand from Skylar’s knee. She’d learned to spot fans over the years and had no doubt that the woman was one of them. Elena smiled at her.

“I’m so sorry for bothering you, but I saw you two sitting out here and knew I’d kick myself if I didn’t tell you how much I love your music.”

“Aw, thank you. We always love meeting fans.”

“I have tickets to the LA show on Saturday, and I cannot wait.”

“It should be a good show,” Skylar chimed in.

“I saw you all on the last tour and cried when the band broke up.” The woman nervously laughed. “Anyway, I just wanted to say hi and that I love your music.”

“Thank you. What was your name?”

“Carolyn.”

“Nice to meet you, Carolyn. Would you like a picture?”

“Absolutely.”

As Carolyn fished her phone out of her bag, Elena and Skylar stood on either side of her. They all posed for the selfie, and Elena was reminded that the fans were why she did what she did. They gave her the motivation to go through hours of rehearsals and weeks on the road.

“Thank you two so much.”

“You’re welcome.” Skylar picked up her crossbody bag from the back of the chair and put it on her shoulder. “We’ll see you at the show on Saturday.”

“Yes, see you then.”

“Any chance you’ll be debuting new music Saturday?” Carolyn laughed.

It was a question Elena and Skylar had gotten a lot from fans since the tour was announced. But so far, they’d stuck to their old songs despite the fact Skylar and Elena had each written several new songs over the years.

“You never know,” Elena teased as she smiled at Skylar. “I’ll just have to convince this one to share her new music with the world.”

“Oh, that would be great!”

They chatted for a few more moments as Elena gathered her bag, and they walked back into the restaurant. They said goodbye to Carolyn before heading for the exit. While they were used to having fans approach them, they were not used to a small crowd gathering outside the restaurant waiting for them to leave.

“What in the world?” Skylar muttered as she stood inside the restaurant and looked

out at the crowd. “Why are they here?”

“I assume us.”

“Why us?”

“I don’t know. Maybe because we’re the hottest band touring right now?”

Skylar laughed. “So, what do we do?”

“I guess we have to face them.”

Pushing open the door, Elena put on her classic smile and greeted the fans. She and Skylar signed autographs and smiled for pictures. It was hard to tell if any of the people were paparazzi since they blended in so well these days. But judging by the random questions being shouted out, either paparazzi or journalists were in the crowd.

“Is Maine Event going to release new music?”

“How does it feel to be back on tour?”

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“Are you ever going to address the rumors around the band’s breakup?”

Elena’s head snapped in the direction of the last question. She knew exactly what rumors the man was insinuating. It had been speculated for years that there had been a falling out between Skylar and Elena. Fans and nosy press had no idea how close to the right answer they were. But it wasn’t their business, and Elena had no intention of giving them any details.

Skylar, on the other hand, seemed pissed about the question. She was gritting her teeth, very clearly trying not to stoop to the journalist’s low.

“It’s just a question,” the man insisted as Elena and Skylar pushed their way through the crowd that seemed to be closing in on them. “Wouldn’t it be easier to squash the rumors than let them grow?”

Elena opened her mouth to respond, but Skylar took hold of her arm. “Let’s go.”

Pushing their way out of the crowd, they walked over to the rental car they’d driven to the restaurant. Elena had hoped it would help them stay incognito. So much for the best-laid plans. Skylar opened the driver’s side door for Elena, and she got in without thinking much of the gesture.

She nearly spun her tires as she left the parking lot and headed for the interstate. Both she and Skylar were quiet until they were several minutes away from the restaurant. Elena reached across the car and took Skylar’s hand.

“You okay?”

Skylar squeezed her hand. “I am. You?”

“Annoyed, but okay.”

“I know. Me, too.”

“We’ll figure this out.”

Elena tried to comfort her but knew Skylar was upset. She knew better than to force Skylar to talk, so she allowed her to sit in silence until they arrived back home. Parking the car in the driveway, Elena knew what might make Skylar feel better.

“Wanna have sex in the pool?”

“First one there comes first.”

Skylar essentially bolted out of the car, and she ran around the house, discarding her clothes and shoes as she went. Elena tried to casually walk down to the pool, but seeing Skylar’s naked body standing on the edge of the pool was more than enough to send her running after her. As Skylar jumped in, Elena quickly shimmied out of her dress and kicked off her heels.

Standing by the pool with her toes over the edge, Elena watched Skylar swim to the other side of the pool. She leaned against the infinity wall as water flowed around her shoulders. Skylar arched an eyebrow at her.

“You joining me today?”

Elena answered by jumping into the pool with her. She swam over to her and wrapped her legs and arms around Skylar. Their lips met sweetly, and Elena savored the taste. Skylar moved her hand under Elena’s behind as she turned around and

pinned her against the wall.

The pool was only five feet deep where they were, so both were able to stand easily. As Elena stood on her own, Skylar moved her kiss to her neck. Elena moaned as she felt Skylar's fingertips graze her clit. She wrapped her arms around Skylar's neck and pressed their foreheads together.

"I thought you wanted to come first?"

"I like watching you come."

Skylar's smirk grew as her fingers entered Elena. With her other hand, Skylar cupped Elena's breast and ran her hardened nipple between her fingers. All the while, their kissing never slowed. In fact, the faster Skylar's fingers rhythmically moved in and out of Elena, the more passionate their kissing grew. It didn't take long for Elena to feel the orgasm building.

"Sky," she moaned, breaking their kissing for the first time in what seemed like an hour. "Please."

"Beg me some more."

Elena's sigh morphed into a louder moan as Skylar curled her fingers inside of her.

"Skylar, please."

"Please, what?"

"Make me come."

"Like this?"

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Elena came so fast and hard that her legs began to tremble. She dug her nails into Skylar's back as she rode out the orgasm on her fingers. Once it was over, Elena breathlessly rested her head on Skylar's shoulder as her whole body went limp.

"Have you been practicing?"

"Only on myself," Skylar smirked, and the comment turned Elena on more than she could have anticipated. Elena cocked her head at her.

"Yeah?"

"Yup."

"I bet it wasn't as good as this."

Slowly, Elena ran her hand down Skylar's body to her clit. She could tell by Skylar's body that she was already turned on. Skylar arched her back as she leaned into Elena's touch.

But suddenly, Elena had an idea.

"Wait."

"No," Skylar whined as Elena got out of the pool. "Where are you going?"

"Just wait here."

“Fine.” Skylar pouted.

Running into the house dripping wet, Elena rummaged in her nightstand for what she was looking for. She’d gotten herself the silicone dildo years ago but had never taken it out of the box. There had never been a reason for her to use it. Elena hadn’t been with anyone since Peter. But now, she knew exactly who she wanted to use it with.

As she strapped it on and slid into the harness, she proudly walked back out to the pool and laughed as Skylar’s eyes lit up.

“Oh, hell yes.”

Slowly wading into the pool from the ladder, Elena watched as Skylar equally as slowly walked toward her. She was surprised when Skylar walked past her and sat on one of the steps. Her breasts were just above the water, and Elena wanted to get her hands on them. As Skylar spread her legs, Elena knew exactly what she wanted.

It had been a while since Elena had used a strap-on, and it took her a few moments to get comfortable with it again. But once she did, she and Skylar both blissfully fell into their own world. Nothing else mattered except them. And, well, Skylar’s boobs. Elena couldn’t take her hands and mouth off of them.

After Skylar came, they dried off and cuddled outside on the couch. Elena loved making love to Skylar, but there was something so intimate about being wrapped in her embrace. She could feel Skylar’s breast pressed into her bare back as she held onto Skylar’s hand.

“You should come home with me next week.”

“To the Cove?”

“Yeah.”

Elena had already thought about inviting herself along the next time Skylar went home. But the invitation coming from Skylar meant so much more.

“I’d love that.”

“Me, too.”

Skylar kissed her shoulder, and Elena savored the way it felt. So perfect, so sweet, as if they had been doing it every night for the last ten years. Although she had no idea what would happen between them after the tour, Elena needed Skylar to know something.

“Sky?”

“Yeah?”

Elena rolled over so she could face Skylar. She looked into those dreamy blue eyes that seemed to reflect all the stars in the sky.

“I love you, Sky.”

Skylar’s eyes softened as she smiled.

“I love you too, Ellie.”

Chapter 20

Skylar

There was something so comforting about finally being back in the Cove. For the first time in weeks, Skylar felt comfortable walking around town hand in hand with Elena. She knew people would see them, but she doubted any paparazzi were there to care. Elena had schemed a plan to throw them off their trail by hiring a private plane to charter them across the country. Skylar had been blown away by the luxury but had to admit she loved it.

But Skylar also loved finally hugging Atlas again. He had been clinging to her side since they'd arrived in town. Atlas had been staying with her dad, but Skylar could tell she was glad to be back home. Skylar felt that on so many levels.

She smiled at Elena, who was sitting on the couch across from her. Their legs were beside each other while Atlas lay sprawled out between them. His head was in Elena's lap, and she was stroking his fur while he drifted in and out of sleep.

“I think he's won you over.”

“He's so sweet.”

Elena seemed so much more relaxed than she had been in weeks. The Cove was good for her, and Skylar was glad she came home with her. Similar to Skylar, she was

wearing shorts and a T-shirt to combat the warm summer sun. They'd spent the morning on the lake and had plans for an early dinner with Skylar's dad.

Skylar checked the time on her phone. "We should probably head over to Dad's."

Atlas perked up as his tail started wagging.

"Do you wanna go see Grandpa?" Skylar rubbed her back as Atlas stood and jumped off the couch. Elena laughed, enjoying the way Atlas was so excited. "Are you wearing that?"

"What's wrong with this?" Elena seemed offended, and it was then Skylar realized how her question probably came across. She pulled Elena to her feet as she laughed.

"I didn't mean it like that. You look gorgeous. I just wanted to make sure you were ready. That's all."

"Mhmm," Elena teased. "I was going to say you're wearing the same thing."

"We're just going to Dad's. There's no sense in dressing up."

Loading up into Skylar's SUV, they headed across town to Skylar's childhood home. Not much had changed about the small house. It still had the same shutters Skylar had painted the summer she turned fourteen. Even one was still crooked where Skylar fell off the ladder and broke her arm, missing several screws in the process. Her father never climbed back up there to fix it, and it always made Skylar wonder why. Steven was quirky that way, but Skylar loved him.

Skylar parked the vehicle in the driveway and let Atlas out. He ran around to the backyard as Skylar and Elena followed, hand in hand. They found Steven at the grill in a World's Best Dad apron. He slipped something off the grill to Atlas.

“He doesn’t need any appetizers.”

“I’ll give him whatever he wants.”

He gave Skylar a quick hug before turning his attention to Elena. When Skylar had picked up Atlas the night before, Elena had stayed at home showering and getting ready for bed. Steven had been bummed not to see Elena again, which was why he’d insisted on dinner. And judging by the bear hug, Steven might have missed her more than Skylar.

“Elena Cruz! It’s so great to see you again.”

“It’s good to see you too, Steven.” Elena hugged him back equally as right. “I’ve missed the Cove.”

“And it’s missed you.” Taking a step back, Steven beamed like a proud dad. “You need to come around more often than once every few weeks, okay?”

“Totally.”

“Good.” Clapping his hands together, Steven turned toward the table that he’s already set for them. “Take a seat. The food’s almost done, and there’s a pitcher of margaritas. Glasses are on the table.”

Steven had gone all out for dinner. Not only were there the traditional Ford summer cookout staples of hamburgers and hot dogs on the table, but there were also racks of ribs, baked potatoes, and banana pudding on the outdoor table. Skylar felt her stomach growl as she pulled out a chair for Elena and then sat beside her.

“This smells amazing, Steven.”

“And I have corn and asparagus coming too.” He slipped another piece of asparagus to Atlas.

“Dad, I saw that.”

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“Leave me and my grand-dog alone.”

Skylar leaned in closer to Elena. “Twenty bucks says he made a steak just for Atlas.”

“I heard that. And yes, I did.”

Steven walked over to the table with a plate full of corn on the cob and asparagus. He somehow managed to find a place on the table to put it before he poured each of them a margarita.

“So, how’s the tour been? I’ve been keeping up on the Twitter and on Instagram. That Riley is a damn good publicist.”

Skylar nodded in agreement. “She is. And the tour has been great. The fans have been awesome, and our albums are back in the top played albums on all the streaming platforms.”

“That’s so great.” Steven was beaming. He’d always been proud of her, and her heart soared at the fact she still had all his love and support. “I’m so proud of you two. You’ve come a long way since Maine Event was playing out in the garage.”

“You were the first person to give us a shot.” Elena held up her glass to him, and they cheered. Skylar joined in as they all shared a laugh. “I’ve missed this. Ford family dinners were always a staple growing up.”

Skylar recalled all the times she and Elena, and often the rest of the band, gathered around the dining room table for a home cooked meal. Steven always made sure they

were fed before and after band practice. Even if he'd had a long day at work, he'd still have pizza or fast-food burgers waiting on them. There was no doubt in Skylar's mind that the band wouldn't have reached the success it had without his unwavering support.

"Are you still planning on coming to the show in Boston, Dad?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world." Steven's wide smile was infectious. "I would love to go to more, but someone has to keep the store open."

Skylar dramatically rolled her eyes and laughed. "I told you Walker could handle it all on her own if you wanted to go on the road with us, but you insisted you didn't want to do that."

"Well, someone had to take care of the store and Atlas." He tossed Atlas a piece of his hamburger. "And I'm sure your bus isn't big enough for all three of us."

Elena nearly choked on her food. Skylar knew exactly what Elena was thinking. After all, they'd been sharing a tour bus for the last few weekends without anyone knowing. Or at least they assumed no one had caught on, except maybe their bus drivers. But Skylar knew that's not what Steven meant.

"Yeah, me, you, and Atlas," she raised an eyebrow at Elena before smiling back at her dad, "would make it really cramped."

"Oh," Elena nervously laughed, "right. Exactly. The buses are small."

"That's why Atlas and I enjoy hanging out here. Isn't that right, buddy?"

Steven tossed him yet another bit of food. Skylar resisted the urge to scold her father again. While Skylar tried not to make it a habit to give Atlas table scraps, she didn't

care that he was being spoiled by his grandpa. At least Atlas didn't beg for food, which Skylar counted as a win.

Under the table, Skylar put her hand on Elena's thigh. They glanced at each other and smiled. Skylar had asked Elena if she wanted to tell her dad they were dating, and Elena told her it was her decision. Both knew that Steven wouldn't sell them out to the highest-paying paparazzi.

Skylar had to admit that she wanted to tell him because she was dying to tell anyone. She hated keeping their relationship a secret. It went against everything Skylar believed. Years ago, Skylar told herself she'd never hide back in the closet again. And yet that was exactly what Skylar was doing for Elena.

But Skylar loved Elena and didn't want to push her. Not since Elena had opened up about how it would affect every aspect of her life, not just her career. So Skylar had found herself back in a makeshift closet for the sake of Elena. Skylar wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not. She might be the bigger person to Elena, but if her fans knew, they might not see it the same.

Skylar would have to cross that bridge when she got there. She'd face whatever backlash met her then and hoped that it would all be worth it. But the truth of the matter was Skylar had no idea what would happen to her and Elena after the tour. Elena wanted to stay on the road and perform. Skylar wanted to be on her boat with Atlas. She didn't know how those two lives would or ever could mesh after the tour.

Sighing, Skylar looked over at Elena. She smiled as she chewed and winked at her. It gave Skylar the peace of mind that maybe things would work out.

"So, what are you two up to while you're here? You have any plans?"

"We're going over to Alexis and Blake's after we leave here. Elena hasn't seen

Alexis in years, and she's never met Blake or the kids."

"Or seen their new house," Elena chimed in. "The pictures I've seen are gorgeous."

"It's a beauty, that's for sure." Steven nodded his head as he chewed. "And those babies, oh man," he chuckled. "They're adorable."

"They really are."

"Skylar showed me pictures. I can't wait to meet them and Harper."

"Harper is the best. If I ever have a kid, I want her to be like Harper."

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Skylar noticed the way Elena's eyes seemed to soften at the mention of kids. Back years ago, they'd never discussed having kids or not because they were always just focused on the relationship. And now, things were too new to have that discussion. Especially when neither of them knew what the future held.

But that didn't stop Skylar from thinking about what it would be like to have kids with Elena. She could picture a house and Atlas in the backyard and a couple of kids running around with him. It seems nice, idyllic even, and Skylar suddenly found herself wanting that life.

Dammit, Skylar. Focus on the now, not the future. Get through the tour before you start picking out baby names.

Chapter 21

Elena

For the first time in years, Elena wished she wasn't on tour and didn't have another life to go back to after she left the Cove. She wanted to stay in the seemingly safe bubble of her former town. Elena hadn't appreciated it enough when she lived there; she knew that now. Elena wondered how many family dinners and time with friends she could have had if life had been different.

Friends.

Elena huffed to herself. She didn't have any friends, not really. Sure, Gordon and Andy were her friends, but they were also her coworkers. And, in a way, they had

been her employees for the past few years. It was clear to Elena that she truly didn't have friends like Skylar did in the Cove.

The only friend Elena had was Fallon Rogers. Fallon was an actress who Elena met when she had a song played on a movie soundtrack that Fallon was starring in. They had met at a red-carpet event, and the rest had been history.

Elena knew the rumors that had surrounded her and Fallon. But it was easy for Elena to deny it when she was married to a successful man who was also in the spotlight. Even when Elena found out Peter was cheating on her, she tried to reciprocate the hurt she felt by sleeping with Fallon. However, it never happened. Elena backed out and blamed it on still being in love with Peter.

Although it had everything to do with the fact Fallon wasn't Skylar, and that was the only person Elena wanted at the moment.

Her relationship with Fallon faltered some after that, but the two had remained casual friends.

"You're quiet," Skylar squeezed her hand as they turned down a two-lane road toward the Holland's house. "You okay?"

"Yeah, sorry." Elena shook her head and smiled at Skylar. "I was just thinking."

"Care to elaborate?"

Elena sighed. "I love the Cove, and I love being here with you and seeing your dad and your friends, but it makes me sad too."

"I'm making you sad?"

“No, not you. Never. It’s just,” she tried to think of the words to say, “I don’t have any friends to just hang out with, and I realize how much I’ve missed. Like this could be a normal Tuesday night for us.”

She was keenly aware that she’d referred to them as an us. It made Elena happy to say it.

“I guess I get that. I often wonder how things could have been different if, well...” Skylar gripped the steering wheel with both hands. “I just wonder.”

“I do, too.”

Silence settled between them as Skylar pulled into the driveway of a gorgeous house. Elena admired the house as she felt Skylar reach out and take her hand. She looked over at her and smiled.

“But we won’t make the same mistake twice.”

“No, we won’t.” Skylar seemed to be more at ease as she turned off the SUV. Leaning across the console, Skylar kissed her. “I love you, and I’m happy you are here with me.”

“Me, too.”

Exiting the vehicle, they walked hand in hand up the sidewalk as Atlas trotted ahead of them. It was clear they had been there before by the way Atlas pressed his nose into the window as a Golden Retriever appeared inside the house. Atlas’s tail was wagging excitedly, as was the dog’s inside the house. When the front door opened, Atlas headed inside as Skylar and Alexis hugged each other.

“Eek! I’m so glad you’re here! I’ve missed you.”

Alexis was taller than Elena remembered. Granted, a lot of people were taller than her short frame. Her long dirty blonde hair was curling slightly around her face while her flip flops, shorts, and V-neck gave her the perfect casual summer look.

“I’ve missed you, too.” Skylar stepped away from Alexis and directed her attention to Elena. “I hope it’s okay I brought an old friend along with me.”

“Absolutely!”

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Alexis wrapped her into a tight hug as Elena soaked in the feeling. Even though she and Alexis weren't friends when they were younger, it was still nice to be greeted as if they had been. She was a few years younger than Elena and Skylar, and Elena wondered when she and Skylar reconnected.

"It's so great to finally meet you. Skylar's told us a lot about you, and of course, I've listened to all your music."

"Well," Elena uncomfortably laughed, "I just hope Skylar told the good stories."

"Obviously." Skylar winked at her.

"Come on in." Alexis motioned them to follow her into the house. "Blake and the kids are out back."

As they walked through the house, Elena admired how homey the place felt. It was truly a home, not a place where people just lived. Elena was keenly aware that was the vibe her own house gave out. But after seeing Alexis and Blake's house, Elena wasn't sure how she could go back to her impersonal Santa Barbara mansion.

"Your house is gorgeous, Alexis."

"Thanks. We love it. I miss the old apartment a little, but there's no way we could have lived there with the babies."

Stepping out through the sliding glass door, Alexis led them onto a patio. Blake and the kids were at the swing set, and Elena soaked in the sight. Harper was swinging by

herself while Blake alternated, pushing each of the babies in their little swings.

“Blake, Harper, look who’s here.”

Harper perked up when she saw Skylar and made a beeline for her. Skylar wrapped her in a hug, picked her up, and spun her around while Harper giggled.

“Skylar, guess what?”

“What?” Skylar matched her enthusiasm perfectly.

“I learned a new song on the guitar.”

“You did?” Sitting Harper back down, Skylar gave her a high five. “You rock, kid! I’m so proud of you.”

“Do you wanna hear it?”

“Absolutely!”

As Harper and Skylar headed back into the house, Elena smiled nervously at Alexis. Small talk wasn’t her forte, especially with people she didn’t know. All Elena knew about the Hollands was from social media and Skylar. Even though Blake had been an actress a few years ago, she and Elena never ran in the same circles.

“Come on. I’ll introduce you to the rest of the family since Harper is clearly preoccupied.”

“She’s adorable.”

“She’s been so excited to show Skylar her new song for weeks. When I told her you

all were stopping by tonight, she practiced all day.”

“All day,” Blake emphasized. She had one baby on her hip while Alexis picked up the other one. “It’s nice to meet you, Elena.”

“You, too. I’ve heard a lot about you two from Skylar. And I might have stalked your Instagram pictures. Your family is adorable.”

“Thank you. We’re lucky, that’s for sure.” Blake looped an arm around Alexis’s shoulder and pulled her close. She placed a casual kiss on her head. “Isn’t that right, babe?”

“The luckiest.”

Elena felt jealousy starting to mingle with sadness, so she turned her attention to the babies. She tickled one of the babies’ stomachs. “This is Archer, right?”

“It is. I’m impressed. Some of our friends still can’t tell them apart.”

“So this must be Reese.” Elena took hold of the baby’s small hand as she wrapped her fingers around Elena’s. “It’s good to meet you, too. You’re much bigger in person.”

“They’re growing so fast.” There was a twinge of sadness in Blake’s voice. “It’s hard to believe they’ll be a year old next month.”

“I know. I felt like I was pregnant for ten years, and then this last year has just flown by.”

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“I bet.” Elena smiled as Archer reached out for her. She carefully took him from Blake and put him on her hip. He rubbed his nose against hers and giggled. “Hi there, cutie.”

“That’s how Archer says hello. We blame my sister, Mason. She started doing that when he was born, and it’s never stopped.”

“I love that.”

“Come on, let’s go sit on the patio.”

Elena followed Alexis, Blake, and Reese back to the patio. Between the outdoor furniture was a small playmat with some toys, and Alexis sat Reese down. Assuming she should do the same with Archer, she tried to set the baby down, but he tightened his grip on her shirt.

“Archie is also a cuddler,” Alexis laughed. “Reese likes to cuddle if she’s sleepy, but that’s it. Harper was the same way. But Archie loves cuddles all the time.”

“And again, that’s Mason’s fault. She spoiled him all because we gave him her middle name.”

“Aww. That’s so sweet.” Elena sat down on the couch next to Alexis and placed Archer on her lap. “I saw the documentary you did for Mason’s organization. It was great.”

Blake blushed. “Thank you.”

Mason's Mission was a nonprofit service dog training organization. Blake had produced a documentary for the organization a couple of years ago, and Elena was impressed with how well it was done.

"That was your first producing credit, right?"

"It was."

"But not the last." Alexis was beaming with pride as she looked at her wife. "She's been working hard at a new movie, and it should be out later this year."

"Hopefully."

"It will be."

"I look forward to seeing it."

"What are we seeing?" Skylar walked back outside with Harper, who was carrying a guitar. She plopped down beside Elena, cooing a greeting at Archer as she did.

"Blake's new movie."

"Oh, I am so excited about that. I'm on the soundtrack, you know." It was Skylar who was beaming now. Elena playfully jabbed her in the ribs with her elbow.

"I didn't know that because you didn't tell me."

"Skylar," both Alexis and Blake scolded in unison.

"There's been a lot going on. The rehearsal, the tour, living out of a bus." Skylar shrugged. The sly smile on her face made Elena curious about what else she would

say. “Getting this one back.”

Alexis squealed and clapped her hands together. “Oh em gee, I knew it. I knew it. I told Blake I thought you two were together, and she told me I was crazy.”

“You can be,” Blake interjected, but Alexis never missed a beat.

“But I don’t know. I could just tell by the way Skylar looked when she FaceTimed that she was in love.”

“My damn face.” Putting an arm around Elena’s shoulders, Skylar pulled her closer and kissed her cheek. “Gives me away every time.”

“But it’s such a good face.”

Elena kissed her lips. She never imagined kissing someone in front of her friends would make her feel like she was on top of the world, but that’s exactly how Elena felt. Having Alexis and Blake know they were together was a huge relief to Elena. She knew they both understood life in the spotlight and wouldn’t say anything to anyone.

“I’m so happy for you two.”

“So, not to be a mood killer here, but I’m assuming this isn’t public knowledge, right?”

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“No.” Skylar shook her head. “We’ve made the decision to keep it private until after the tour.”

Elena felt guilt creeping up in her body. She hated that Skylar couldn’t be herself because she was holding her back. Skylar must have sensed the uneasiness and squeezed her shoulder before continuing.

“I’m sure you all understand.”

“We do.”

“Totally.”

“Whereas I don’t see myself staying in the music world, Elena wants to. So, we’ll have to figure out how to handle all of this after the tour. Elena coming out right now would take the spotlight off the tour and put it all on that, and that isn’t something either of us want. That’s why we’re trying to be careful.”

“I totally get that.” Blake nodded firmly. “And if you ever need help my agent, Salem, is great.”

Alexis huffed. “As long as she stays away from me.”

“Oh, stop it,” Blake laughed. “Alexis has beef with her because we used to date years ago before I ever met Alexis.”

“Doesn’t matter.” There was a grin on her face as she stuck her tongue out at Blake.

“See what I deal with?”

“I love it,” Skylar’s voice was dreamy. She tickled Archer, who was still contently cuddled against Elena. “Hey, Harper, why don’t you play your song for everyone?”

“I’ve been waiting for the grown-ups to finish talking.”

She looked exactly like a miniature Alexis as she sat cross-legged on a chair with her guitar in her hands. Everyone chuckled, and Harper began to play the song Elena knew all too well. After all, she wrote it with Skylar.

As Harper played, Blake recorded it on her phone. Elena and Skylar started singing along, which made Harper smile. At the end of the song, everyone applauded, even the babies who caught on to the clapping.

“You’re going to be joining us on stage before too long, Harp.” Skylar high-fived her once again as Harper giggled.

“Yeah, you’re totally hired if we need a new guitarist.”

“Thanks.” Harper giggled as she sat down the guitar and ran over to Alexis. She jumped into her lap and rested her head on her shoulder, seemingly suddenly shy. Alexis kissed her head in reassurance, and Elena’s heart melted.

She wanted that. There was no denying it. If the universe ever saw it fit for her to have a child, Elena knew she’d embrace that new journey. As she turned to look at Skylar, she was surprised to find her already looking back at her. And the look on her face told her she was thinking the same thing. Elena leaned in and kissed her.

“I love you.”

“Back at you.”

Chapter 22

Skylar

Half of the tour was already over, and Skylar honestly couldn't believe it. It seemed like it had just started, and yet they only had five more weeks on tour. Skylar tried not to think what the inevitable end to the tour would mean. Instead, she tried to focus on what Riley was saying about the journalist that would be arriving at any moment.

Riley had set up the interview with the music magazine before the tour started. The magazine wanted to feature the entire band and talk about the tour and what the future held for Maine Event. Granted, none of them knew the answer to that question. There had been talks of a new album or another tour, but none of them had committed to anything yet.

Skylar was seated at a long table along with her bandmates. She and Elena were in the middle, with Andy and Gordon on the other side of Elena and Erica and Michael beside Skylar. Riley had been giving them mock questions for nearly a half hour, and all of them were already over it.

“We know how to answer questions, Riley,” Andy whined as she crinkled the empty soda can in front of him with his hands. “We’ve all done interviews before.”

“But it’s been years since the last time the band did an interview together, and this is the first one after the breakup.”

Skylar didn't dare look away from Riley, but she felt every other eye was focused on her. She knew everyone but Elena blamed her for the band's breakup. Hell, so did most of their fans. As soon as word got out that Skylar's leaving was the reason for

their demise, she faced instant backlash online. Thankfully, social media didn't have as strong of a presence then as it does now, so the comments eventually died down, and people moved along. Although she hadn't been brave enough to see what fans were hypothesizing now, she could only assume some still held a grudge against her.

But that was a burden Skylar was willing to carry to keep the truth a secret. No one needed to know that Elena's inability to admit her feelings publicly for Skylar was the reason she left and the band split up. She was content to just let people assume what they wanted.

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Riley, on the other hand, clearly wanted them all to be on the same page.

“I’m sure the reporter will ask about the breakup, so, Skylar, do you want to comment on that when they do?”

“Me?”

“You’re the one that left,” Erica quipped, and Skylar shot her a glare. “You can get mad, but it’s the truth.”

“Leave Skylar alone.” Elena’s voice was elevated slightly. “She did what was right for her, and that’s all that matters.”

“You can say that because it never affected your career.”

Riley held up her hands as if she were a referee. “Okay, ladies, let’s not bicker. If the breakup is too testy of a subject, I can always interject and divert the questions back to the current tour.”

“I don’t care to answer questions,” Skylar clarified. “But I reserve the right to keep my reasons for leaving to myself.”

She glanced at Elena out of the corner of her eye and tried to quickly smile. Riley nodded, giving her the approval to give whatever answer she was comfortable with.

Before anyone could say anything else, a middle-aged woman in a black pencil skirt, red top, and higher heels than Skylar had ever seen someone wear walked into the

conference room of the hotel. The band had rented the room near the venue for the interview, and Riley had been sure to hire security to keep prying eyes out of the way. She had even worked with the magazine to set up a backdrop for promo photos that would run alongside the photos from the concert later that night.

“Hello, I’m Carmen Fleming with Three Chords Magazine.” She extended her hand out to Riley, who shook it. As they introduced themselves, Skylar leaned in toward Elena and whispered in her ear.

“Do I have your permission to slug Erica if she starts to out us?”

“Oh, one hundred percent.” Elena chuckled. They both knew she was joking. Or, well, mostly joking.

Thankfully, most of Carmen’s questioning was lighthearted and fun as she got to know each of the band members. She took the time to ask each one of them questions, which Skylar appreciated. It felt as if she were truly getting to know them. Riley also seemed pleased with how the interview was going.

That was until the inevitable question was asked.

“So, I know a lot of fans still wonder why the band broke up.”

Nervous laughter came from everyone in the room. Carmen must have noticed it because a smile formed on her lips.

“I see I’ve asked an awkward question.”

“It’s not awkward.”

Erica. Shit.

“We formed the band in high school, and we all started to grow and evolve at different paces. Going our own way was inevitable.” Erica looked over at Skylar and nodded slightly.

Wow. Wasn’t expecting that.

Skylar nodded back, silently thanking Erica for her answer.

“So, there’s no hard feelings about the band breaking up?”

“No,” Elena answered promptly. “We had an amazing run the first go around, and we’ve all been successful in our own ways since then. Erica has an amazing family. Michael has been a bassist on tons of hit songs. Andy, Gordon, and I have stayed busy still making music. And Skylar has been teaching guitar lessons in her hometown.”

Elena waited for a beat before continuing.

“And I think I speak for everyone up here when I say we never thought we’d have this chance to do a reunion tour. We are extremely grateful for this opportunity.”

Everyone agreed with Elena, and Carmen seemed pleased with the answer. As did Riley, who was seated beside Carmen and beaming with pride. Thankfully, Carmen’s next few questions were easier, and everyone seemed to be in a lighter mood.

That was until Carmen said, “So I have one more question for Elena and Skylar.”

Skylar felt her heart beating in her ears.

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“It was pretty clear before Maine Event broke up that there was a rift between you two. But things seem to be better between you two now. Did you all keep in touch over the years?”

“No,” Skylar and Elena answered as they nervously laughed.

“Wow, really? You two seem close now. In fact, I’ve seen the pictures of you two out together for dinner, and you look quite comfortable together.”

Skylar knew exactly what she was insinuating, and she didn’t like it. Although she’d seen the pictures Carmen was referencing, Skylar didn’t know why they were being brought up. Well, that was a lie. She did know. In fact, if Elena or Skylar had been a man, she would have flat-out asked the question she was tiptoeing around. And that pissed Skylar off.

“Elena and I have put the past behind us and moved on for the sake of the band. Maine Event has always been and always will be important to us, and we wanted to come together for this tour for our fans.”

“And Skylar and I were friends for years before the band made it big, and I’m glad that we’ve been able to reconcile that relationship.”

“Me, too.”

“Interesting.” Carmen’s deadpan response told them that wasn’t the answer she wanted. “So, the rumors of you two dating are untrue, then?”

Skylar and Elena looked shocked at each other before looking at Riley. Although Riley didn't know they were dating, Skylar knew she'd have their back. She quickly interjected.

"Let's keep the focus on the tour, please."

Carmen held up her hands. "I'm sorry if I overstepped. I'm just asking questions I see on social media."

"Well, we are clearly not on the same social media pages because I've never heard that rumor." Riley was holding her ground against the reporter. "And frankly, I think it's very disrespectful to ask such a personal question when this is supposed to be an article about the band and the tour."

Carmen gritted her teeth and nodded. "Fine."

Skylar's entire body was on fire. Suddenly, she worried that Carmen would include their responses in the article. She knew Riley would stop it if she could, but if any reporter insisted that, Skylar knew the rumors would start flying. And Skylar didn't know what that would mean for her and Elena. Her stomach was in knots at the thought.

"I'm sorry if I overstepped. The chemistry is just evident, so I thought I'd try to get a lead." Carmen shrugged. "But I guess not."

"Definitely not," Riley responded.

As the interview came to an end, Skylar didn't dare look at Elena. She was too angry and upset to focus on anything and didn't want to take it out on Elena. Skylar hated that she had to hide her relationship and that a reporter had the audacity to ask them if they were together just for the clickbait article. It angered Skylar more than she had

anticipated.

Standing to leave, Skylar felt Elena's hand on her arm.

"Sky."

"I just," Skylar sighed, not looking at Elena, "need a minute."

Exiting the conference room, Skylar found her way out to the pool and was thankful to find it empty. She let out a huff of air as angry tears fell from her eyes. Being gay had never been easy, but she didn't realize how hard it was to be gay in the spotlight. Especially when she was trying so hard to stay in the closet for Elena's sake, Skylar wished she had a punching bag to let out her frustrations.

"Hey." Riley's voice startled her, and she turned to face her. "I just talked to Elena, and she told me everything."

Skylar blinked a few times as she tried to process what Riley had just said. Had Elena really told her everything? Why would she do that?

"While I wished I'd known before that interview, I know now, and I can help you two navigate this."

"I don't want to make Elena come out before she's ready."

"She mentioned that, and I understand that. I'll do my best to shut down any rumors I hear. I'll try to set up some more interviews with reporters I personally know who will stay away from questions like that. That way, we can get out ahead of this and not give it a chance to grow. That should give you two some time to figure out what you want to do."

“We just want to wait until after the tour to do anything. We don’t want it to overshadow the tour, which we both know it would.”

Riley nodded. “I know. I get that, too. But from now on, I really need to be made aware of things like this so I don’t let some pretentious reporter ask questions like that.”

“She was pretentious,” Skylar laughed. “And I will. We will. I’m sorry we didn’t tell you.”

“It’s okay. I get it.” Riley didn’t offer up any explanation for her response, and Skylar didn’t inquire. “I’m going to get ready for tonight. You should too.”

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Riley was right. She would be needed at the venue in a couple of hours for sound check, and she needed to get her shit together. But first, she needed to find Elena.

Chapter 23

Elena

Carmen's questions kept swirling around Elena's mind. How dare she ask them if they were dating. It was beyond unprofessional. The whole point of the interview was to focus on the band, not Elena and Skylar's possible love life. No one but the two of them deserved to have any opinion on it.

However, Elena knew they weren't just a normal couple. They were the lead singers in a major band that was currently on a very publicized tour. If they had been a heterosexual couple, the rumors would have started long before now. But that didn't mean Elena had to be okay with it.

Especially not when the possibility of Carmen including her question in the article. Elena knew it was a possibility. No one had told Carmen it was off the record, so it was all fair game. That meant that Elena had to do one thing sooner rather than later.

"Ellie," Skylar was out of breath as she approached her. She slowed her run as she enveloped Elena in a tight hug. "Are you okay?"

"I'm okay. You?"

"I'm pissed she would ask that, but I can't say I'm surprised."

“Me either,” Elena sighed. “I told Riley about us.”

“She told me.”

“Is that okay?”

Skylar nodded. “Absolutely. I was going to if you hadn’t.”

“Good.” She took a deep breath and slowly let it out. “So, I’ve decided I need to tell my parents about me. About us.”

“What?”

“It’s past time. Today made me realize that. I can’t imagine them finding out via a stupid online article. They deserve to hear it from me first.”

“Are you sure? Do you want me to come with you?”

“I am, and no,” Elena smiled softly, “I need to do this on my own. I’m going to go there between shows this week.”

“You know I’ll support you always.”

“I know, and I love you for that.” Elena wrapped her arms around Skylar and pulled her close. She cuddled into her embrace. “This is just something I’ve needed to do for a while, and I know I need to do it if we’re ever going to be an actual couple.”

Skylar rubbed her hands up and down Elena’s back. “I’m proud of you, Ellie.”

“Showtime!” Johnny called out from somewhere backstage as Skylar and Elena made their way to the stage. The show was phenomenal, and Elena even caught a glimpse

of Carmen in the audience, seemingly enjoying the show. Hopefully, that meant she'd give them a great review.

After the show, Elena and Skylar spent the night on Elena's tour bus. Skylar requested a rental car for the next morning and drove Elena to the airport. They kissed goodbye in the car, thankful for the dark windows.

"Call me or text me whenever you get there."

"I will."

"And I can be on the next plane if you need me."

"I know." Elena leaned in and kissed her again. "Thank you. Are you going to the Cove?"

"Yeah, my plane leaves later today."

"Give Atlas a kiss for me."

"I will."

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After another kiss, Elena got out of the car and headed for security. She'd booked an early morning flight to Boston, hoping it would be less crowded. Thankfully, no one seemed to recognize her, so she made it to Boston with no issues. Elena rented a car, put her small carry-on in the back seat, and headed for her parents' home in Cambridge.

Although they had lived there for almost three years, Elena had only seen the house once. Felix and Adele Cruz had moved around so much that it was impossible for Elena to keep up. The last move had been due to Felix taking a job in the theology department at Boston College. Elena didn't have much contact with her parents anymore, but they used the occasional phone call to remind her that she needed to settle down with a nice Catholic man soon.

She mentally prepared herself for the same conversation as she pulled into a parking spot at the townhouse. All but one of her older siblings were married with families. Her eldest brother, Gabriel, was a priest, so Elena always knew he was her parents' favorite. If there was a scale of the five Cruz children, Elena knew she would be at the bottom of it.

Steeling herself for whatever was about to happen, Elena walked up the steps to the house and rang the doorbell. It took a few moments for the door to open, but when it did, her mother's smile grew wider.

"Elena!" Adele pulled her into a tight hug. "What are you doing here? Is everything okay? Why didn't you tell us you were coming? Come on in."

She ushered Elena into the house as she looked her over.

“You look thin. Have you not been eating?”

“Yes, Mom.”

“Felix!” Adele called out. “Come here. Elena is here.”

“Elena?” She heard her father’s gruff voice from somewhere in the house. “Why is she here?”

“I don’t know. Why don’t you come here so we can find out?”

Leading Elena into a living room, Adele motioned for her to sit down. Elena took a seat on a stiff chair that was clearly never sat upon. In fact, the entire house looked more like a staged showroom than a home. There were few personal touches in the home, and Elena shuddered at the fact it reminded her of her own house. Both were a stark contrast to Skylar’s home.

Skylar.

She wished she’d let Skylar come along with her. Elena needed her there; she knew that now.

“Elena,” her father nodded his head at her as he sat on the couch beside her mother, “what brings you here?”

Part of Elena was glad he had just cut to the chase. That was one thing Felix was known for. He wasn’t one to spend time talking to his kids just because. There always had to be a reason. To an extent, Adele had been the same way. She was there for her kids, but never without interjecting her own opinions, whether they were warranted or not.

“Well, I just wanted to come and see you two.” Elena exhaled sharply. “And to tell you something because there’s a chance it’ll be news before too long.”

“You’re pregnant!” Her mother shrieked as she clasped her hands together. Elena couldn’t tell if she was excited or mad, but both reactions annoyed her.

“Um, no. I’m not pregnant.”

“Oh,” the disappointment was clear in Adele’s voice. But it was quickly replaced by optimism as Adele scooted to the edge of the couch. “So, are you seeing someone?”

“A good Catholic man, I hope.”

It was now or never. Elena had to tell them and get it out in the open before she exploded.

“I am seeing someone, and they’re Catholic, just not practicing. And they’re not a man.” She watched the confused looks go across her parents’ faces. “I’m dating Skylar. Skylar Ford. You know her.”

“The woman in the band with you?” Adele’s deadpan voice was dripping with disappointment. “You’re dating a woman?”

“Unacceptable!” Felix slammed his hand down on the end table, startling Elena. “You cannot date a woman. That is against everything we have taught you.”

“You’re not gay, Elena. I would know if you were. You were raised in the church. You’re not gay. You’re just confused.”

Her blood was boiling. Although she had expected that reaction, it didn’t make it sting any less.

“I’m not confused, Mom. I love Skylar. I’ve loved her since we were together ten years ago.” She watched as her words registered with her parents. “I hid my true self for years because it was easier than dealing with the inevitable backlash. I ruined my relationship with Skylar the first time because I couldn’t say out loud that I am gay and that I am in love with Skylar.”

“Elena, darling, you cannot be gay.” Her mother laughed, although nothing was funny. “You’ve just been in the secular world too long. You need to get back into the church. You can go to confession and get back on the right track.”

“I am on the right track. This is who I am. I still believe in God. I still talk to God regularly. And you know what? He still loves me even if I am gay. I was hoping you could see me the way he does.”

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“How dare you claim to know what God thinks of you.” Felix stood and put his hand on his hips. “I have never supported your career choice because I knew one day it would take my little girl away from me. And today, you have proven to me that that time has come. We do not condone this behavior. And if you want to continue to be a part of this family, you will repent of your sins and come back to the church.”

Angrily standing, Elena held her ground against her father.

“I didn’t come here to start a screaming match with you. I knew this was a suicide mission when I came here, but I still respect you and Mom enough to be open with you about this. I didn’t want you to find out by reading an article online. I thought you deserved to hear it from me.”

“I deserved not to have heard it all,” he nearly spat the words at her. “If you continue this lifestyle, then you will be shunned from the family. You know it is wrong. You were raised better than this. How could you turn your back on your faith?”

“How could you turn your back on your daughter?” Elena sobbed angry tears. “You always prayed I would find someone who loves me and cherishes me and makes me happy. Well, guess what? I found that. It just happens to be with a woman instead of a man, and you’re too close-minded to see that gender doesn’t matter. What matters is that Skylar and I love each other.”

“Get out of my house!”

Her father’s booming voice sent shivers down Elena’s spine. She walked back toward the door, with Felix coming after her. Although he’s never raised a hand to them

before, Elena was suddenly worried if this would be the first time. Felix yanked open the front door and pointed outside.

“Don’t you dare set foot inside my house again until you have changed your ways.”

“Felix. Please. Don’t.” Adele sobbed a few feet behind him, and Elena wished she could talk more with her. But now wasn’t the time.

Nearly running down the stairs and to the rental car, Elena sped away as tears poured from her eyes. She hadn’t made any hotel reservations for the night, but that didn’t matter. Elena knew where she was going. Heading toward I-95, Elena headed north to Maine.

Chapter 24

Skylar

After an extended layover, Skylar had finally landed in Portland. Normally her dad would have picked her up, but with it being so late, Skylar opted to grab an Uber for the half-hour drive to the Cove. She checked her phone for any message from Elena, but still, there was none. Skylar checked her last message and saw it said Read, but Elena hadn’t responded yet.

Skylar typed out another message as she walked toward the exit.

Hey, Ellie. Just wanted to check in on you. Please call me when you can. I love you.

Hitting send, Skylar sighed heavily. She’d been worried about Elena all day. Skylar knew the conversation with her parents was bound to go badly, but she hoped with everything in her that maybe—just maybe—her parents would listen and understand. Elena deserved that.

Her phone buzzed, and Skylar quickly opened the message.

I love you too. Meet me outside.

“Outside?” Skylar mumbled as she picked up her pace to the airport’s exit. She looked around for Elena.

“Sky,” the voice was one she’d know anywhere. Stopping in her tracks, Skylar made eye contact and immediately knew something was wrong. She dropped her bag onto the ground and pulled Elena into a tight hug. “It was so bad.”

“Aw, baby, no. I’m so sorry.”

“They don’t want me in their life anymore.” Her sobs were uncontrollable yet understandable.

Skylar felt her heart shattering as Elena cried. She didn’t want to let her go as she tried to shield Elena from the other passengers as they mingled outside the airport. Her protectiveness was kicking in, and she looked around for a car Elena might have parked there.

“Did you drive here?”

Elena only nodded. She reached into her pocket, handed Skylar the key, and pointed at an idling SUV. Skylar helped her inside as she tossed her bag into the back and got into the driver’s seat as she canceled her Uber.

“Where are we going?”

“I know a place where we can be alone and talk.” Skylar shrugged. “Or not. I’m here for whatever you need.”

“I honestly don’t know what I need.”

Reaching out, Elena took Skylar’s hand and held it as they drove to the Cove. Skylar was thankful the road was mostly clear, allowing her to make the drive faster than usual. She parked the car by the old lighthouse as Elena squeezed her hand.

“I should have known we’d end up here.”

“It’s the perfect place to talk.”

As they exited the car, they took hold of each other’s hand as they made their way toward the lighthouse. Skylar had assumed they’d head up to the top, but Elena pulled her down toward the beach. They found a spot on the beach to sit, and Skylar put her arm around Elena’s shoulders.

“So, walk me through it. What happened?”

Elena recounted the conversation with her parents, and Skylar felt her blood boiling. She’d known Elena’s parents weren’t supportive of the LGBTQIA+ community, but she had hoped that they would have understood since it was their daughter. But clearly, Felix and Adele weren’t that kind of parents.

“He told me not to come back unless I was straight.”

“He said that?”

“Well, not exactly like that, but that was the gist of it, yeah.”

“I’m so sorry, Ellie. I never thought they’d react like that.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“But it kind of is.” Skylar gritted her teeth as Elena looked at her. “You’re with me, and that’s why you had to come out. If we weren’t together, then...”

“No.” Elena shook her head rapidly. “Don’t you ever think that. I love you, Skylar, and I want to be with you. I knew this was part of that then, and it doesn’t change anything now.”

Skylar nodded in agreement. “I just wish things didn’t have to be this way. I hate that us just being in love with each other is seen as some political or religious stance when it’s not.”

“On some level, it is, though. We could easily suppress our feelings for each other. Hell, I did that for years,” she laughed as the heaviness seemed to let up just a little. “But it’s not worth it. I was miserable, and I missed you all the time.”

“I wish you had told me.”

Elena glanced away from her as she ran her hands in the cool sand. “I didn’t know how. Not after how things ended.”

Looking back, Skylar didn’t know if she’d have even answered Elena’s calls or texts back then. Skylar had been so hurt by Elena that she never wanted to see her again. Granted, it was mostly because she was still madly in love with her and didn’t know how to process those feelings.

But Skylar understood now more than ever why Elena didn’t want to come out. All the things Elena had been worried about were slowly coming true as Elena inches further out of the closet. Skylar couldn’t blame Elena if she hurried back in and slammed the door in her face. Especially when her career could be the next thing to take a hit.

It pained Skylar to speak the words in her heart, but she loved Elena.

“We don’t have to say anything about us.” Skylar didn’t look at Elena as she spoke.

Instead, she focused on the waves gently crashing into the shore. “We can just keep it between us. Nobody needs to know that.”

“It’s bound to come out, Sky. You know that.”

“Then we can announce that it’s not true. Maybe if people hear it straight from us, they’ll believe it.”

“That goes against everything you stand for. Why would you even suggest that?”

Elena was right. Keeping their relationship hidden went against everything Skylar had been saying for years. Hell, they could have still been together if Skylar had that mentality back then. But the one thing that Skylar knew now that she didn’t know then was that her life was better when Elena was in it. And Skylar would fight heaven and hell to keep Elena in her life this time.

“It’s like we talked about before. I’m leaving the music world after the tour. You’re still going to have to live in it. And if staying in the closet and keeping us a secret keeps you safe and comfortable, then you should do that. I won’t push you to give more than you’re willing to give.”

Nodding her head, Elena wiped a few tears from her eyes. Skylar put both arms around her and pulled her closer.

“I’m too emotional to think clearly tonight.”

“I get that.” And Skylar truly did. “Have you eaten anything? We can grab some food on the way home if you’d like.”

“I’m really hungry, actually. I haven’t eaten all day.”

“Burgers or pizza?”

“Both,” Elena chuckled.

“I can make that happen.”

Heading back downtown, Skylar stopped at the Pizza Parlor to pick up a pizza before they made their way to Straight to Ale. It was a little past ten on a Monday night, and most of the crowd had already gone home for the night. Skylar and Elena found a spot on the patio that overlooked the ocean and sat the pizza down.

It wasn't long before Emily Crawford headed toward their table with two glasses of water. She was easily Skylar's favorite bartender and the two had been friends for years. They all ran in the same group, along with Alexis and Blake.

“I saw you two brought your own food to a restaurant,” she quipped. “You know, we do serve food here.”

“But not pizza,” Skylar corrected. “Emily, do you remember Elena?”

“I remember you more from your music than anything.” Emily reached out a hand to Elena, who shook it. “It's great to re-meet you. I'm sure we met in high school, but I don't remember.”

“Don't feel bad.” Elena laughed. “I don't either.”

“How's the tour going?”

“Good,” they responded in unison.

“That's great. Sophia and I have tickets to the Boston show and are super excited to

see you all in action.”

“Sophia is Emily’s fiancée.”

“Wife,” Emily corrected as she held up her hand to show off her diamond ring.

“Oops, sorry. I forgot.”

Emily snorted a laugh. “You were literally there when we got married. How did you forget?”

“Look, I’ve had a lot going on these past few months, so please forgive my forgetful brain.”

“I’ll forgive you if you give me a slice of that pizza.”

Elena turned the box toward Emily as she took a piece, then took down their orders. When they were alone again, Elena looked at Skylar and smiled.

“What’s that look for?”

“Is everyone in this town gay now?”

“There’s something in the water,” she said with a wink as she took a sip of her water. Elena rolled her eyes and laughed, and Skylar was thankful to see the sadness from earlier fade away slightly.

“I wish the rest of the world was as accepting as the Cove.”

“It is a magical place.”

“It is,” Elena sighed. “I wish we didn’t have to leave.”

“We have the tour.”

“Yeah.”

“But we can always come back here. Together, I mean. I live here, so I’ll obviously be here. But you can come and visit whenever after the tour. My door will always be open.”

Elena smiled slightly as she took another bite of pizza. Skylar could tell she was thinking, so she didn’t say anything to interrupt her.

“What if I just quit?”

“Quit... what?” Skylar played dumb. She knew exactly what Elena was thinking. But she also knew Elena was upset and emotional and bound to make rash decisions based on that. Skylar knew better than to get her hopes up yet.

“The past few weeks have just made me realize there’s more to life than touring and making music.” She shrugged, keeping her eyes away from Skylar’s. “I see that clearly when I’m here.”

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As Skylar watched Elena watch the ocean waves, she realized it too. She could see a life with the two of them in the Cove. Together as a family. The way Skylar had always envisioned it. It was a good vision.

If only life would let it become a reality.

Chapter 25

Elena

Elena hadn't been the same since her conversation with her parents. Granted, conversation was a loose word to describe it. There had been no conversing between them, only yelling. She hated the way things had gone between them, but Elena also wasn't surprised. And despite the fact she didn't usually talk to her parents anyway, the silence was deafening now.

Her mind had been a million miles away the last few days, and Elena knew she wasn't on her best game at last night's show. She'd been determined to focus more during soundcheck, but her mind was now on something else. Her friend Fallon had traveled to Chicago to see the show, and the two had plans for dinner. Fallon had suggested they go to her favorite restaurant that offered private rooms so they could avoid any nosy fans. Elena had eagerly agreed, knowing the privacy would help her open up to Fallon.

Other than Skylar, Elena would only trust Fallon with her deepest thoughts. And Fallon had already walked the road that Elena was getting ready to walk. Fallon was out in Hollywood, so hopefully, she could help Elena navigate the world on the other

side of the closet.

Elena eagerly awaited Fallon's arrival at the restaurant. She knew fans and, most likely, paparazzi would know they were at the restaurant, so Elena had chosen a form-fitting, V-neck black dress with high heels and silver jewelry. Her perceived confidence was high enough that Elena knew she looked good. The only thing she wished was that Skylar could be there with her. Fallon had said Skylar could come along, but Elena needed to talk openly about her worries regarding their relationship.

The door to the restaurant opened, and Fallon walked in wearing a sleeveless sundress with ballet flats as cameras flashed behind her.

Dammit. Of course, the paparazzi followed her here.

The paparazzi seemed to follow Fallon wherever she went. She had that classic beauty of luscious blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes that turned heads everywhere she went. Fallon had been on a press tour promoting her new movie. The band's tour and the movie's tour happened to line up perfectly, so they were both in Chicago at the same time. Elena just wished the paparazzi would leave them alone. Thankfully, the restaurant had strict rules and kept the paparazzi at bay.

"Hey, pretty lady." Fallon hugged Elena quickly. She normally has a few inches on Elena, but their choice of shoes made them more even in height. "You look good."

"I look good?" Elena laughed. "Have you looked in the mirror lately? You're stunning."

"I'm telling you, vacation."

Fallon had been harping on Elena for years to take a vacation. The closest Elena had gotten to one was a week off from playing bars when she had a head cold. She knew

she needed more, and maybe she could take Skylar on a much-needed vacation after the tour.

“I know, I know. I promise I’ll take a break after the tour.”

“A vacation, Elena. A vacation.”

“Ms. Rogers?” The maître d’ approached them with a smile on his face. “Your table is ready.”

“Perfect. Thank you.”

Fallon flashed the smile that had gained her numerous nominations over the years, and they followed the gentleman through the restaurant. There were several small seating areas behind sliding frosted doors, and he led them inside one of them. He and Fallon discussed the wine list as Elena sat down at the table for two. Elena usually drank her wine from a box, so she had next to no input on what wine they should pair with their meal.

“Coming right up, Ms. Rogers.”

As the maître d’ left the room, Fallon sat down across from Elena and smiled.

“I’m so glad we got to do this. It’s been too long.” She picked up the water glass on the table and took a sip. “So, catch me up. How are things with the ex?”

Elena nervously laughed. “Well, funny story.”

Fallon leaned onto the table slightly toward Elena. “Ohhh, tea time.”

“Maybe not the way you think.” She laughed again, still nervous to tell Fallon about

Skylar. “We are actually dating.”

“What?” Fallon shrieked as she laughed. She did a happy dance in her seat and reached across the table for Elena’s hand. “Oh em gee, you have to tell me everything. Start at the beginning and leave nothing out.”

Elena recounted the last few weeks to Fallon starting with going to the Cove, to the conversation with her parents. Fallon listened intently as if her life depended on it. They only paused to place their order. By the end, she sat back in her seat and let out an exasperated sigh.

“Damn. You’ve had a busy few weeks.”

“You’re telling me.”

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“But firstly, I am so sorry about your parents. That isn’t fair to you at all, and I pray that one day they will come around.”

“Thank you. I do, too.”

“So,” Fallon leaned back in her seat, sipping on her wine, “you and Skylar back together. How does that make you feel?”

Elena giggled as her smile spread wide across her face.

“That’s all the answer I needed,” Fallon teased. “I’m happy for you, Elena. You deserve someone great, and it’s obvious that Skylar makes you happy.”

“She does.”

“So, how are you going to navigate this?” Classic Fallon, cutting right to the chase. “I haven’t seen any news about you two, so I’m assuming it’s not public knowledge.”

“It’s not.”

“Ahh.”

“We talked about it, and we want to wait until after the tour. It’ll overshadow it if we don’t.”

Fallon nodded. “I get that. My movie that came out right after I did tanked because the press was all on me and my personal life, so I respect the decision to wait.”

“Why do I feel like there’s a but coming?”

“But be careful.” Fallon’s voice was firm but kind. “The world is so different now. Everyone with a phone is a paparazzi whether they intend that or not. One photo taken without your knowledge can be posted online and spread around the world with any narrative while you’re completely unaware the picture was even taken.”

Elena winced as she remembered the exact situation Fallon had been in last year.

“I know you’re careful, but you’ll have to be even more careful if you want to protect your peace with Skylar.”

“See, here’s the thing.” Elena hadn’t said the words she was about to say out loud yet. “I think I’m ready to make it public.”

“Holy shit.”

“My exact reaction.”

“This is huge, Elena. Are you sure?”

“I am.”

“Well, hell yeah. I’m proud of you.”

“I haven’t talked it over with Skylar yet, but I definitely want to do it after the tour. I think it’s the right call to wait, but I definitely don’t want to wait too long.”

“Yeah, the longer you wait, the longer you have to keep it a secret.”

Elena nodded. “Exactly. And I don’t want to wait.”

“I’m here for you every step of the way, my friend.”

“Thanks. I’ll need you for sure.”

With the big news out of the way, Elena was relieved to settle into a comfortable conversation with Fallon as they ate their meal. They caught up on their lives and their respective tours, and their dating lives. Fallon admitted she was in a dry spell and wondering if she’d ever meet someone worth her time.

“Maybe I need to come to the Cove and find someone,” Fallon joked as they left the restaurant.

They smiled at the small group of paparazzi that were outside the restaurant as they made their way into the waiting limousine. Fallon had arranged the limo for them, and Elena had to admit she loved it. She felt extremely fancy as she sipped on champagne and rode to the venue in style.

When they arrived at the venue, Elena led Fallon to Skylar’s tour bus and knocked. On the other side of the door, she hears Skylar say, “It’s open.”

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Elena opened the door as she and Fallon walked inside. Skylar walked out of the bedroom with a huge smile on her face. She quickly kissed Elena, and it made Elena's heart soar.

"Hey, how was dinner?"

"It was great. Sky, this is Fallon." Elena motioned toward Fallon. "Fallon, this is Skylar."

"It's so great to meet you." Skylar shook Fallon's hand. "I've seen all your movies, and they're great."

"Thanks, Skylar. I've listened to all your albums and think they're great too."

"They're great because of me." Skylar winked, which made Elena's stomach fill with butterflies. She jokingly rolled her eyes as Skylar laughed. "I'm teasing. They're great because of Ellie, obviously."

"You two are perfect for each other," Fallon stated as she sat down on the small couch.

"Hell yeah, we are." Skylar sat down beside her, and she pulled Elena down onto her lap. Elena wrapped an arm around her neck as she enjoyed the closeness of their bodies. "So, Fallon, do you have any good Elena stories to share?"

"Oh, boy, do I."

“Please don’t,” Elena jokingly begged.

“I’ll let you tell a story about me if you let her tell me one about you.”

Elena pretended to contemplate the offer, then nodded. But just as Fallon was about to speak, there was another knock at the door. Elena jumped off Skylar’s lap as Skylar walked to open the door.

“Time to head backstage.” It was Johnny, which meant showtime must be getting close. “Show time is in a half hour. Is Elena with you?”

Skylar glanced over at Elena.

“I’m here.”

Johnny stepped onto the bus. He waved at Elena, then noticed Fallon.

“Well, I didn’t know we had Hollywood royalty in the audience tonight.” He had a dorky grin on his face as she straightened his tie before holding his hand out to Fallon. “I’m Johnny Lundy. I manage these two.”

“Well, more power to you, Johnny. I know that has to be one hell of a job.”

Johnny laughed. “You have no idea.”

As Skylar and Elena headed backstage, Fallon made her way to her seat with Johnny escorting her. Harlow had already arranged extra security for the show, but Elena was sure there wouldn’t be any issue.

The show was one of the best Maine Event had ever put on. Skylar and Elena were on fire, and the rest of the band was on the same level. Every note and chord was perfect,

and the audience gave them a three-minute standing ovation at the end. As they headed backstage, Harlow greeted them in a panic.

“What’s wrong?” Elena quickly asked as Harlow’s eyes were locked with hers.

“It’s your dad, Elena.”

The entire world stopped as Elena reached out and grabbed Skylar’s hand.

“He’s had a massive heart attack.”

“What?” Skylar gasped as she covered her mouth with her hand. Elena felt the tears starting to fall from her eyes.

“He’s in a medically-induced coma and still in critical condition. I’ve already got you a plane out to Boston and will have a car waiting on you when you get there.”

“I’m going with her.”

“I got you a ticket, too.” Harlow offered a sad smile to Skylar. “I’ve talked to his doctor, and she is going to call you when she has more information, okay?”

Elena could only nod, so Skylar took over for her.

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“Thank you, Harlow. I’ll keep an eye on her and keep you posted.”

“Thanks, Skylar. Your plane leaves in an hour, so you need to get to the airport. I’ve called a car, and it should be here soon.”

“They can take my limo.” Fallon had come backstage after the show and must have heard the entire conversation. “It’s already here, and I don’t need it. I’ll take the car when it gets here.”

“You’re a lifesaver, Fallon.” Harlow expressed her thanks as Elena and Skylar headed to the buses to pack quickly. Fallon followed them, and Skylar turned to her.

“Can you grab some stuff for me and just throw it into my suitcase? I need to keep an eye on Elena.”

“Of course,” Fallon nodded as she headed to Skylar’s bus as Skylar followed Elena into the other bus. She barely had the door closed when Elena burst into sobs and wrapped her arms around Skylar.

“Oh, Ellie, sweetie, I know you’re scared, but your dad is so tough.”

“He can’t die.”

“He won’t.” Skylar’s words were confident, but Elena knew she didn’t control that.

“He won’t,” she repeated as she held Skylar, and they cried.

“Do you think I caused this?” It was the only thing Elena had been able to think since

she'd heard the news. "By telling him?"

"Ellie, no." Skylar tightened her hug. "Don't think that."

"It's hard not to," she sobbed into Skylar's shoulder. Elena had no idea how long she cried or how she got into the limo with Fallon and Skylar on either side of her.

All she knew was that her last words with her father could have very easily been in anger.

Chapter 26

Skylar

Elena had barely said a word since they'd left Chicago. She'd been quiet on the car ride to the airport, silent as they flew in the small private plane to Boston, and only let out a few sobs as they rode in the Uber to the hospital. Skylar squeezed Elena's hand that she'd been holding through all of that.

"You ready?"

"I don't know." Elena was heartbroken; Skylar could tell by the pain in her eyes. She wished more than anything she could take that pain away from Elena. "I keep feeling like this is my fault."

"It's not, Ellie."

"But do you see why I think that?" Tears poured from her eyes again as she dropped Skylar's hand and walked a few feet away from her. She needed the space, and Skylar was willing to give it to her. "I told him last weekend that I'm gay, and then he had a heart attack. That man is the healthiest person I know. He's never had any

health issues. So why now? Why this? I can't help but think I caused it."

Skylar wanted to tell her she didn't, that it was just her mind attacking her with negative thoughts. But Skylar knew giving Elena facts now would only upset her more. So Skylar stayed quiet, letting Elena rant through her feelings.

"I know it sounds crazy. Hell, I've felt crazy for the past three hours. But I can't change the way my brain thinks. You weren't there, Skylar. You didn't see how angry he was. Looking back, I'm surprised he didn't have a heart attack right then and there in the living room."

She was borderline hysterical, and Skylar was suddenly worried Elena would work herself up into a heart attack.

"And why am I here? It's not like he'd want me here. He made it abundantly clear the other day that he wants nothing to do with me if I'm gay. And guess what? I am! I can't change that."

It was rare to see Elena so angry. She usually kept her emotions more in check or at least subdued when out in public. Although there weren't many people mingling in and out of the hospital so late, Skylar knew anyone could be listening to their conversation. Skylar knew she needed to get Elena inside and calmed down soon.

But before Skylar could say anything, Elena's shoulders dropped, and she whimpered.

"It shouldn't be this way," Elena sobbed as her angry resolve melted away. She went to Skylar willingly and hugged her. "He's supposed to love me no matter what. Why can't he just love me for me?"

"I don't know, baby." Skylar kissed her head as she held her close. "I'm so sorry."

As she was holding Elena, the door to the hospital opened, as Adele Cruz stepped outside. She immediately locked eyes with Skylar, but it took her a moment to realize who she was. An almost reluctant smile formed on her face as she walked over to them.

“Elena.”

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At the sound of her mother's voice, Elena turned around and faced her. Skylar could almost feel Elena's hesitation about whether to go to Adele or not. The latter won out, at least for now.

"Hey, Mom. How's he doing?"

Skylar could tell more by what Adele didn't say than what she did say. It was clear that Felix wasn't doing well, and Skylar's heart broke. Although Elena was never close to her parents, they were still her parents. They were family, no matter how they might feel about her now.

"He's stable. The doctors," her voice cracked, "they'll know more if he wakes up."

"If?"

Adele nodded. "It was a massive heart attack, Elena. They said it's a miracle he lived long enough to make it to the hospital."

Elena gripped tighter onto Skylar's hand.

"Come on inside. He's still in a coma, but the doctors say he can hear us."

"I don't know."

She looked at Skylar as if she had any insight on what she should do. But Skylar didn't know. If it was her dad, Skylar would have already been by his bedside. However, Elena didn't have that same relationship with Felix. Skylar tenderly tucked

Elena's hair behind her ear.

"I'll go with you if you want."

Elena nodded, and they followed Adele back into the hospital and up to the third floor. Skylar could feel Adele's judging eyes on them and their intertwined fingers. But Skylar didn't care. She wasn't ashamed to show Adele that she truly loved her daughter.

"He's in here. Marco, Margo, Juan, and Julien were here earlier and will be back tomorrow, so you can have the room to yourself." Adele looked Skylar up and down as her eyes narrowed slightly. "Maybe you could give her a moment alone."

"I'll do what Elena needs." Skylar was determined to stand her ground against Adele. It was clear Adele wasn't used to that, and she looked at Elena to back her up.

As soon as Elena looked at her with sad eyes, Skylar knew she wanted to be alone with her father but didn't want to say that. Skylar pulled Elena into another hug, holding her tight as she placed a kiss on her forehead.

"I'll be right here."

"Thank you," Elena whispered as she kissed Skylar on the lips. It was the first time they'd ever kissed in front of Adele, and Skylar could only imagine the look of disappointment that was aimed at her. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

She watched Elena walk into the room and close the door behind her. Skylar expected to see an angry look on Adele's face when she turned around, but instead, it was something different.

“You love my daughter?”

Skylar couldn't tell if it was a statement or a question. She nodded. “I do, very much.”

“Hmm.” Adele walked over to a vinyl chair against the wall and sat. Skylar waited for a beat before taking a seat a few chairs down from her.

The silence in the hallway was the loudest Skylar had ever heard. Making small talk with Adele seemed pointless. How could she make light conversation while her husband was in critical condition down the hall and her daughter's gay lover was sitting next to her?

Leaning her head back against the wall, Skylar closed her eyes. Skylar had been up for too long and was in dire need of sleep. Or, at the very least, a nap. She was just about to drift off when Adele spoke up.

“I know that Elena has probably told you about what happened.”

Skylar was wide awake now and turned her attention and body toward Adele.

“We raised Elena differently than this. All of my children but Elena have followed Felix and me in the faith. But Elena has always marched to the beat of her own drum.” Adele laughed sadly. “Literally, I suppose. When she first told us she was in a band, I thought it was a phase. Then Maine Event hit it big, and I thought she'd come back to us once it had run its course.”

A nurse walked back, and Adele waited until she passed to continue.

“I thought when the band broke up, and she settled down with Peter that she would finally start living the life we had planned for her since she was a baby.”

Skylar cleared her throat. “Respectfully, Adele, Elena’s life is hers to live. Not yours.”

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She knew she was treading dangerous territory, but Skylar wasn't going to let Adele talk down about Elena. Elena had worked her ass off to achieve everything she had in life, and her parents should be proud of that. Beside her, Adele sighed.

"I know, but I don't expect you to understand. You don't have kids. You don't know what it's like to have them go against everything you taught them."

"I know I'm not the most religious person, but I did go to church enough to know that God loves everyone no matter what. And if He makes everyone in His own image, then he made Elena exactly how she is."

Adele seemed to think about the words, so Skylar kept talking.

"Your daughter has shared her musical gift all over the country and even the world. She spends time with each fan at meet and greets and thanks them for coming to the show, and that she's thankful for them. There's a reason Elena is so beloved and had a career after Maine Event. She's spreading the love that you taught her to have around the world to the people that need it."

Still, Adele said nothing. She looked away from Skylar at a spot on the tile floor.

"And I know you wanted Elena to follow the social norms and be with a man. But I can assure you, Adele, that I love Elena more than anyone else on this planet ever could. I've loved her for years. Hell," Skylar laughed, but Adele's quick look up at her told her cussing was not funny, "sorry. I was just going to say that the band broke up the first time because I loved Elena so much, but she didn't want to come out then. She didn't want to upset you or Felix or anyone else who still saw her as a good

Catholic girl.”

Adele’s brow furrowed in confusion. “So, wait. You’re telling me that you and Elena were together ten years ago, and I never knew?”

“We were.”

“But why? Why didn’t she tell us then? She just told us you left the band, and we never asked any more questions.”

“She stayed in the closet to make life easier for you and Felix.” Skylar shrugged. “It was never my place to make Elena do anything she isn’t ready to do. I don’t know if you’ve met your daughter, but she’s a little stubborn.”

“A little?” Adele heartedly laughed. “She’s just like her father. Stubborn as a mule.”

“But you gotta love them.”

“I do,” she sighed and wiped a tear from her cheek. “I do love Elena.”

“I know you do.”

Skylar stood and moved to the chair beside Adele. She gently picked up her hand and placed it on her own as she gave it a squeeze. When Adele made eye contact with her, Skylar smiled.

“And I need you to understand that I love Elena, too. I thought I blew my chance with her ten years ago, but the universe brought us back together for a reason that’s bigger than a Maine Event reunion tour. I’d be lying if I said Elena and I had anything figured out for life after the tour, but I can assure you that I am not going anywhere.”

Adele covered Skylar's hand with hers and smiled. "I'm glad."

Chapter 27

Elena

The methodical beeping of the machines was almost in sync with Elena's own heartbeat. She hadn't been able to move from her spot by the door since she entered the hospital room. Elena had never seen her father take a sick day, let alone seen him in a hospital bed attached to more machines than Elena could count. He looked smaller than his six-foot-tall frame. Maybe it was just the fact Elena wasn't used to seeing him lying down.

Felix Cruz had always had a bigger-than-life personality. He commanded any room he walked in and always had a smile on his face. Or, well, he did, unless he was yelling at his daughter when she came out to him. Elena wondered if her parents had told any of her siblings. None of them were close; her brother was the only one that occasionally contacted her when he wanted money, and often Elena just ignored his requests. She'd worked hard for her money and didn't freely give it to people who didn't need it.

Elena wondered for the millionth time in her life how things could be different if she was actually close to anyone in her family. She'd grown apart from her siblings as they were older and already out of the house by the time Elena was old enough to hang out with. Then when Maine Event got big, they all thought Elena was too good for them. And maybe, on some level, she did have that mentality. It was the first time in her life her siblings paid her any attention, even if it was negative attention.

Her parents had never made it a point to have family dinners or gatherings. They were too busy with their own careers to worry about all their kids getting along or developing actual relationships. As far as Elena knew, none of her siblings were in

regular contact with each other.

It was a stark contrast to other families in the Cove. Maybe it was because they were Cove transplants. Maybe the magic that seemed to live in the Cove was only available to those that were born there. Elena's mind wandered back to their time with Alexis and Blake and their sweet family. There was no way those three kids wouldn't be the best of friends as they grew up. Even if she didn't want to admit it, she wished she had that.

A soft knock on the door startled her from her thoughts. She had assumed it was Skylar or her mother, but a nurse entered instead. He offered Elena a smile and walked over to the bedside.

"Hi, I'm Shawn. I've been taking care of your dad since he was admitted to the CCU."

"Thank you." Elena offered him a quick smile. "I'm Elena."

Shawn grinned and laughed. "Yeah, I know."

"Oh. Duh."

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Elena was used to being recognized in public, but having her father's nurse recognize her caught her off guard. The band's popularity had clearly reached farther than she'd realized.

"I have tickets to your show here in a couple of weeks."

"Oh, well, thank you."

As Shawn went to work taking her father's vitals and logging them into his tablet, Elena slowly walked over to the vinyl chair by the bed and sat. He was breathing on his own, which Elena thought was a good sign. Cautiously reaching out, Elena took hold of his hand.

"Between you and me," she slowly exhaled as she looked at Shawn, "how is he? I've only talked to my mother."

"He's in critical but stable condition."

"Is he more critical or stable?"

"It just means his vitals are within normal limits and stable at this time, but that could change due to the seriousness of the heart attack." Shawn sat his tablet down on the table by the bed. "A heart attack stops blood flow to the heart, and this can cause damage depending on how severe the blockage is. They got a stent put in quickly, so they're hopeful about his outcome."

"Good." Elena nodded. "That's good."

“His heart surgeon should be in early, and he’ll stop by. I can try to answer any questions you have, though.”

“When should he wake up?”

“We don’t really know. It varies by each person.”

“But he can hear me, right?”

Shawn smiled. “Yeah, he can hear you. I’ll check back on him later.”

“Thanks, Shawn.”

As Shawn left the room, Elena sat on the edge of the chair and propped her elbows up on the bed. She kept a tight grip on her father’s limp hand. Elena didn’t know what to say, but she hoped the words would come to her.

“Hey, Dad.” She let out a dry laugh. “That sounds dumb. But I don’t know how to do this. You and I have never had an open relationship. And I know that recently I’ve upset you, but I hope that one day we can move past this. Because I want my dad in my life. And I was hoping you could get to know Skylar. She’s so great, Dad. I know if you give her a chance, you’ll like her. She loves to fish, so you finally know someone with a boat.”

Elena paused, watching her father’s chest methodically rise and fall. She wished she knew if he was listening.

The door opened again, but this time it was Adele. She had a cup of coffee in each hand and sat Elena’s on the table. Adele pulled the other vinyl chair up beside Elena’s and sat down. They sat in silence for a few moments before Adele bumped her shoulder against Elena’s.

“I talked to Skylar.”

“Yeah?”

Adele nodded a slight smile on her face. “I know that we didn’t give you the perfect coming out story, but I want you to know that your dad and I are trying. He’s been praying nonstop since you left. I know he’s struggling; we both are, but you’re our daughter, and we love you.”

“I love you too, Mom.”

As Adele wrapped an arm around her shoulders, Elena leaned into the embrace.

“I hope you can get to know Skylar and know how happy she makes me.”

“I can see that. And I know she loves you, which I have to give her credit for. You are not easy to love.” They laughed, and Elena rolled her eyes. “No, but seriously, Elena, I like Skylar. It makes my heart happy that she came here to be with you during this time. I will need more time before I start going to those Gay Pride things, but I want you to know I’m trying.”

“That’s all I can ask for. Thank you.”

“Thank you for telling us.”

Elena smiled and turned her attention to her father. She still had a tight grip on his hand, which was still limp.

“I wish he would wake up.”

“Me, too.”

“How did this happen? I always thought Dad had a perfect bill of health.”

“I don’t know. We had just gotten home from Mass, and he was going to work on his crossword puzzles out on the patio. I went to check on him a little later and found him slumped over the table.”

“Oh, Mom.” Elena’s heart broke for her mother. She couldn’t imagine how that must have been.

“I called the ambulance, and they rushed him into surgery. They put a stent in but said they’d need to do a few more tests to make sure there’s no more damage. But they’re hopeful he’ll make a good recovery.”

“Good. That’s good.”

“It is.” Adele stood and walked around to the other side of the bed. She sat her coffee cup down and squeezed his arm. “You know, other than when I was having babies, we’ve never been in the hospital. We never talked about what would happen if one of us...”

Her voice trailed off as she brushed tears from her eyes.

“Make sure you and Skylar talk about it.”

Despite how morbid the idea may be, Elena knew it came from a place of love. And it

wasn't lost on Elena that her mother had acknowledged them as a serious couple. Her conversation with Skylar must have gone well.

Another knock on the door was followed by Skylar entering the room. She had her hands tucked into the pocket of her tight black jeans and walked over to Elena. As she massaged Elena's shoulders, Elena realized how comforting the simple gesture was. Elena smiled up at Skylar.

"I heard you and Mom had a good talk."

"We both agreed you're a stubborn ass."

"Skylar," Adele scolded as she busted out laughing, "I said stubborn mule."

"Same thing." She laughed as Elena enjoyed the sound.

"Elena's not an ass." Her father's quiet voice was followed by a cough as he slowly opened his eyes, and his grip tightened on Elena's hand. All three of them turned their attention to him. "She's headstrong, just like me."

"We agreed on that, too." Adele laughed as she leaned down and kissed Felix's lips. "You're awake."

"I am. What time is it?"

"It's after two in the morning."

Felix groaned. "I should go back to bed."

"We'll leave you alone so you can rest, Dad." Elena went to let go of his hand, but Felix didn't let go. She made eye contact with him and smiled. "I'll be back

tomorrow. I promise.”

“I don’t want you to go without knowing that I heard you.” He didn’t have to clarify what he’d heard. “I’m old, but I can try to understand this. Maybe Skylar can take me fishing sometime so we can talk.”

“Absolutely,” Skylar nodded as she wrapped her arms around Elena’s waist from behind and pulled her close. “I’d love to take you out on my boat sometime.”

“It’s a plan.”

His eyes were heavy, and he slowly drifted back to sleep. Elena gently let go of his hand as they left the room and went out into the hallway. All the time, Skylar kept her arm around her waist.

“Do you all have a place to stay tonight?”

“We do. Riley got us a hotel.”

Adele nodded. “Okay. Good.”

“We’ll stop back by in the morning. We don’t have to leave right away, so we can stay for a bit.”

“Thank you for being here.”

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“Of course, Mom. Thanks for letting me know.”

“And thank you for coming with her, Skylar.” Adele surprised them both by wrapping Skylar into a bear hug. It warmed Elena’s heart to know her mother was trying.

As they bid her goodnight, they took an Uber to a nearby hotel and checked in. Elena was exhausted as she leaned on Skylar’s shoulder while they waited for the elevator to arrive. Once inside, Elena kissed Skylar.

“Thank you for coming with me.”

“There’s literally nowhere else I’d rather be than with you.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

The door to the elevator slowly closed as Elena kissed her again. No matter how tired they were, she knew sleep was going to be delayed.

Chapter 28

Skylar

With Elena’s dad expected to get discharged from the hospital soon, she and Skylar had flown to Ohio for the next show. Elena had been quieter than usual the last few

days but understood why. She tried her best to be there for her as much as she could. Skylar knew Elena felt her support.

If the last few days had taught Skylar anything, it was that she didn't want to face whatever life would throw at her without Elena by her side. They had remained strong and steadfast through the ordeal with Elena's father, and Skylar felt they'd come out stronger on the other side.

She smiled at Elena, who was getting ready for the show by applying her makeup just right. Skylar watched her as she carefully selected the perfect lipstick color from her massive makeup bag. Holding her mouth open just right, Elena applied the red lipstick before smacking her lips together, making Skylar laugh.

"What's so funny?"

"You're so focused." Skylar mimicked the way Elena applied her lipstick as she walked over to her. She leaned on the counter and smiled down at Elena.

"I have to make sure it's perfect." She ran her hands through her hair as she made sure it was ready for the show. Elena looked up at Skylar, batting her long eyelashes. "What do you think?"

"I think you look beautiful."

"You do, too."

Slowly standing, Elena put her hands on either side of Skylar's waist. She had Skylar pinned against the counter with her palms lying flat on the counter behind Skylar. Skylar took a moment to kiss Elena and soaked in the way their lips felt together. There was no doubt in Skylar's mind that she could stay lip locked with Elena forever.

“I love you,” Elena whispered into her ear as she kissed Skylar’s neck. Skylar knew it would leave a trail of red lip stains, but she didn’t care. She’d deal with that later.

“I love you, too.”

“How long do we have until showtime?”

“Not long enough to do what my mind wants to do to you.”

“Does it include this?”

In a quick motion, Elena unzipped Skylar’s pants and plunged her hand down her panties. Skylar wasn’t ready for Elena’s fingers on her clit, and she gasped at the sensation. Elena’s touch was soft but quick as she slipped Skylar’s pants down her hips for easier access. She spread her legs wider to give Elena more room, and Elena took the invitation.

Elena thrust two fingers inside Skylar as she pumped them methodically in and out. Leaning her head back, Skylar let Elena bring her to an orgasm. She gripped tightly onto the counter’s edge as she moaned in pleasure. There were a lot of things Elena was good at, and giving orgasms was definitely one of them.

Just as Skylar was about to reciprocate the gesture, there was a knock at the dressing room door. Elena quickly removed her hand from Skylar’s pants as Skylar worked to quickly pull them back up. The door opened—note to self, lock the door next time—and Riley walked in. Her expression went from shock to horror to embarrassment in a flash.

“Oh, my gosh. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Skylar and Elena responded in unison.

Riley looked uncomfortable as she shifted her weight from one foot to the other. She had her phone in her hand, and her face was flushed.

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“So, um, this,” Riley gestured to them, “is what we need to talk about.”

Skylar’s stomach made a free fall to the floor. What could there possibly be to talk about? Riley knew they were together, and so far, that hadn’t been an issue with anything. The tour was still sold out, the merchandise was selling left and right, and the albums were back on the top one hundred lists. Everything had been going well, so what was the problem?

Riley tapped on her phone, then turned it around so they could see it. As soon as Elena and Skylar saw the picture staring back at them, they both gasped. It was a candid picture of them kissing in the elevator at the hotel in Boston. Skylar hadn’t remembered seeing anyone in the lobby that night, but apparently, someone was watching them.

“Where is that posted?” Elena grabbed the phone, examining the photo.

“It’s on Reddit on a Skylena forum.”

“Skylena?” Skylar asked in confusion. “What is that?”

Riley grimaced. “It’s the ship name people have for you two.”

Skylar blinked once, then twice. She looked at Elena, who looked just as confused as she felt.

“Like SwanQueen?”

“Yeah,” Riley nodded.

Taking the phone back from Elena, she clicked off the photo to show them the forum that was full of comments and questions about Skylar and Elena’s assumed relationship. Skylar quickly scrolled through them as Elena read them beside her.

“Apparently it’s been a pretty popular forum since the tour started. A lot of people assume you two are together. Or they want to believe that’s true. So once this photo was posted, the forum lit up. One of my reporter friends called me about it, asking for a comment. By the time I was able to look into it, the photo had already been shared across social media.”

“What the fuck?” Skylar groaned. “We’ve been so careful. How could they do that? Just share a photo without permission?”

“Everyone is paparazzi these days,” Elena repeated the phrase Skylar had heard her say before. “How dare they do this? Who takes a private photo like that and posts it on the internet? This is an invasion of privacy.”

“I know.”

“Is there anything we can do?” Skylar looked at Riley, desperate for her to have an answer. But Riley just shook her head.

“Not really. It would be impossible to completely remove the photo from the internet. It’s probably already saved to hundreds if not thousands of phones.”

“I’m so sorry, Elena.” Skylar turned toward her. She could feel the tears nipping at the corner of her eyes. “I never thought this would happen.”

“It’s not your fault, Sky. We’re both in that picture as willing participants in the kiss.”

She sighed heavily as her shoulders dropped. “We just have to deal with the consequences now. At least my parents know.”

It wasn’t much of a bright spot, but it was at least something. Skylar knew Elena was worried about the potential repercussions of the picture being posted online, and she wished she could make it all go away. But all she could do was pull Elena into a hug and hold her tight.

“I know this isn’t how you wanted it to happen.” Riley’s voice was gentle, calming even. “I know you both wanted to wait until after the tour to come out publicly about your relationship, but we don’t have that luxury any longer. And I am so sorry about that.”

“So, what do we do?” Elena asked the question Skylar was also wondering.

“Well, from the way I see it, we have two options. One is we ignore the photo altogether and hope it blows over. Or we can make a statement on it.”

Skylar furrowed her brow in confusion. “A statement? Like a press release?”

“Sort of.” Riley motioned for them to sit on the sofa as she explained her idea. “We already have the interview scheduled for tomorrow with the online news organization. I know the interviewer and know she would treat this situation delicately no matter which direction you want to take the story.”

“Take the story?” Elena looked at Riley, then Skylar, then back to Riley. “You mean if I come out or not?”

Riley plopped onto the chair across from them, looking as defeated as Skylar felt.

“Basically.”

“So all of this is riding on me?” Elena shook her head in frustration. Reaching out, Skylar tried to take hold of her hand, but Elena pulled it away. “This is so unfair. I should be able to dictate how and when I come out.”

“You should,” Riley affirmed. “And believe me, I wish you still could. But this is the best I can offer you. We can either deny the rumors, say you were hugging, or something. Or we can tell them the truth.”

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Elena looked at Skylar with tears running down her face. Her heart broke into a million pieces as she looked into her sad brown eyes. She wished she could take all the pain Elena was feeling away.

“What should we do?”

“That’s not a decision I can make.”

“It affects you too, though.”

“It affects you more.” Skylar scooted to the edge of the couch and looked at Riley.
“How long do we have to decide what to do?”

“The interview is tomorrow at three.”

“Okay. Can we have some time alone to talk about it?”

“Of course.” Riley stood and walked over to the door. She looked back at them before exiting. “I’m really sorry this happened to you two. You don’t deserve it. No one does.”

Skylar smiled her thanks at her as Riley left them alone. She turned her attention to Elena, who was sunken into the couch with her arms crossed over her chest and tears streaming down her face.

“This is so unfair.”

“I know.”

“What do we do?”

“What do you want to do?”

“Don’t do this, Skylar.” Elena angrily stood and began pacing in front of her. “This affects both of us. We were both in that picture. And it affects the band and my family. They just found out I’m gay, and now this? And the band? What will they think? I mean, sure, Erica knows, but that’s because she’s a nosy little shot. But the rest of the band doesn’t. What if they get mad at us?”

“Why would they get mad at us?”

“For not telling them we’re together.”

Skylar laughed. “You really think Gordon, Michael, and Andy would tell us if they were dating anyone.”

She watched as Elena’s shoulders relaxed ever so slightly. Elena ran her hands through her hair as she looked at herself in the mirror.

“Great, my makeup is ruined.”

“You’re beautiful.”

Elena smiled at her in the mirror. Slowly, Skylar walked over to her and stood beside her as they kept eye contact.

“If you’re not ready to come out, then I think we should deny the rumors and just say the picture isn’t what it looks like. I mean,” she shrugged, “it’s kinda grainy, so you

can't exactly tell that we're kissing. Maybe Riley can spin it for us."

"Do you really think that'll work?"

"At the very least, it could buy you some more time. Us more time."

Elena sighed as she dropped her head. "I hate I'm putting you through this. I know you want to be out. I want that too. I just wanted to have control over it."

"I know."

"Are you regretting being with me?" The broken look in Elena's eyes when she looked back up at her further hurt Skylar's heart. Skylar quickly wrapped Elena into another hug as Elena sobbed into her shoulder.

"I will never regret being with you. We will figure this out. I promise. I'm not going anywhere."

And Skylar meant it. It didn't matter what Elena decided to do. Skylar would stand by her. But as for now, they needed to somehow get ready for the show.

Chapter 29

Elena

Elena's stomach had been in knots since Riley first broke the news to them. She still didn't know how she'd made it through the show the night before. Or how she was still standing after barely sleeping. After telling Skylar she needed space to think, Elena had spent the night alone, and she didn't like it. More than once, Elena thought about calling Skylar to come over, but she never did.

She didn't know why. There was no one but Skylar who could possibly know what Elena was feeling. But Elena also knew she had to be at peace with whatever decision she made. It would affect not only her and Skylar's lives but her career as well. The weight of it all was too much for Elena.

After going back and forth all night about what to do, Elena had come to a decision. She had taken Skylar's words from the night before. If they denied the picture was them kissing, it would give them more time to release the news on their terms and not someone with a phone and a computer. It pained Elena more than she expected to tell Skylar that, but she seemed to understand.

At least, Elena hoped. They'd only talked briefly about it with Riley before the interviewer arrived. Now, the whole band and Riley were gathered around a round foldout table backstage at their next venue.

The irony of the location was not lost on Elena. They were in the same venue where Maine Event had their last performance together ten years ago. Elena still remembered watching Skylar drive away that last time. She'd stood crying in the rain like some cliché rom-com.

Back then, Elena wasn't confident in herself or her dreams to acknowledge that she wanted to be with Skylar. She wasn't prepared for that then, but things were different now. Elena was in control of the situation.

And her previous plan for the interview was suddenly not sitting well with her. She shifted uncomfortably in her seat as Skylar placed a hand on her knee under the table. Elena tried to focus on whatever the interviewer was asking, but her brain could only focus on one thing.

Today was the day she was going to publicly come out.

Now, if the interviewer could speed up the questioning and get to that one, Elena could relax.

"So, I think it's time we address the elephant in the room." Nora Dyer smiled up at Skylar and Elena as if she wasn't just about to toss a significant question to them. "Skylar and Elena, there was a photo recently posted online of the two of you that has caused quite a stir."

Elena nervously laughed and glanced over at Skylar. Under the table, she squeezed Skylar's hand as she glanced back at Nora.

"Yes, we were made aware of that recently."

"So, do you want to confirm the rumors?"

This was the moment. This was when Elena was supposed to deny it and say it was just a hug between friends and nothing more. She had prepared a whole speech in her mind and had been ready to give it. But not now.

"Yes." Elena firmly nodded as she felt every eye on her. She flashed a smile at Skylar

as she lifted their intertwined hands up onto the table. “Yes, I would like to confirm the rumors. Skylar and I are together.”

Skylar’s grin couldn’t have been dorkier if she tried. She looked so beyond happy that it made Elena want to scream for joy.

“She’s right,” she proudly stated. “We’ve been together since the beginning of the tour.”

“Wow, I know some fans will die when they hear that.”

“Hopefully, they’ll just celebrate with us.” Elena couldn’t remember the last time she’d ever felt more confident than she did at that moment. “I’ll openly admit that I was hesitant to come out of the closet and announce my relationship with Skylar. Hell, until about two minutes ago, I was prepared to deny the photo was of us kissing.”

Elena forced herself to take a deep breath. She looked at Skylar for reassurance.

“But the longer I thought about it, the more I realized I didn’t want to be stuck in a closet any longer. This is me. I’m gay, and I’m in love with Skylar Ford.”

Nora was clearly unprepared for the turn the interview had taken. She looked at Riley. “I didn’t think this was the direction the interview was taking, but I have to say I am here for it.”

Riley laughed. “Elena and Skylar control the narrative. I’m happy for them.”

The interview lasted for a few more moments before Nora wrapped it up. Each of the band members made it a point to share their congratulations with Skylar and Elena before they got ready for the show. Elena didn’t know if it was the weight off her

shoulders or that soon enough, the world would know she was in love with Skylar, but she felt happier than she had been in years.

That happiness bubbled over to the show, where the band was more electric than ever. Every note was perfect; every chord echoed through the venue eloquently. She shared the mic with Skylar as she had every other night on tour, but it was different now. Soon enough, everyone would know why their chemistry was so palpable.

But Elena didn't want to wait for a news article to drop the news. During an interlude, when she usually talked about writing the next song, Elena decided it was time to come out instead.

"So," she laughed into the mic, "I know there's been a picture going around the internet of me and this one right here."

Elena looped her arms around Skylar's neck as they both laughed. She looked into her eyes, seeking unspoken permission for what she was about to do. Skylar nodded, still beaming with pride.

"Well, we just want you to know it's all true."

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The crowd erupted into applause. Hoops and hollers came from around the venue as Elena and Skylar soaked in the sound. She wasn't at all surprised when Skylar took her in her arms, dipped her as if they were in a movie, and kissed her in front of everyone.

"They're so in love it's nauseating," Erica teased as the crowd laughed. "And I bet if you all asked nicely, they'd play the song they wrote together a few weeks ago."

Elena furrowed her brow in confusion. Skylar had the same look on her face. They had played several new songs for Erica and the band, so Elena didn't know which one she was referring to. She shrugged to let Erica know she didn't know what song to sing.

"Back To Us," Erica called out away from the microphone as she walked toward them. "Skylar played it for me, and I loved it. You all should sing it."

"It's not a Maine Event song, though. It's just us."

"Let's be real; you two will keep making music together long after Maine Event." Erica's smile was genuine. "Play it."

Elena looked to Skylar, who shrugged and nodded her head. The crowd was still clapping and encouraging them to sing the song they didn't know. But that didn't dim their excitement any. Skylar picked up her guitar as Elena and Erica made their way back to their respective spots on the stage.

As Skylar started the song, the crowd grew silent as they listened to the song. They'd

only played it a few times since they first wrote it, but Elena was surprised at how good it sounded. By the end of the song, the crowd was even swaying along to the beat. Another round of applause followed the end of the song as Skylar and Elena held hands and took a bow.

The rest of the show was just as fun and electric as they finished the set and took a final bow. She and Skylar kissed again, which caused the applause and cheers to get louder. As the band headed backstage, Erica pulled Elena and Skylar aside.

“I meant what I said out there. I think you two have the potential to branch out on your own after Maine Event.”

“We don’t want Maine Event to end, though,” Skylar stated the sentiment that Elena was feeling as well. “We love playing with you all.”

“And I think I speak for the rest of the band when I say that we love playing with you all too. But, let’s be real.” Erica smiled. “You two could be bigger than this. You could branch out on your own and make your own Skylena music, and it would be huge. I know it.”

Elena laughed. “Let’s just get through this tour before we start figuring out the future.”

As they parted ways, Elena and Skylar walked out toward the tour bus. Riley caught up with them, holding her phone out to Elena.

“Look,” she said as Elena took the phone, “Nora just sent the first draft of the story. It’ll be the top news story tomorrow on the website.”

Elena looked down at the phone and smiled.

Elena Cruz: It's All True

Lead singer of Maine Event confirms she's dating bandmate Skylar Ford

"This is so great."

"It's a beautiful article," Skylar nodded in agreement. "Nora captured exactly what Elena and I wanted to say."

"I told you she was great. She also sent over a few pictures her photographer took tonight of the show and wants us to pick out some. But I think hands down this one," she took the phone back from Elena and flipped through some photos, "should definitely be the main one."

Riley turned the phone back around to them. The picture wasn't captured during the speech when Elena came out as she had expected. Instead, it was just a normal moment on stage that had happened a hundred times before over the last few weeks. Skylar and Elena were sharing the mic, their eyes locked with each other.

But it was the smiles on their faces that sold the photo. There was no denying the love between them. The photo captured it perfectly. Elena wrapped her arm around Skylar's as she leaned into her.

"We're going to need a copy of that for the tour bus."

"I figured," Riley laughed. "Oh, and I took the liberty of canceling one of the tour buses for the rest of the tour. I figured there was no point in paying for two when you're both sharing one anyway."

They all laughed as Skylar and Elena headed back to the tour bus. Riley had a valid point. After all, Elena never wanted to spend a night away from Skylar ever again. As

they closed the door to the tour bus, Skylar put her arms around Elena's waist and pulled her close.

"I am so proud of you, Ellie."

"Thank you for not forcing me to come out."

"I knew you would when you were ready." She tenderly kissed Elena's forehead. "I love you so much."

"Yeah?" She arched an eyebrow at Skylar. "Wanna show me how much?"

“Hell yes, I do.”

As they scurried off to the bedroom, Elena knew it was the first of many nights together as an openly out couple.

Chapter 30

Skylar

A week had passed since Elena had come out, and Skylar could visibly see the weight had been lifted off her shoulders. They had spent the last few days exploring New York City together as they happily posed with fans and even a few paparazzi that followed them in and out of restaurants and theaters. Skylar could have never dreamed they would be so comfortable with each other after so many years apart. But Elena had busted down the closet doors, and Skylar couldn't have been prouder.

Even if the fact their pictures were now all over the internet was something Skylar was going to have to get used to again.

Back when Maine Event was last touring, Skylar often saw their pictures splashed in tabloid magazines at the checkout corner or on a news website online. She had gotten used to it, especially since the customers of those media outlets tended to have a short attention span. Skylar knew there would always be someone else for them to turn their attention to at any moment.

In the years since Main Event had broken up, Skylar had mainly stayed to herself in the Cove. There had been the occasional fan that made the pilgrimage to the record

store just to see her, but those encounters got fewer and farther between over the years. Skylar had gotten comfortable with the fact the news outlets had moved on from her and stopped trying to reach out to her.

Of course, that was all before that fateful day Elena showed up in the Cove. Skylar had no idea then that they would end up where they are now. They were currently seated around a table at a local restaurant with Alexis, Blake, and Fallon, who had come in for their Boston show. Both Skylar and Elena knew better to get wasted before a show, but a few drinks with their friends wouldn't hurt.

Skylar's father was also set to be at the show that night, and he was bringing Atlas. Steven had grumbled about having to drive instead of fly to get the canine to the show, but Skylar knew he'd drive across the country for her.

Elena had also invited her parents to the show, but with her father still recovering from the heart attack, Skylar wasn't sure they would show up. She held out hope, though, for Elena's sake. Although Elena and her parents had never been close, Skylar had noticed that Elena had started to call her mom to check in every few days. They seemed to be getting closer, even if that just meant they had an open line of communication now.

Across the table, Fallon was sipping on her vodka soda. Skylar was thankful she'd come back for another show as she seemed to put Elena more at ease to have a familiar face around. Of course, Fallon and Blake being with them meant that it was inevitable that the paparazzi would capture them at some point together. It had been Blake's idea to hire a couple of bodyguards for the night. The men were seated at a table a few feet away, eating but definitely giving off the vibe that no one should approach the table.

"So, Alexis, how does it feel to be away from the babies?" Elena picked up her soda and took a sip. "This is the first time you've been away from them, right?"

Blake laughed, “Don’t remind her.”

“It is.” Alexis pouted, then smiled. “I miss them and Harper like crazy, but it’s nice to get away with Blake for the weekend and hang out with you all.”

“Are Sophia and Emily watching the kids?” Skylar knew they were always the first option for Alexis and Blake when it came to babysitting.

“Of course. Sophia wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“I haven’t met her yet, right?”

Skylar, Blake, and Alexis all laughed.

“Trust me, babe. You’d remember if you met Sophia.”

“She’s a spitfire,” Blake chimed in.

“Well, I can’t wait to meet her.”

“You will next time you’re in the Cove. We can have a party at our house whenever you’re there again.” Alexis leaned slightly onto the table toward Skylar. “When will you be back in the Cove?”

“Lex,” Blake playfully scolded. “Let her live her life.”

“Well, I’m just curious.”

Skylar looked at Elena. They hadn’t talked about what would happen after the tour yet, so Skylar wasn’t sure when she’d be back. She had been putting off asking Elena about the future because she’d been too focused on keeping their relationship a secret.

But now, it was a looming question before her.

“I’m not sure yet. We still have a couple of more weeks on the tour.”

“But we will definitely be back soon after that.” Elena’s use of the word we wasn’t lost on Skylar. Her heart happily swelled as she pictured her and Elena together in the Cove again. “I love it there.”

“You should totally buy the land beside us and build a house there.” Alexis’s excited comment was met with an elbow to the ribs from Blake. “What? I’m just saying it’s for sale.”

“Please ignore my beautiful wife. She’s not trying to dictate your lives. She just hasn’t talked to adults in a while.”

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“Rude,” Alexis rolled her eyes, then smiled at Blake. They kissed softly, and Skylar longed to have a life and a love like them. Thankfully, she knew she’d found that in Elena.

“We’ll keep that in mind.” Elena winked at Skylar. “Skylar and I still have some things to figure out, but you all will be the first to know when we do.”

“All I’m saying is if you move to the East Coast, I’m moving too.” Fallon dryly laughed. “I’m over LA and need a change.”

Blake perked up. “Well, you know, if you wanted to move to the East Coast, I started a production company out of the Cove. It’s small right now; we only have one documentary film out that didn’t get a premier or anything, but the feedback has been good. I know it’s way below the level of your normal work, but I’d love to work with you if you’re interested.”

“And she says I try to dictate people’s lives,” Alexis teased.

“I’m just offering Fallon a job if she’s interested.”

“Mhmm.”

Fallon’s laugh was more authentic now. “Oh, I didn’t know that. You’ll have to give me more information on that.”

“Of course. Yeah, totally.” It was funny to see the normally poised Blake suddenly flustered. She fumbled in her bag and pulled out a business card, handing it to Fallon.

“You can call me whenever.”

“Thanks, I will.” Fallon tucked the card into her purse and then looked at Elena. “So, are you still doing okay after all the press last week?”

“I am,” Elena let out a relieved sigh.

In the past week, Elena had done several interviews about her coming out story. She had been all over social media, which had been great press for herself and the band. Even Skylar had been involved in some of the interviews, which she had mixed feelings about. Sure, she loved talking about how much she loved Elena, but some of the interviewers wanted personal information from them. Thankfully, Riley had been there to step in whenever needed.

“It’s so nice not to have to hide anymore. And now I get to kiss this one on stage anytime I want.”

Elena leaned in and kissed Skylar.

“I’m a huge fan of that,” Skylar quipped as she looked at her smartwatch. “Hey, we should probably get back for soundcheck. Johnny will be pissed if we’re late.”

“Again.”

After paying the tab, the group of friends piled into the limo that Fallon had once again rented and headed for the venue. Skylar wasn’t surprised to find her dad and Atlas waiting for them when they got back. Steven was wearing a vintage Maine Event T-shirt under a plaid shirt with jeans—a very typical Steven Ford look. She ran over to him and gave him a hug.

“Hey, Daddy.”

“Hey, Peanut.” He kissed her forehead. “You look good.”

“I am good. And so much better now.” Crouching down, Skylar rubbed Atlas behind the ears as he licked her face. “I’ve missed you too, buddy.”

“I’m sure she missed the dog more than you.” Elena walked over and gave Steven a hug. “Good to see you again, Steven. Thanks for coming out to the show.”

“I wouldn’t miss seeing my girl on tour again. And hey, congrats on coming out. I know that was hard, but I’m proud of you.”

Skylar looked up to see Elena’s eyes fill with tears as she hugged Steven again.

“And hey, I bought you this.”

Reaching into the black bag by his feet, Steven pulled out a Set the Record Gay T-shirt that featured its Pride logo from a few years ago. They had made the record in the logo a rainbow for the occasion, and all the proceeds went to support LGBTQIA+ youth. Elena smiled widely at the shirt.

“Oh, my goodness. I love it.”

“I know it’s corny.”

“It’s not corny. I honestly love it. Thank you, Steven.”

“Ellie,” Skylar nodded toward the woman walking toward them. It was Adele, with a bouquet of flowers in her hand.

“Mom!” Elena ran to her mom, giving her a big hug. Although she couldn’t hear what they were saying, Skylar knew they were happy to see each other.

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“How’s her dad doing?” Steven asked in a low voice.

“Good. He’s good. Recovering, but good.”

“That’s good. How’s Elena?”

“She’s good, too. This week has been a lot for her.” Skylar laughed. “It’s been a lot for both of us.”

“I bet. At least you only have a couple more shows, and then things should calm down for you two.”

“Maybe, except we have no idea what’s going to happen after the tour. We haven’t really discussed that yet. We want to be together, obviously, but Elena’s life is in California, and mine is in the Cove. We’ll have to figure that out.”

“You will,” he said firmly. “That’s what you do when you’re in love.”

Something about the way his eyes twinkled told Skylar his comment wasn’t just about her and Elena.

“Dad?” She arched an eyebrow at him. “Are you seeing someone?”

His smile was the only confirmation Skylar needed. She playfully smacked his shoulder.

“Why didn’t you tell me?!”

“You’ve had a lot going on, and I didn’t know if it was serious.”

“But it’s serious now?” Skylar wasn’t sure how to feel about that. It was yet another thing she’d have to figure out. “Are you going to tell me who she is?”

Elena rejoined them with her mother and asked, “Who are we talking about?”

“My father is apparently dating someone and didn’t tell me.”

“Ohhhh,” Elena and Adele echoed in unison.

“Listen, I’ll tell you all about her later, but right now, I want to focus on you two and the show. I can’t wait to see it. I’ve read all the reviews, and people love it. They love you two!”

“I’ve read the stories too.” Adele’s voice held less excitement than Steven’s, but at least it wasn’t condescending. “I’m happy for you both and everything you have accomplished.”

Skylar slipped an arm around Elena’s back.

“Thanks, Mom.”

“We raised some pretty good kids, didn’t we?” Steven smiled as he bumped his shoulder against Adele’s. She was clearly caught off guard by the gesture, but she recovered quickly and nodded.

“We did indeed.”

Skylar felt herself blush under their parents’ praises. She glanced at Elena and smiled.

“We should probably get ready for the show.”

“Yeah, we will catch up with you all later.”

Waving goodbye to their parents, Elena and Skylar made their way onto the tour bus, with Atlas trotting along between them. Skylar had only one thought on her mind as she closed the door behind her and blurted out, “I don’t want this to end after the tour.”

“It better not.”

“I’m serious, Ellie.

“I am too, Sky.” Elena walked over to her and placed her hands on her shoulders. “I love you. I made the mistake of letting you go once, and I never intend to do that again. I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

“I want that too. But how are we going to do this? You’ll go back to California after the tour, and I’ll go back to the Cove.”

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“I’ve been thinking about this. A lot, actually.” Elena’s eyes were sparkling. “I want to move back to the Cove. With you.”

Skylar felt a warm tear fall from her eyes as she smiled. “Really?”

“Why do you sound so surprised?” Elena laughed. “I love you, Sky.”

“I love you, too. I just never thought we’d have this second chance.”

“Well, we do, so we better make the most of it.” Leaning in, Elena kissed her slow and long. “There is one question I have, though.”

“Ask.”

“Do you want me to buy a house in the Cove or...”

“Your ass will be moving into my house, and I won’t hear you ever suggest we live somewhere separate again.”

“Deal,” Elena chuckled as they resumed their kissing.

Chapter 31

Elena

Taking the final bow with Maine Event had been more bittersweet than Elena had been prepared for. She knew the Maine Event reunion was only temporary, but it was

hard to say goodbye to her friends yet again. Which was why Elena had arranged for them to have one last dinner together at her Santa Barbara home.

The dinner was catered, of course. Elena's favorite Mexican restaurant had set up a full taco bar for them, along with a variety of margaritas to choose from. Skylar had been sipping on them all afternoon as they waited for everyone to arrive.

"Save some for the band," Elena scolded as Skylar refilled her glass again. "Are you still wanting to tell them what we've been talking about?"

"I am if you are."

They had spent the night before planning their next step together. Both of them agreed they wanted to settle down, but neither of them wanted to give up music and performing altogether. So when Skylar suggested they write some songs together and put out their own album, Elena was intrigued.

"I am. I think everyone will be happy about our decision. It's not like we all secretly harbor bad thoughts toward each other."

Skylar dramatically winced. "Oh, that reminds me. I've been meaning to tell you that I secretly harbor some bad thoughts about you."

"Oh, yeah?" Elena arched her eyebrow at her. "How bad are we talking?"

"Bad and dirty."

"Just my kind of thoughts."

As their lips met, the doorbell rang.

“Okay, right now, my bad thoughts are all focused on that damn doorbell.”

“Agreed.”

Laughing, Elena walked over to the front door and let Gordon and Andy inside. They joined Skylar and Elena in the kitchen until Michael and Erica arrived, and they moved into the dining room. The conversation was light as they ate. Their stories mostly stuck to memories of the tour and joking about how they were too old to tour again.

“I’m glad we did it, but I’m glad to have my weekends back too.” Erica took another taco shell off the plate in the center of the table and prepared another taco. “What are you and Skylar going to do now that the tour is over?”

“Well, I’m glad you asked.” Elena looked beside her at Skylar and smiled. “I’m going to move back to the Cove with Skylar.”

“That’s awesome!” Andy high-fived her across the table. “Gordon and I were just saying we wanted to get back there.”

“Mom and Dad keep asking us to move back and settle down, so maybe it’s time.” Gordon nonchalantly shrugged as he finished off another taco. “So, what about the band? Are you going to keep touring, Elena?”

“That’s something else we wanted to talk to you all about.”

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“I’m not going back on tour again,” Erica whined. “I need my own bed and my kids.”

Gordon laughed. “In that order?”

“And what about your husband?” Skylar teased her as they all laughed.

Erica took another sip of her third margarita. Not that Elena had been counting. “Don’t tell him I didn’t include him.”

“So,” Skylar cleared her throat, “Elena and I were talking about writing more songs and maybe putting out another album.”

“By yourselves?” Normally quiet Michael leaned back in his chair with his margarita glass in his hands. “Or with us?”

“Both.”

Gordon, Michael, Andy, and Erica all looked confused. Skylar continued.

“We want to record a more queer-friendly album. Have songs for our lesbian and queer community, and we didn’t want to assume you all would be on board for that.”

“Why wouldn’t we be?” Of course it was Erica that asked the question. “We love you and Elena and fully support you all. I think that album sounds like a great idea.”

“Especially if you strike while the iron is hot with all the press Elena has been getting since she came out.” Gordon with his logic, as usual. “I think it’s a great idea.”

“Me, too,” Andy agreed. “And we can play on the album, too. Right, Michael?”

“Wouldn’t that just be another Maine Event reunion, though?” Michael had a fair point, but his deadpan expression made Elena laugh.

“It’s a rebrand.”

“A gay Maine Event, if you will.” Skylar further clarified.

Elena snorted a laugh. “Yeah, exactly. We would love to have you all on board and be on the album with us. It just wouldn’t be marketed as a Maine Event album. And we’re not thinking of a tour or anything. Just an album.”

“I’m in.”

“Me too.”

“I am too.”

The boys all responded without hesitation, and everyone turned to Erica for her response. She laughed and tossed up her hands. “Well, if everyone else is in, I’m in too.”

“Awesome!” Skylar fist-pumped the air, then gave Erica a high five.

“We don’t have anything figured out or nailed down yet.”

“And we still need to write the songs,” Skylar quickly added.

“Exactly. But as soon as we have more information, we’ll let you all know.”

With everyone on board, they all started tossing out song ideas to each other. Gordon even used two spoons to tap out a beat he had been working on. By the time they all left for the night, Elena was energized about what the future held for her and Skylar, and the band.

Pouring two glasses of wine, Elena carried them out to the pool where Skylar was sitting. She had a bikini on, showing off her tanned skin and strong arms. Elena handed her a glass of wine as she sat beside her.

“I thought you were going to change into your bathing suit.” Skylar pouted as she pointed at the long, oversized T-shirt Elena was wearing. “We have to take advantage of pool sex while we can. Once we’re back in the Cove, the times we will be able to do this will be super limited.”

“Unless we get a heated pool.”

“Oh, totally,” Skylar teased and rolled her eyes. “That would be great.”

“You know, I’ve been thinking.”

“That’s dangerous.”

“Shut up,” Elena laughed. “No, but seriously, I’ve been thinking about something Alexis said.”

“About the land being for sale beside them?”

Elena’s head nearly snapped around to look at Skylar. They hadn’t talked about living anywhere—except Skylar’s townhouse in the Cove—but the fact they had both been thinking of the land for sale meant something new could be in their future. Skylar smiled.

“You’ve been to Alexis and Blake’s house. It’s gorgeous. And I know the designer, Arden Greene. We could definitely talk to her about the possibility of building a house there.” She shrugged, a slight smile on her lips. “If you want.”

“Are you kidding me? A house with you in the Cove sounds perfect.”

“And Atlas.”

“And maybe some kids one day.”

“Definitely kids someday.” Skylar leaned in, kissing Elena. “I know we haven’t really talked about the future, but I want kids. You know that.”

“I do know that.”

“I know from Blake and Alexis’s experience that it’s expensive and a lot of work.”

“But having our own squishy little baby would be so worth it.”

Skylar laughed. “Well, I can’t disagree there.”

“And it’s not like we have to make that decision right now. We can focus on the new album first and see how that goes.”

“And look into a new house.”

“Definitely.”

“We have time to figure all this out.”

“Yeah, but,” Skylar’s eyes danced in the moonlight, “we could start trying to make a baby now if you want.”

Elena giggled. “I don’t think it works that way.”

Standing, Skylar sat her glass down by the pool and jumped in. She slowly walked over and positioned herself between Elena’s legs. Elena wrapped her legs around Skylar’s neck.

“There’s only one way to find out.”

Elena smirked as she arched an eyebrow at Skylar. Slowly, Elena lifted the T-shirt off to reveal that she wasn’t wearing anything underneath. Skylar let out a noise that was somewhere between a moan and an evil laugh. She spread Elena’s legs wider as she started to suck on her clit.

Pool sex with Skylar was quickly becoming one of Elena's favorite activities. It didn't matter if it was inside the water or out. Elena knew an orgasm was definitely on the horizon. She grabbed onto the edge of the pool as Skylar's tongue worked its magic.

Nearly an hour later, they were both sitting contently on the infinity edge of the pool as they looked out over the ocean. Elena's head was resting on Skylar's bare shoulder as they held each other's hand. She was glad she'd put the T-shirt back on as the cool ocean wind was chiller than she expected.

"So, yeah, we'll check into that heated pool."

Elena chuckled. "Honestly, I'm not building a house with you unless that's in the plans."

"I'll call Arden as soon as we get to the Cove." Skylar smiled, and Elena kissed her. "I love you," Ellie."

"I love you too, Sky."

Epilogue

Skylar

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 6:36 pm

Just over a month had passed since Elena moved to the Cove, and Skylar couldn't have been happier. Having never really lived together outside of a tour bus, it had taken some adjusting. Elena was not a morning person, while Skylar was often up and out for a run with Atlas before the sun came up. But they'd finally settled into a routine that worked for both of them. Even Elena's cat Leo seemed to be loving his new home and had even befriended Atlas.

When Skylar and Atlas returned from their run, they would all eat breakfast together before spending the rest of the day writing or walking around town, or visiting friends. At night, they would cook dinner together before sitting outside on the small patio and talking until they were too tired to keep their eyes open.

Skylar's favorite part of having Elena living with her was the fact she woke up and fell asleep beside her every day and night. She loved Elena so much, and her heart was full at the mere thought she was getting to spend her life with Elena.

They had even become regulars at Straight to Ale together and drew in such a large crowd that Isla had started taking reservations. Everything seemed to be going more perfectly than Skylar had anticipated.

Elena seemed more at home in the Cove than Skylar thought was possible. Even after years apart, Elena had picked up as if she never left. They regularly hung out with friends Elena hadn't seen since high school and were quickly becoming best friends with Alexis and Blake. Skylar's heart melted each time she saw Elena with the Holland kids. She would be such a great mom one day, and Skylar couldn't wait to take that journey with her.

After Skylar arrived back home in the Cove, she made the decision not to return to work at the record store. Her dad understood, as he always did. Walker was doing a phenomenal job running the store, and Skylar wanted to focus on the music she was making with Elena. With Skylar stepping away from the store, her father had decided to as well. That left him more time to spend with his girlfriend, Monica Carlson.

She had to admit that she liked Monica. She had opened her home to Skylar and Elena more than once for dinner since they'd been back. The fact that Monica was Skylar's friend Maddie's mom made the adjustment easier for Skylar. Steven wasn't one to date, but he seemed happy with Monica. And if her dad was happy, then Skylar was happy.

That sentiment carried over to Elena's parents as well. They had visited once since Elena moved to the Cove, and they had all gotten along super well. Elena and Skylar even showed them the land they were thinking of building a house on, and her father had insisted they pray over the land. Skylar loved the gesture and knew it meant the world to Elena to have her father work on accepting them as a couple.

Skylar glanced over at Elena, who was sunbathing on the stern of the boat as Atlas lay beside her. Elena's hand was mindlessly petting his head while Skylar strummed on her guitar nearby. Skylar had been trying to figure out the chorus to a song she'd been working on for a few hours, but the words weren't coming easily. At least she had the first verse.

Lying here with you

I know I've found my place

Right here in your arms

Is where I call home

And Elena had helped her write the second verse the night before.

Every day with you

Is my new favorite day

Your love is my rock

With you I'll forever stay

But that damn chorus was eluding Skylar. She played the chords out on her guitar as she begged the word to come to her.

“What about this?” Elena didn’t get up or even open her eyes as she began to sing.

Starting over with you

That was all I needed to do

To find my place in this world

Right here by your side

“Holy shit, Ellie. That’s it. That’s the chorus.”

Elena rolled her head toward Skylar, lifted her sunglasses up so she could see her eyes, and smiled. “I know.”

“I freakin’ love you. You know that, right?”

“I’ve been told that before.” Elena’s teasing drove Skylar wild in the best ways.

Sitting down her guitar, Skylar walked over to Elena. She lay down beside her as Elena rolled over onto her side to face her. Skylar took Elena's sunglasses off so she could see her beautiful brown eyes.

“I will tell you every minute of every day for the rest of my life that I love you.”

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“I love you, too.”

“Atlas,” she called out to the dog, who perked up his head, “turn your head while I make out with your new mom.”

Sighing, Atlas laid his head back down with a thud. Skylar and Elena laughed as they snuggled closer together. She ran her hand through Elena’s hair and smiled.

“You know, there’s one more thing we need to do.”

“Get married?”

“Okay, well,” Skylar laughed, “two things.”

Elena’s eyes softened as she slipped her hand around Skylar’s back. “What’s the other thing?”

“We haven’t had sex on the boat yet.”