



# Kiss Me

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**Category:** Romance, New Adult

**Description:** Get swept up in this insta-love holiday romance that will make you believe in the magic of New Year's.

Jax is the modern-day equivalent of a Prince Charming, but he views himself as a beast. He rescues a beauty from the side of the road and never expected one night would change his life forever.

Gabi needed an escape from her world in LA. When her rescuer found her and her wrecked vehicle, she thought he was an angel. She quickly discovers she can rescue him back in a different way.

A holiday power outage still manages to shine light upon what matters most to Gabi and Jax—the people and the moments that define us.

One accident. A one-night stand. Two hearts. And...some mistletoe. What happens when the ball drops on New Year's?

**Total Pages (Source):** 27

# Page 1

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1

Gabi

For the past hour and a half, I've sat as patiently as anyone could at the airport waiting for their luggage to finally show up. By the time I had rented a car, a winter storm had started to pass through the area and a thin sheen of ice was already sticking to the roads.

Undeterred, I put my friends' address into the GPS the rental company had provided and set out as slowly and carefully as I could.

In all truth, I wasn't used to driving much. Back home in LA, I had a service that drove me to most things, so I didn't have to deal with traffic, let alone curvy icy roads, and I had my groceries delivered when I was in town. My anxiety skyrocketed from driving in nowhere near pristine conditions; my hands shook on the steering wheel.

According to the navigation, my journey would take me approximately thirty minutes, but it was obvious it would take me much longer. I had only traveled perhaps five miles, and it had taken twenty minutes with my slow, cautious driving. At that pace, it would take me hours to get to my destination.

The worst part was that my phone had died sometime during my flight while I was sleeping. My only saving grace was that I'd had the forethought to write their address on a piece of paper before I'd left and had stuck it in my purse. In hindsight, I should have also put one or both of their phone numbers on the note and told them that my

plans had changed; that I was coming to visit. It would also have been smart if I had put the charger in my purse instead of my suitcase.

Since I couldn't bite my nails and keep both hands on the wheel during my nerve-racking journey, I chewed the inside of my cheek and lips until there was nothing left to nibble on, but I still continued on the raw, sore skin. On one particularly hair-raising turn, I bit my lip so hard, I tasted blood. I was sure that by the time I got there, my lips would be a messy, bloody pulp, and possibly swollen.

I wasn't sure how much longer I could drive without having a nervous breakdown or getting into a wreck. What I knew was that by the end of the night, I would need a good stiff drink.

Trying to get my mind off the terrible road conditions, I decided to turn on the radio, which was a poor idea. The first station I came upon was a weather report stating that extreme icy conditions had covered the roads and power lines. Many towns across the region were without power, hence the extremely dark roads I was traveling on. Of course, my destination, Fairlane, was included on the list.

If I had called the Sandström's, I was sure they would have informed me of the impending weather and advised me not to come. Changing the station, Shadowed Alley's latest hit song, "Fame Monkey", was playing. After hearing the first beat of the song I knew so well, I turned off the radio and kept my eyes on the road. There was no way in hell I was letting Shadowed Alley make me run off the road. Especially after they had fucked me over this past week.

With fifteen more miles left to go, and who knew how many more minutes, I started up one of the steepest hills I had ever encountered in my limited driving history. My rental car slipped and slid twice trying to make it up the steep incline, making me wonder if I would be successful in making it up. Once at the top, I felt triumphant in my accomplishment - not only make it up the hill, but without a single curse word

flying out of my mouth during the process. Even when the brakes did a weird bumpy thing when I hit them while making a strange sound that didn't sound at all good.

I shouldn't have celebrated so soon, though, because the moment my car hit the downhill part of my journey, I immediately lost control. I tried everything in my arsenal to get the vehicle back under control, but nothing worked. Every time I pushed the brakes to slow my rapidly increasing speed, the car would veer in one direction and then the other with my overcorrections.

Thankfully, there were no other cars on the road for me to hit or cause me more anxiety. With the luck I'd had the last bit of my life, I should have known what would happen next. For only the briefest of seconds, I thought of how desolate the land was around me and how fortunate I was, so, of course, that was the moment an electrical pole seemed to pop up out of nowhere, just in time for my rental to lose total control, careening into a one-eighty, only for me to right the car into a three-sixty.

After a couple of circles flying down the hill, and me screaming at the top of my lungs, the rental slammed head on into the pole. The sound of the car crunching, the air bags deploying, and glass breaking was deafening. My face was wet with blood from hitting the side window. My neck ached with a throbbing pain that radiated up into a pounding headache, which threatened to overtake me. Spots started to fill my vision as I looked out the shattered windshield where the now icy rain invaded the once warm car. Blackness seeped in slowly, my head rested against the frame of the driver's side window. Soon, it would be freezing in the car, and I would be coated in ice, but there was nothing I could do about it as the darkness took over.

There was nothing.

Only black.

Cold.

Darkness.

2

Gabi

“Miss? Miss?”

The darkness started to recede as a noise grew stronger.

“Miss?” I heard once again as a sharp pain shot up my arm and into my shoulder. My eyes flew wide open, only to be invaded by a blinding light. My already aching head pulsed and throbbed to such an extreme, I was almost sick from the pain.

Lifting my arm to shield my eyes from the bright light, I quickly dropped it as more pain shot up from what seemed like a direct line from my elbow to my temples. My eyes squeezed shut; more pain assaulted me. Why did every movement fill me with agony? The icy roads and losing control came flooding back to me in a flash at the same time as the deepest, rumbliest, sexiest voice I had ever heard say Miss again.

Had I died and gone to heaven? No, obviously not, or I wouldn't be in such an incredible amount of pain. Was I in hell? Possibly. It would be my luck that that sexy voice would taunt me as I laid in pain, never to reach it.

“Miss, can you open your eyes?” Mr. Rumble asked; causing my whole body to shiver uncontrollably. Maybe it wasn't his voice that caused the shiver, I thought, as my body shook once again from the extreme cold. I wanted to open my eyes to see if he was real, but the bright light hurt too much.

“Are you an angel?” I coughed out. It was possible the light was coming from him if he was indeed an angel. Unfortunately, if he was, I wasn't sure if he could tamp down

the light he emitted.

I knew then that I was most likely delusional, thinking that an angel had been sent to save me.

“No, sweetheart. Are you?” his gravelly voice asked back with humor.

## Page 2

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“Obviously not, or I wouldn’t be here freezing my ass off or my body throbbing.”

The man let out a deep booming laugh that made me want to smile, if it wouldn’t hurt so much. “Or the swearing.”

“Yeah, I don’t think I’ve ever been mistaken for an angel before. Do you think you could kill that light? It feels like my skull is splitting in two.”

“Oh, of course! I wanted to see if there was anybody in the car, and then when I found you, I was checking to see if you were okay. How are you feeling? Maybe I should call you an ambulance?”

“No, I don’t want to go to the hospital.” I groaned out. I didn’t need anyone finding out that I had been in a wreck when the news broke that Shadowed Alley was no more. The headline would read that I’d gone on a drunken bender because of the breakup and wrecked out in the middle of nowhere.

We were silent for a few moments as I waited for him to stop beaming me with his angel light. I had no idea what the hell he was doing, since I had my eyes closed to keep out the blinding light and had heard no sounds coming from him. Finally, I’d had enough and growled out a very un-lady or angel-like curse.

“Sorry,” he muttered before the light went out.

Finally, able to open my eyes, I was met with a man I knew even in the dark of night was the most gorgeous thing I had ever laid eyes on— and my eyes had been on a lot of men over the years. The only thing I could tell for certain was that he had dark hair

that came out from underneath the beanie he wore and a very attractive amount of scruff on his face.

“I don’t think your car will start. There have been so many accidents around the county tonight, it will most likely be sometime tomorrow before a tow truck can get to you. If you’d like, I can give you a ride to wherever you were headed. If you’re sure you don’t need to go to the hospital.”

“I’m sure. I may be a little out of it, but I’ll be fine. I just need some ibuprofen and maybe a strong drink. If you could give me a ride, that would be amazing. I don’t think I would last overnight in this cold.”

My eyelashes were coated in ice, and I was sure my hair was too. I wanted out of that cursed car as soon as possible. This man didn’t give off a serial killer vibe, so I felt safe getting a ride from him. When I turned to undo my seatbelt, my neck spasmed; I cried out in pain.

“Fuck, don’t move!” he barked. “Let me help you with that.” The gravel in his voice was more pronounced, as if it pained him to see me hurt.

The driver’s side door creaked open a second later; he leaned over me so closely, I could feel his body heat. I wanted to snuggle up to him and suck every ounce of warmth from his body. The smell of winter and a light, inviting cologne permeated the small area. I knew it was coming from this man. My savior. My angel. It was so intoxicating, it could lure a thousand women to do its bidding. It was heaven, and I couldn’t stop the groan that made its way out from deep within me.

He jerked back, hitting the horn; its blare filled the nearly silent night. His dark eyes locked on mine, captivating me. “Did I hurt you? I’m so sorry.”

“I’m fine. Please help me get this seatbelt off and out of this car. I’m so cold.” My



teeth chattered with every word, growing more notable by the end. There was no way I would ever tell him, or anyone else for that matter, that I had moaned out loud because of how good he smelled. And I knew this wasn't a one-time thing. Somehow, someway, I knew that he always smelled that extraordinary.

“Tell me if I hurt you. I'll try to be gentle and quick.”

Once I wasn't moaning and able to keep my body under control, it didn't take my gorgeous angel more than a couple of seconds to get my seatbelt undone.

My body locked up in pain when I tried to move out of the car. I gritted my teeth and said every swear word in the English dictionary as I tried to figure out my next move.

“It's going to hurt like a son-of-a-bitch no matter what you do, so I suggest you try to get up like ripping off a Band-Aid. I'd help you if I could, but I think I'll only make the situation worse.” He spoke from the side of the car, softly with a small amount of worry in his deep, rumbling voice.

I knew he was right. I needed to grin and bear it and hope to never have to move again. Shit, maybe I did need to go to the hospital.

As quickly as I could, I turned, stiff as a board, until my body was facing the open door. I gasped with pain then held my breath for a few moments. Turning to the side, each leg out of the car, I knew the hardest part would be getting up on my feet.

“Can you hold your hands out so that I can grab onto them and maybe pull myself up?” I asked when I saw no other way to get out without his help.

“Whatever you need,” he answered; both his hands came into view, palms out.

“Mother fucking, fuck!” I yelled as I stood, using his hands for support. I could do

nothing but stand and wait for the pain to subside, hoping that my angel wouldn't demand that he take me to the hospital.

Looking down at me, he grimaced. "Fuck, that looked painful. My truck isn't parked too far. Do you think you can make it?" He indicated the space behind my rental.

When I looked over, there was a large, dark-colored truck running right behind my car. It was good to know that I didn't have far to go, although the height of the truck might prove to be a problem with my aching body.

"You ready?" he asked, letting go of my hands. I hadn't realized that he was still holding them until that moment and felt an immediate loss when he let go.

"Let's do this," I gritted out as I took a step. Fuck! Every part of my body hurt.

"Hang onto me so that you don't slip and fall." He held out the crook of his elbow for me to grasp. I wondered what was going to keep him from falling, but I didn't voice my question.

At any other time, I would have paid more attention to the firm body underneath my hands. Instead, I closed my eyes, breathing in his intoxicating scent as I brushed passed him, trying to make my way inside the cab of the truck. I didn't need to take in that breath because the entire truck smelled of him, making my body relax and my pain diminish slightly.

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Once firmly planted inside, he put my seatbelt on, closed the door, and made his way to the driver's side. Leaning back in my seat, I looked out the windshield to see my car for the first time. Its whole front end was smashed in to the point that, from my view point, it looked as if there was only about a foot of space between the pole and the non-existent windshield. It wasn't until then that I realized how lucky I was to have gotten out of there without being seriously injured. Yes, I was in pain, but that was most likely from the impact and the whiplash I was sure I had suffered during my icy adventure.

"I'm Jaxson Stone. My friends call me Jax," he said, looking over at me briefly as he put the truck into drive and pulled around my now ruined rental car.

With my head slightly turned toward him, I replied, "I'm Gabriella Santana. My friends call me Gabi."

"Nice to meet you, Gabi."

"You too, Jax."

3

Gabi

"So where are we headed?" Jax asked as he expertly navigated the icy road.

"Oh shit! The address is on a piece of paper in my purse, back in the car. How could I forget my stuff?"

“Right here,” he patted the space beside him that had my purse sitting there underneath the blanket he had retrieved from the back.

“Can you hand it to me, and I’ll find their address?”

“Yeah, sure.” Being a responsible driver, he stopped at the stop sign before handing it over.

I rifled through all the junk I kept in my purse. It may take me forever to find anything, but I was always prepared. Or almost always. From now on, I’d have one of those battery chargers, so that if my phone went dead, I could charge the damn thing.

“Here,” I called out, holding it in the air once I found it. I watched as he put the address into his phone’s GPS and waited for it to calculate how to get to the Sandström’s house.

“It won’t take us too long to get to your friends’ house. What time were they expecting you?” Jax asked as he turned up the heat a little higher after another shiver wracked my body.

“They aren’t expecting me. I had other plans that fell through and decided to take them up on their offer of letting me stay until after New Year’s.”

He hummed to himself, but I knew what he was thinking, and he was right. He was thinking I was stupid for not letting them know. At the time, I thought it would be a fun surprise.

“It was stupid. I know,” I grimaced. “I had no idea I’d be coming into a winter storm. If I had known, I would have stayed home and enjoyed the warm weather and sun.”

“This storm system seemed to pop up out of nowhere and provided little notice. How

were you to know?"

"It's my luck. I should have known it would all turn to shit." I grumbled before resting my head against the cold window. At least my body seemed to be thawing out. The shivers that had been wracking me were becoming fewer and further between, and I was getting the feeling back in my toes.

I must have fallen asleep, because the next thing I knew, Jax was nudging me awake with a gentle shake.

"There you are." He smiled at me once my eyes focused on him. "Are you sure you're okay? You might have a concussion."

"I'm fine. I haven't been sleeping well lately, and then I got all toasty warm." I answered with a big yawn at the end. "See? Just tired."

"You can be tired and still have a concussion. Just tell me if you start to feel nauseous or anything like that, okay?"

"I will. Thanks."

Jax was only lit by the dashboard lights, but with even that small amount of illumination, I could see the kindness in his dark eyes. It had been too long since I had last seen that emotion aimed at me.

"So," he drew out as he moved back to his side of the truck, and then looked out the windshield. "We might have a problem."

"It wouldn't surprise me. What happened?" I asked as I kept my eyes on him.

Jax pointed out the windshield to a closed gate.

“Shit. They have a gate. Of course, why wouldn’t they?” I grumbled to myself.

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“I didn’t even know this neighborhood existed.”

The uncertainty in his voice had me looking over at him. I didn't know the area. I shrugged, but then had to grit my teeth from the pain. “I’ve never been to their house here, and they didn’t mention it.”

“Who did you say it was?” Jax asked, leaning forward to get a better look out the window.

Stretching forward, I tried to see if there was anything there before I answered back. “My friends, Alex and Luke Sandström.”

He tilted his head to the side. “Are they gay?” Jax asked in a hushed voice as if someone else might hear him.

A laugh burst out of me, and I didn’t care how badly it hurt to laugh because it was too funny. “Alex and Luke? Gay?”

Jax looked down at the space between us, and my laughter died. Had I hurt his feelings?

“Shit, Jax, I’m sorry. Really, I am.”

Peeking out from under his long lashes he murmured, “From your reaction I’m going to say they aren’t gay.”

“No, they’re not gay. Have you seriously never heard of Luke Sandström?”

He looked up to the roof for a moment before shaking his head. “No, I don’t think so.”

How had this man not heard of Luke? A Hollywood actor who had fallen in love with a single mother from the Midwest who now spent all of his free time here. Especially since Jax lived in Fairlane. In the same city!

“Luke Sandström has a show called Night Shadows on H@T, and he’s been in quite a few movies. It’s rumored he’s going to do a big book trilogy that will make his career. After that, he won’t have to work again if he doesn’t want to.”

“Doesn’t ring a bell, but I watch very little TV or movies. That kind of stuff doesn’t interest me.”

“Really? Wow! His wife, Alex, is from here. It was kind of a big deal since, if he’s not working or on vacation, he’s here instead of LA.”

Jax made a strange noise that was a mix between a grunt and a hum as he looked out at the dark neighborhood. “Why is that a big deal?” he asked after a few moments.

“Because people are assholes. I don’t know. I guess because everyone expected him to want to be in LA. I’m not saying it makes sense. It’s just the way Hollywood is.”

“Definitely doesn’t to me, and you know them?”

“Yeah, I met them a couple of years ago when I did a guest spot on his show. Alex was there, and we hit it off. So much so that they invited me to their wedding.”

“Cool.”

I had a feeling that Jax was not feeling like it was indeed cool, but I wasn’t going to



push him. Especially after he had saved me from being stuck out in the cold all night.

Realization hit me as to why we sat there, and what the real problem was. “If there’s no power, then I can’t get in, can I?” God, I was slow tonight. Maybe I did have a concussion. Normally, I would have figured it out right away. Maybe it was because I was inside of a truck with a man who had the most amazing voice I’d ever heard and smelled just as good.

“Sorry.” He answered apologetically. “If you had their phone number, and they had power, there might be an off chance you could get in, or they could come down and get you, but with no power to the call box or gate, I don’t see any way to contact them. What type of phone do you have?”

I peered over at him wondering why he was asking me that. What did it matter? “An iPhone. Why?”

“Well, I thought if we had the same phone, we could charge yours up a little and try to call them, but I don’t have an iPhone. Fuck,” he shook his head angrily. “I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, me too.” I murmured as I looked at the gate impeding any progress.

Leaning my head back, I looked up at the truck’s roof. “Now what am I going to do?” I rolled my head to the side and looked at Jax. “Can you take me to the nearest hotel?”

“Yeah, I can do that, but there might be a problem. We’ve only got one in town, and it’s the holidays. I can look it up and call to see if they have any rooms available for you. I’d hate to take you all the way across town in this weather if they have no vacancies. The next nearest one is over thirty miles away.”

“Thank you, Jax. I’d really appreciate it. You’ve gone above and beyond what anyone else would have done in your position.”

“Nah, maybe not in LA, but you’d be surprised who’d help a person in need here in Fairlane.”

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I seriously doubted he was right, but I didn't want to fight with this man who had only been nice to me.

"I don't have the energy to fight you on this. Let's agree to disagree. What do you say?"

"Sounds like a plan." He grabbed his phone from a hidden place in the dash. His face lit up more than what the dash had done, but still not enough for me to get a good look. I was desperate to see him in the full light of day, knowing that the darkness hid his good looks. I couldn't take my eyes off him as he put his phone to his ear and spoke.

His hair, brows, eyes, and scruff looked to be black. His lips were lush and full. They were perfect, and I was mesmerized as I watched them form the deep, gravelly voice that came out of my savior.

He let out a huff, then those perfect lips formed a grimace. "Alright. Thanks, Jane." Jax hung up and placed his phone down on his thigh nearest me and tapped his fingertips against it. "Bad news. They aren't taking anymore occupants since they lost power. Their generator can only power their small lobby area, and everyone's in there with very little room to move about."

"What do I do? Go back to the airport and stay there until I can get a flight out?"

My options were zero, and if the airport wouldn't let me stay there, I had no idea what I'd do. Never again was I taking an impromptu trip. The only good thing about the situation was that with everything going on, it was keeping my mind off my so-

called band.

“You can stay with me,” Jax stated as he looked out the windshield.

4

Jax

Why did I ask her to stay with me? Maybe because she was the most beautiful, unconventional woman I had ever seen or met. The moment my flashlight had lit up her face, I’d been instantly drawn to her. Even with Gabi being unconscious. Even before I saw her car wrecked on the side of the icy road. Something or someone had made me jump in my truck in the middle of an ice storm and set off without purpose.

That, and my mom had taught me to always help a woman in need.

“You’re not a serial killer, are you?”

I barked out a laugh. “Shouldn’t you have asked that before you got in my truck?”

“Probably, but at the time I didn’t have a choice. It was you or an ambulance, and there’s no way in hell I’m going to the hospital.”

Why was she so adamant about not going to the hospital? No one liked going, but if you needed to go, you went. Was she hiding from someone? Was she in trouble, and that’s why she had shown up here? Maybe I needed to stop reading mystery novels.

“You didn’t answer my question. Are you a serial killer, or are you planning to hurt me, Jax?”

“I will never hurt you,” I vowed.

Although I felt if anyone got hurt in this scenario, it would be Gabi hurting me. I knew she would only be here for a short amount of time, and I already didn't like the thought of never seeing her again. I wasn't sure how I would fight the pull I felt for her, but I knew it would be in my best interest if I did.

"There's something about you that makes me believe you," she said in an awed voice.

I liked hearing those words from her mouth more than I should.

"I had a fire going when I left, so the house will be warm when we get there, and I have a hot tub you can use that will help your sore muscles."

"I might take you up on that. Do you have any alcohol at your place?"

"I've got beer and maybe a bottle of whiskey." I didn't drink a lot, especially at home. If she wanted anything girly, she was out of luck.

"I'll take whatever you got. I'm not picky. I've been dreaming of having a drink since I landed and this whole mess started."

Gabi shivered from her side of the truck, and I swore I heard her teeth chatter, even though they had stopped sometime before she'd fallen asleep.

"Do you want me to turn the heat up more?"

"I'm good, but thanks," she replied before pulling the blanket up, tucking it under her chin.

Even though I was sweating like a cat in heat, I leaned forward to turn the heat up full blast on her side. I would have turned mine down, but I knew some cool air would have made its way over to her, and she needed to warm up more than I needed to cool

down.

With the roads clear of cars except for a fair share of runoffs, it didn't take too long before I was pulling into my driveway. Gabi slowly sat forward with a slight grimace of pain as she took in what little she could of my house in the dark. It was pitch black out except for the light coming from my headlights.

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I was more than a little nervous of what she'd think after getting a glimpse of one of the houses in the neighborhood her friends lived in. She probably already thought less of me since I had assumed her friends were gay, but they both had guy names, and I hadn't heard of them before.

Gabi had said she'd met them doing a guest spot on his show, but I didn't get an actor vibe from her. Not that I knew what the actor vibe felt like. I wanted to ask what she did for a living, but I hesitated. All I knew was that Gabi was as badass as she was beautiful.

Jumping out of my truck, I made my way around to open the passenger door and helped Gabi out. It wouldn't be good if she fell down now and ended up breaking something.

"Thanks," she said after using my arm to help her down. "Are you the last gentleman on the planet?"

I shook my head and chuckled, "I doubt it. Sounds like you've been hanging around the wrong people."

"No doubt about it," she mumbled to herself.

I wasn't sure if she meant for me to hear her or not.

"Actually, now that I've thought about it for a second," she started as we made our way up the step to my door, "Luke is a gentleman. He's pretty fucking great."

“At least you’ve got one in your life. Now watch your step. There are two, and then we’ll be on the landing, and it’s likely slick.”

Gabi clutched onto my arm as if her life depended on it, and we slowly made our way to the side door of the house.

As I opened the door, Gabi asked, “Why isn’t your garage attached to your house?”

I couldn’t help but chuckle at how direct she was. “Because my house is ancient, and when it was built, it didn’t have a garage.”

“Did you build the garage? Holy shit, it’s dark in here. I can’t even see my hand in front of my face.”

“Welcome to my humble abode. Make yourself at home.” I invited as we stepped inside.

“Can you direct me to a couch or to that fire you mentioned earlier?” her voice shook, either from being cold or not being comfortable with me yet.

“Follow me. There’s a chair right beside the fireplace, perfect for you to sit and warm up.”

She silently followed me into the living room. I could almost feel her trying to look around, but as she had mentioned, it was pitch dark in the house until we entered the living room.

“Take this,” I said as I handed her the blanket that was draped over the back of the recliner. “I’ll be right back. I’m going to find some candles and flashlights for us to use.”



As I started to walk away Gabi, called out, “Wait, Jax! I just wanted to say thank you for everything. You didn’t have to invite me into your home, or even stop to help me for that matter.”

“You’re welcome, but you don’t have to keep thanking me. Let me find some light, and I’ll be right back.”

I knew I had some candles put away somewhere, but I wasn’t sure where. All I knew was that they were packed away in a box in one of the downstairs closets. If the power ever went out, I was fine to sit around with no light except from the fire. There were two headlamps in the garage that I knew would work best. Grabbing the small flashlight from a drawer in the kitchen, I went back outside to go out to the garage.

I knew where they were, but I wasn’t used to walking around in my shop in the pitch dark. Normally it was brightly lit, or I had the door open for natural light. Even in the dark, it didn’t take me long to find them. I only hoped that the batteries in them were good. It wouldn’t do us any good if their lights were weak or went dead on us by the end of the night.

Instead of using the side door to go in, I went around to the back to check on the temperature of the hot tub. It should have kept its temperature since the power had only been out for a couple of hours by then. The only problem would be once the cover was off it, it wouldn’t be able to reheat itself.

The cover reminded me of myself in a lot of ways – always a struggle to let people in.

“I found us each a headlamp to use. Now I’ll see if I can find the candles. While I was out, I checked the hot tub. It’s still hot if you want to use it. I think it’ll help your sore muscles. Unfortunately, you won’t be able to stay in it for very long. Even though it’s in the ground and well insulated, once the top is off, the temperature will decline pretty quickly. I’d say you’ve got five to ten minutes of hot water. Maybe

longer. I've never used it with the power off." I called out.

Before I searched for the candles, I remembered to get Gabi some water and ibuprofen. I should have given it to her before I went out to the garage, but having her in my house had me preoccupied. I was sure she was sore. Once she started to move, it seemed to help, but anyone would be in pain after a wreck like she'd been in, and her head had to be killing her. Lucky for her, it had stopped bleeding, and the cut wasn't bad. It wouldn't even need a bandage.

"Take these. They should help you feel better." Our hands touched with a jolt of electricity as she took them both from me.

"Thanks, Jax," she caught herself saying thank you again and bit her plump, pink lip between her teeth. My cock immediately jerked to attention and throbbed against the zipper of my jeans. Before I did something we'd both regret, I walked away to cool off and find those damn candles.

After searching two closets and finding nothing, I was afraid I had somehow thrown them out. I was at the point of giving up when, in the back corner, I spotted a box labeled Mom's candles.

Even though I knew my mom would have wanted me to use what was left of her stuff, it was still hard. She would have wanted me to do everything within my power to make Gabi comfortable, and I needed to remember that. It was silly to keep everything of mom's stuffed in a closet.

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Pulling out half a dozen, I quickly put the box back and made my way to the living room where I had left Gabi alone for far too long.

5

Jax

My steps skidded to a halt when I found Gabi standing in my living room with her bare shoulders and legs peeking out from underneath the blanket she had wrapped around herself. Was she naked under there? I gulped painfully as I took in every inch of her creamy skin.

“I decided I’d take you up on your offer.” She stepped toward me, her silhouette glowing from the firelight.

“I can see that. I have to take the top off, and I’ll grab you my slippers to wear. While I’m at it, I’ll set out these candles through the house so you can see and find your way around.” My eyes darted around the room, trying not to stare at her for too long.

I set a candle on the coffee table and lit it before making my way to place more in the kitchen, bathroom, the bedroom I’d quickly setup for her, and lastly my bedroom.

I realized that I hadn’t asked Gabi if she had any luggage, but surely, she had something besides her purse. I pulled out the smallest pair of sweatpants I could find, knowing they’d still be too big for her. Next, I got her: a pair of my thickest wool socks, my only pair of slippers that had seen better days, but no one ever saw them so who cared, a t-shirt, my robe, and my warmest sweatshirt. I took all but the slippers

and robe to her room.

“Ready?” I asked even though I had no need. Gabi was standing at the sliding glass door that led out to the backyard. She had her headlamp on as it shined through the glass. I doubted she could see much, but for some reason, I didn’t want to think too much about that. I liked it that she was curious about my house.

She whirled around wide eyed. “From what I can see with this,” she pointed to the headlamp. “Your backyard is beautiful. Even in winter. Everything is.” She indicated around the room.

“Thank you. Did you expect something else?” I laughed. “Not your typical bachelor pad, huh?”

“Definitely not. Are you going to join me?” She asked looking back and forth between me and the outside.

“Have you already forgotten how cold it is out there?” I placed the slippers on the floor and watched as her tiny feet slid into them. I could see from the light of my headlamp that her toes were painted a bright blue. They were cute. “I’ll set this out on a chair for you when you get out.”

“Won’t you please join me?” she asked innocently. Although I knew it was far from innocent.

“I don’t think that’s a very good idea. Are you hungry? Maybe I could make you a sandwich or something.”

She tilted her head to the side and watched me. “Why isn’t it a good idea?”

Jerking my chin up at her, I kept my eyes locked on hers. “You’re naked under

there.”

“Have you never seen a naked woman before? Don’t tell me you’re a virgin. Your voice...” Abruptly she stopped and turned back to the doors. “I’m ready to go now.”

“On it.” I was happy to get away from her line of questioning. Slipping passed her, I made my way to unlock the cover and pull it back. Steam rose from the water into the cold night air. Halfway back to the house, Gabi cracked the door open and peeked out. “Is it ready?”

“All ready.” I answered indicating the area with steam filling the air. I met her underneath the roofed part of the back porch that was protected from the ice. “Hang on to me again. It’s pretty slick on the concrete and bricks.”

“Ice storms suck,” she muttered right before one foot slipped out from under her. Wrapping my other arm around her waist, I righted Gabi and held her steady. Looking up at me in wonder she asked. “How long do these normally last?”

“The ice or the power outage?”

“Both, either, or.” She answered before she turned to the water, dropped the blanket, and quickly stepped into the water.

Turning my back to her, I picked up the blanket and set it on the chair with the robe and towel. “I’ll go make us some sandwiches.”

“You don’t have to go, Jax.”

“Yeah, I do. I’ll be back to help you get out and to the house.”

There was a sigh of resignation from her as I started to walk away.

She didn't understand how close I was to stripping down and taking her in that moment. Her body was perfection. Her ass was round and tight, her breasts firm, creamy handfuls. I knew just by looking at her the one time. Her body was the epitome of a Greek goddess. Tattoos graced her arms and ran across her chest and back. In the dark, I couldn't get a good look, but I wanted to get acquainted with each and every one of them. Preferably with my tongue.

Slapping two sandwiches together to keep my mind off Gabi's sexy body, I hoped she liked ham and Swiss on wheat with mayo because that was all I had at the moment. I grabbed the potato chips out of the pantry and placed everything on the island.

After helping her out of the hot tub, we sat eating quietly. The crunch of chips and the occasional sound of freezing rain hitting the windows were the only sounds.

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“Ugh,” Gabi sniffed and then popped another chip in her mouth, chewing quietly.

“What? Did the meat go bad?” I smelled my sandwich, but it seemed fine.

“No, you make a great sandwich. I smellstrongly,” she emphasized the word as if it was dirty. “Of chlorine. It never occurred to me that I wouldn’t be able to take a shower.”

Fuck! Now that she’d mentioned it, there was a light chlorine smell in the air.

“Sorry. Did I not tell you that you can take a shower? The water should be hot, but the room will be pretty dark. I have a gas water heater, and the power outage doesn’t affect it. With any luck, we’ll have power by morning.”

“Then it won’t happen,” she mumbled against her sandwich.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I have shit luck.” She frowned, swiped another chip, and tossed it into her mouth.

“Do you want to tell me about it?” I asked, curious.

“Not really.” She sighed and looked off into the dark.

I wanted to know more about her and didn’t at the same time. The more I learned, the more drawn I’d be to her.

“Still, I shouldn’t complain. All you’ve done is help me. I should be more grateful.” She smiled around the sandwich wickedly. “Why didn’t you get into the hot tub with me?”

“Earlier, what were you going to say about my voice?” I countered.

Shaking her head, Gabi ran her fingers through her still damp hair. “You first.”

Clearing my throat, I tried not to grimace. I didn’t want to tell her, but if I refused, she wouldn’t open up to me. “Fair enough. It was the right thing to do. I was trying to be a gentleman.”

“Was it really? Wouldn’t the gentlemanly response be to join your guest when said guest asked you to join her?”

Eyebrows raised, I asked, “Really? Said guest?” Her only response was to smile and nod. “Fine, because if I had gotten into that water with you knowing you were naked, I would have taken advantage of you. I wouldn’t have been able to hold myself back.”

I could swear even in the dim light, I could see her face flush, which was surprising. I’d only known Gabi for a few hours, but she seemed like the type of person who would never be shy about anything. Bold and brash were more her style.

“Your turn.” I pushed her but gave her a wink to lighten the mood. If she saw, I wasn’t sure.

“Okay.” She shook her head, smiling. “Wow. You were definitely honest.” Clearing her voice, she answered resolutely. “I was going to say that with your voice alone, you could get any woman you wanted.”



“So, you like my voice? First time I’ve heard that.” Warmth spread through my chest.

She shrugged. “It’s the hottest thing I’ve ever heard.”

I sat back in my seat to hide in the shadows. It didn’t help to know that she liked my voice, no matter how it made me feel. How was I going to be able to stay away from her?

To put an end to the night before I did something I was sure I’d regret, I stood and started to clean up. “You’ve had a long day, and I’m sure you’re tired.”

“Yeah,” she stammered. She was probably taken off guard at my sudden change of subject. “Do you need help with anything?”

“I got it. Do you need me to show you to the bathroom or your room?”

Gabi tilted her head to the side and watched me intently for a moment before answering hesitantly. “I can find it. Goodnight, Jax.”

“Night.”

Maybe it was good that she thought I was an asshole. Then she’d stay away from me, and I wouldn’t be tempted.

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Gabi

After waking up, I stayed in bed staring up at the ceiling, trying to figure out what had happened the night before with Jax. I was at a loss as to what had made him shut down so quickly.

One thing I knew, me staring at nothing was never going to give me answers unless I overheard Jax talking to himself, and that was unlikely.

Padding down the hall to the kitchen, I stopped short when I found Jax leaning against the wall looking outside, lost in thought. When he didn't immediately notice me, I took advantage and finally got a better look at him with the morning light shining on his face.

It was as I thought, Jax was gorgeous from head to booted toe. His hair was black, and it looked as if it was a few months late getting cut but in a good way. In a way that made me want to run my fingers through his hair and clutch it tightly with his head between my legs. His dark eyes, even from a distance, looked out longingly, but with a hint of loneliness that made me want to soothe his soul. Yesterday's dark scruff was longer and sexier.

Jax had to be at least six foot tall. His broad shoulders and sculpted chest filled out his long-sleeved, white Henley flawlessly. It was obvious that he took care of his body and treated it well. Muscular thighs and an ass that I wanted to squeeze filled out his jeans in all the right places.

Everything about the man before me turned me on, but with the distant way he was

standing there, and after last night, it didn't bode well that I would get a hint of what was underneath his clothes.

"Are you going to stand there all morning looking at me?"

His quiet voice shocked me. How long had I been staring? I shrugged. Surely, he had to be used to women ogling him. "It's not a bad way to spend my time. You're easy on the eyes."

Jax shook his head and let out a deep chuckle. "You might be the only one who thinks so."

My head shook on its own accord. Jax was crazy. "Are you searching for compliments?"

Letting out a deep sigh, Jax moved away from the window and headed into the kitchen. "I don't have a lot to offer for breakfast. The milk is still cold if you want cereal, or I have granola bars. Sorry, I wasn't expecting company."

Halfway through whatever Jax had been saying, I stopped listening. My entire focus was on the scar that started at his left eyebrow, moved down to his eye, and curved around his cheekbone.

Clearing his throat after catching me staring at him twice in under two minutes, his lips turned downward. "Not so eye catching, now am I?" he turned his back to me and opened a cabinet. "Do you want anything to eat?"

"Not right now. I'm not really a breakfast person. Normally, I drink two or three cups of coffee, but thanks for the offer."

"Until the power comes back on, I can't offer you any coffee."

“That’s okay,” I said softly as I took in his demeanor that had changed from languid by the window to now stiff as a board. I had made him uncomfortable with my staring.

He sighed and said in a flat voice. “You can ask about it. I know you want to.”

I hated to ask, but he was right; I did want to know what had happened. Jax’s eyes darkened and filled with pain. All I wanted to do in that moment was to reach out and make it all better, but I had a feeling that Jax wouldn’t be receptive. He’d think I was doing it out of pity; when really, it hurt to see him in pain.

“I... well... okay. How did you get that scar?”

His eyes locked on mine. “It was in a bar fight.”

Even if I had wanted to, I couldn’t hide my surprise. My mouth formed a silent ‘O’ as my eyebrows shot up. “Really?” I had no idea how I thought he would have gotten his scar, but it certainly wasn’t in a bar fight.

“I hate to disappoint you, but it’s not that exciting.”

A dismissive sound escaped me, but I wanted to know too badly to care. “Let me be the judge of that.”

Jax stood quietly for a moment before he started to leave the room. Was he trying to get out of telling his story? I followed only to end up in the living room, where he started working on the fire.

Instead of crowding him, I sat on his plush black leather couch. This was the first time I was getting a good look at what Jax and his house looked like. The sky was still gray and dark, and the large Christmas tree was blocking a good portion of the

window, but it was better than what I had gleaned last night with my headlamp.

It was clear that the house was indeed old. The rooms were small but had been renovated; everything looked brand new. It was a little surprising for a single man who wasn't even in his thirties yet, or at least he didn't look it. The furniture was black or dark woods that were stylish, but also comfortable. An extremely large TV hung above the fireplace in typical manly fashion. His Christmas tree was nicely decorated in whites, reds, and golds, with each decoration strategically placed, or at least that's what it looked like to me. If I had seen the same tree in LA, I would have assumed it had been done by a decorator. Who the hell was Jaxson Stone?

He stood after stoking the fire. Seeing me waiting patiently, Jax smiled ruefully and gave his head a slight shake. Sitting down in the chair by the fire with the scar side to me, Jax gazed into the now blazing fire.

"Two years ago, my girlfriend and I were at a bar. I went to the bathroom, and when I came back out, this asshole was harassing her. Even from the hallway, I could tell that she was uncomfortable. I did what any guy would do; I got in between them and in his face."

My breath caught knowing something bad was going to happen, and I wrung my fingers together.

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“When I asked him to leave, he pushed me, but I held my ground. I hadn’t been in a fight since grade school, but I knew I could hold my own and stayed calm. When he realized that he wasn’t affecting me, he became irate.”

He ran a hand through his hair, messing it up and making him sexier than he should be while telling me his horrible story.

It was obvious that opening up to me was difficult for him, and I didn't want to dredge up old memories that would make things more awkward between us, and I really didn't want to hear about his girlfriend. “You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to. I shouldn’t have asked.”

He waved a dismissive hand with a slight upturn to his lips. “I’m fine.” He took a deep breath in and continued his story. “I told my girlfriend to grab her purse and to take my wallet out of my back pocket to pay our tab. She grabbed my wallet but then dropped it. I wasn’t thinking, and instinct kicked in, I leaned down to pick it up for her. The second I stood up, he smashed his beer bottle to my face and wrenched it down, causing this.” His fingertip traced along the scar in such a way that I knew he had done that motion many times before.

I laughed at the absurdness. “You call that not exciting? If so, I’d like to hear what you think is.”

His only response was to shrug and look back to the fire.

“So where is this girlfriend of yours? What’s her name? Won’t she mind that you have a woman staying at your house?” I asked, although I wasn’t sure I wanted to

know. Was she going to stop by? Maybe I should have him take me over to Alex and Luke's before she showed up. There had to be a way to get passed their gate during the day.

"MacKenzie. Her name's MacKenzie, and I don't know where she is now. She broke up with me a couple of months after the incident, then moved away shortly after." Jax's body tensed with every word he spoke until his back was rigid with tension; his back curved away from the chair.

"Are you shitting me?" I whisper-yelled in outrage.

"I shit you not," he answered back with humor; some of the tension in his body eased away.

I knew I shouldn't have asked, but I couldn't help myself. "Why would she break up with you?" Once again, I couldn't help from raking my gaze over his body. From what I saw, Jax was the whole package.

Staring down at his boots, Jax answered, crestfallen. "She said that every time she looked at me and my scar, which was pretty gnarly at the time, she had flashbacks to that night, blood dripping into my eye and running down my face. I was a bloody mess."

"She's a bitch then," I cried. "Plain and simple. That was a shit move on her part, and even if it was gnarly, she should have stood by her man. In the long run, in my opinion, it only made you hotter." My body vibrated with anger. What the fuck was wrong with that girl?

With a sad smile, Jax looked at me. "Gabi, you don't have to say that. I know what I look like."

I moved to stand directly in front of him. Wanting to grab his face with my hands, I put them behind my back. I wasn't sure he'd appreciate me manhandling him. "Have you looked in the mirror lately? Because if you had, you'd know that you're smoking hot, and that scar only adds to it. Jax, don't let what that bitch did to you mess with your head. I promise you that I'm not lying. You're the hottest guy I've ever come across."

Jax looked up at me, eyes wide, opening and closing his mouth a couple of times before a smile slowly spread across his face. "Thanks, Gabi."

We stared at each other for a few moments. Each second that passed, I could feel my body flush and the sexual tension build between us.

Breaking eye contact, I looked around the room when my eyes caught on the mistletoe that hung above the front door. Earlier, when I had come out of the bedroom, I could have sworn that I'd seen mistletoe hanging from the doors to the backyard and the side of the house where we'd come in last night.

"What's the deal with all the mistletoe?"

7

Jax

"What's the deal with all the mistletoe?" she asked with the need to break the tension that had started to build between us.

Shrugging my shoulders, I looked away and into the fire.

"You have a lot of decorations for a man," she proceeded, not noticing that I was uncomfortable as she sat back down on the couch. "I didn't even put up a Christmas



tree this year, and yours is decorated beautifully. Don't even get me started on the garland on your mantle. Is Christmas your favorite holiday?"

Her eyes were wide, and somehow innocent as she looked back and forth between the front door, the tree in front of the window, and the fireplace.

"Why didn't you put up a tree?" I asked, changing the subject off me.

Gabi let out a frustrated sigh, her lips flattened into a tight line. "I hadn't been home in months and hadn't planned to be home but two or three days, so it seemed like a waste. I've only ever had a real tree, and I knew it would die while I was gone." Her tone had turned defensive as she tried to explain.

"So, you're not anti-Christmas?" I joked to lighten the mood.

Throwing her head back, Gabi laughed for a long minute. "Far from it. I love Christmas. I love the decorations, seeing the lights twinkle, the smells, and all the happy faces." She frowned as she gazed at my dark tree. "I guess I feel guilty that I didn't get a tree and enjoy Christmas this year."

"Does your work take you away from home often?" I asked, trying not to stare at her perky breasts that had been pushed up when she crossed her arms over her chest.

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“I’m used to it,” she finally replied bitterly.

“But not anymore?” I asked each word slowly, feeling like I was moving into dangerous territory.

Gabi huffed and may have rolled her eyes. It was too hard to see in the dimly lit room. “As least for the foreseeable future.” Leaning her head back against the cushion she muttered, “I don’t know what I’m going to do now.”

“Did you get fired? Who the hell would fire you right after Christmas?” I asked outraged. Only a total asshole would do that. Didn’t most people realize that the holidays were some of the happiest, but also the saddest, in people’s lives?

Tilting her head, she smiled at me. “You’re too sweet getting upset on my behalf. To answer your question, no, I wasn’t fired.” She let out a puff of air as she rolled her head back and forth on the cushion. “You really have no clue who I am?”

It was my turn to tilt my head as I took Gabi in. Her fingers flitted over her clothes and hair. Was she nervous? Did I make her nervous? I was sure that if I knew Gabi, I would recognize her. She was the most gorgeous woman I had ever seen. With her long brown hair that cascaded over her shoulders and down her back, her big doe eyes that endeared and hypnotized me at the same time. Then there were the tattoos that I’d seen last night that covered her body. There was no way I’d forget her face or amazing body.

“I’d remember you if you’d ever crossed my radar. Who are you Gabi?”

Fiddling with the end of the sweatshirt she was wearing, Gabi laughed without humor. “I feel like a dick asking if you know who I am. It was very presumptuous. I don’t expect everyone to know who I am. You didn’t even know who Luke was, and you live in the same town.”

Who the hell was Gabi?

Coughing, I said, “Maybe I should be embarrassed.”

“No, you definitely shouldn’t. What’s important or interesting for a woman is not the same for a man. I’ve learned that through the years.”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I’ve never had a big interest in TV shows or movies, but if a celebrity was living in my town, you’d think I would have heard about it.”

Bobbing her head from side to side, Gabi studied me intently. “You said you got your scar two years ago, then your girlfriend broke up with you right?”

I nodded my head, unsure why she was rehashing what I had told her.

“I’m assuming that during that time you probably didn’t go out much and might have been a little depressed. Am I right?”

Slouching down in my chair, I answered, “I work out of my garage and didn’t get out much.” I chewed my lip, not wanting to admit how long I’d holed myself up in my house and garage but forced myself to tell her for some reason. “For probably around six months.”

Her eyes widened comically, but she quickly hid her shock. “I think that was around the time Luke moved here, and the hubbub of him being here happened, so it makes sense why you missed it.”

Leaning back in my chair, I ran my hand through my hair. “Thanks for letting me off the hook.”

“Anytime,” she smiled.

“Now why would I, or anyone else, recognize you? Are you an actress?” She had mentioned being on her friend’s show before.

“Up until a couple of days ago, I was in a band called Shadowed Alley. Then my asshole bandmates decided to break up the band and start a new one without me,” she answered bitterly.

I didn’t blame her; that was a dick move.

“Why would they do that?” Surely if they had talked to her, they could have come up with a compromise.

“They weren’t happy that they weren’t the center of attention, and they think that starting a new band, when none of them can sing worth a damn, is going to help them. I don’t know.” She shook her head, eyes blazing. “Maybe they want an all guy band. I was so pissed at the time, their excuses went in one ear and out the other.”

“I can see how you’d be the center of attention, with you being the singer and your beauty.”

She turned her head and her hair slid so that her face was hidden. “You never answered why you have all that mistletoe hanging around, and why you decorate for Christmas more than any man I’ve ever known. Have you been bringing unsuspecting women to your house to get them underneath your mistletoe?”

I couldn’t help but laugh. She didn’t know how far off the mark she was. “Far from

it,” I eventually choked out. It had been almost two years since a woman had stepped foot in my home.

“Then why?”

“Because it was my mother’s favorite holiday. She believed in love and had some crazy story that if you kissed someone underneath the mistletoe at midnight on New Year’s Eve, then that person was your destiny.” I was hoping that Gabi wouldn’t ask any more questions, because I wasn’t sure how much more I could answer. Even three years later, it was still too fresh to talk about.

“Do you believe in all that destiny stuff?” she asked in a sweet tone that I couldn’t deny.

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“I don’t know.” I shrugged and looked at the mistletoe hanging at the front door. “I guess I used to when I was young and saw the belief through her eyes, but now,” I let out a deep breath, “I don’t even know if I believe in love, let alone that we each have someone who we are destined to be with.”

Gabi sat up and moved to the edge of her seat. “I don’t know if I’d put it like that. I don’t believe in destiny, but I do believe that we make our own fate. Even though I have no reason to, I believe in soulmates. Maybe that’s what your mom meant.”

“Perhaps,” I said, keeping my eyes on the mistletoe and thinking of the happiness and wonder on my mother’s face during Christmastime.

“Did your mom decorate for you?” she asked innocently, not knowing the dagger she’d just used to pierce my heart.

Needing some space, I left to get a bottle of water. After taking a couple of deep swallows, I braced my hands on the counter and looked outside. Everything was covered in a sheet of ice.

It was peaceful. The only sounds were the snaps from branches breaking and the crackle of the fireplace.

“Hey,” Gabi placed her hand between my shoulder blades. “Are you okay? If I overstepped my boundaries, just say so. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“I know you didn’t. Don’t worry about it.” I continued to stare out the window, and after a few minutes of silence on both our parts, I listened to Gabi walk away. Unable

to stop thinking about how happy the holidays had made my mom and how she would have wanted me to be happy.

Could I be happy with Gabi? Would it be worth opening up to her if she was only going to leave? We were from two very different worlds. Fuck, if I wasn't thinking like some chick. I couldn't deny that I had never once in my life been drawn to anyone the way I was to Gabi. It was getting harder and harder to fight the pull I felt toward her.

Lowering my head, I closed my eyes before pushing off the counter to find Gabi. Here she was my guest, and I had ignored her when she was trying to make me feel better.

Starting in the living room, I searched from room to room, unable to find her downstairs. Making my way up the stairs, I spotted her sitting on the top step with her elbows on her knees and her head in her hands.

I knew she could hear me as I made my way up the steps, each creaking with my weight, yet she continued to be unmoved. "Gabi," I spoke her name quietly as I sat a couple of steps below her, so that we'd be on the same level.

Neither of us said anything for a few moments. I was so out of practice with women, I had no idea how to handle the situation. If I would have known she would take my silence so hard, I wouldn't have ignored her. I had only wanted a few minutes to myself so that she wouldn't see how upset talking about my mom made me.

"Gabi," I said a little louder this time as I scooted closer and rested one hand on top of hers. "I'm sorry if I hurt you. I'm... fuck, I'm not used to this."

Turning her head, she peeked out of her curtain of hair. "Used to what?"

“Talking. Opening up. I’m not good at this, but I feel like shit for upsetting you.”

“From my experience, most men aren’t particularly good at opening up.” She bit her bottom lip as she peeked out a little more. A look of indecision on her face.

“Go ahead and say whatever’s on your mind.” Moving the hair from her face, I tucked it behind her ear. The moment we touched skin-to-skin, I felt a rush of warmth through my body as Gabi gasped in shock.

Clearing her throat, Gabi sat up with eyes wide and bright. “Wow!” She eyed my hand that I let fall to my lap. “Um... I might be wrong here, but I think when your girlfriend broke up with you, you started to see yourself differently.”

“No,” I denied and started to get to my feet.

“Wait, Jax. Don’t go yet. Please, just hear me out.” Her shoulders slumped as she looked up at me. “Like I said, I might be wrong, but I don’t think I am.”

If she wanted me to stay, she was going about it in the wrong way. Why couldn’t we talk about boring shit instead of all the things from my past that still haunted me?

I stood and started making my way back downstairs when I said over my shoulder. “I’m going to try to make us some soup. I thought I could cut up the vegetables in the fridge and put them in a pot with some stock in the fireplace. It will either be a total failure or a warm meal to celebrate New Year’s Eve.”

“Do you need any help?” she asked hopeful.

“I’m good. There’s a den downstairs. It’s the last door on the right. It has all my mom’s old books, and mine. There should be something for you to read in there. If you open the blinds and curtains in your room, there should be enough light to read



by if you sit in the chair.”

“Oh, okay. I guess I’ll do that then.” Ducking her head back down, she hid her face.

And once again, I felt like an asshole. I’d gone to apologize and fix my mistake, only to hurt her again. I really needed to get my head out of my ass or figure out a way to get Gabi to her friend’s house and out of my life.

I knew which one would be easier, but which way would my heart lead me?

8

Gabi

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:17 pm*

After watching Jax walk away, I sat at the top of the stairs for a few minutes, trying to wrap my head around the fact that he had gone into the kitchen and started chopping up vegetables as if nothing had happened.

With a huff to myself, I rose to my feet and went downstairs to Jax's den. I had left my headlamp in my bedroom earlier, and with the blinds closed, I hadn't been able to get a good look at the room. Everything was in shadow. I couldn't wait for the power to come on so that I could get a good look at everything. And that everything included Jax. I would never again under-appreciate electricity.

Grabbing a random book off a shelf, I went and sat by the window in my room so I could pretend to read if Jax walked by. I highly doubted that he'd come to check on me, but I wanted to look busy just in case.

Jax may have denied that getting his scar and his girlfriend consequently dumping him hadn't change his view of himself, but I knew it was true. Even in the dark, he was gorgeous, and damn did that scar make him hot. If I were a blind woman, I would have wanted to jump him from his voice alone. It was so deep, husky, and gravelly. An auditory aphrodisiac. If anyone in Hollywood heard him, they'd cast him for his voice alone.

God, I couldn't wait to see him in the sunlight. Real sunlight, so I could ogle him properly.

How could I get Jax to see that he was gorgeous on the inside and out? Hating the scar that marred his face wasn't the only reason he'd closed down. Something had caused the heartache reflected in his dark eyes.

I wasn't sure how long I sat staring out the window, seeing nothing and thinking about Jax. How could I get him to talk to me without shutting down? I knew that everything would change between us if he talked. I couldn't explain why I wanted him to open up to me, but I needed it. Even though I would be leaving soon and would never see him again. Why did that thought make me so uneasy?

When I next blinked, the world had descended into darkness once again. I decided that Jax should have had enough time to get himself together. If not, too bad because I was done hiding. Since I'd awoke with Jax blinding me with his flashlight, I had been off. I wasn't a girl who got embarrassed or hid. A blush hadn't hit my cheeks since grade school, and now I felt as if they heated up every time Jax's eyes landed on me.

He made me feel like a beautiful girl. I hadn't felt that way in ages. Constantly touring with three guys and a year and a half without sex had battered my self-image.

Grabbing my headlamp and letting it hang around my neck, I stepped out of the bedroom to hear Jax somewhere in the house talking to himself. I paused to listen to what he was saying.

"Stop fucking this up. Gabi is not MacKenzie. She didn't do this to you." He continued to talk to himself but had gone out of earshot.

Instead of waiting to see if he'd come back so I could hear more, I loudly padded down the hall in his thick wool socks. I was glad that he couldn't see me, because I was sure I looked like an idiot trying to make so much noise. Once I got close to the end of the hallway, I walked as if I didn't have a care in the world and hadn't heard him talking to himself.

Jax had lit a couple of candles in the kitchen and had one going in the living room along with the fire. I found him once again standing at the sliding glass doors looking

out into the dark.

Putting a smile on my face, I greeted him as I walked to the kitchen table where a pot sat covered with a potholder on the lid. Lifting it up, a heavenly aroma filled the air; my stomach rumbled.

I moaned as I took another whiff. “That smells so good. I can’t remember the last time I had a home-cooked meal.”

Jax chuckled as he pushed off the wall he was leaning against. “Let me get something to serve with, and you can have as much as you want.”

After a few tense moments of us eating in silence, I watched Jax from the corner of my eye. He stared down at his bowl, his lips in a flat line, as if his soup had the answers to all his problems.

“This is really good. Thanks for making it for us. It’s perfect. All warm and homey.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it,” he muttered, not looking up.

Fuck, this was awkward. Maybe I should’ve had him try to take me over to Alex and Luke’s when it was still light out.

“So,” I drew out the word until he looked up at me through his long lashes. “Did you have any plans for tonight? Any parties or hanging out with friends?”

“Nah, that’s not really my scene. I was probably going to watch some Netflix and then head to bed.”

Could we be any different? Before I’d decided to come here, I’d planned to go with the guys in my band to Vegas. We had been invited to multiple parties that were sure

to be wild and the epitome of the rock star life. It's what the guys lived for. And so had I at first, but their growing resentment toward me slowly killed my love of the lifestyle.

Now I was in Fairlane, Missouri, in an ice storm with no power, and happily stuck in a house with a stranger who was the hottest guy in the world. If I could only get him to open up and see himself as I saw him.

After several more minutes of quiet, I cleared my throat. I hated that we had become so uncomfortable with each other.

"How old are you?" I asked to break the silence.

"I just turned thirty-two. How old are you?" He made a face. "Wait, I'm sorry. I shouldn't ask that."

I couldn't help but laugh. Maybe in another twenty years I wouldn't want to share my age, but I didn't care. I had nothing to hide. "I don't mind. How can you get to know someone if certain subjects are off limits?"

His eyes locked on mine, knowing that I wasn't talking about him asking about my age. "Touché."

"To answer your question, I'm twenty-eight."

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“Really?” His brows rose as he tilted his head. “You look younger.”

“Yeah, I hear it all the time. I’m hoping it will work in my favor when I’m older.”

Silence fell upon us once again. Obviously, I would need to keep the communication flowing.

“So, what’s your favorite color?”

Jax threw his head back and let out a hearty laugh, giving me hope that he hadn’t totally shut down. “Really?” he choked out.

“Well, I could ask about the weather, but we both know how bad it is.”

“Is it that bad being stuck with me?” he asked with a hint of sadness in his voice.

Looking him over in the candlelight, a smile tipped my lips. “It’s not so bad when you’re talking to me.”

“Yeah, about that. I’m sorry.” He took a deep breath and exhaled loudly as he let his shoulders relax. “I’ve never been very social, but after my mother’s death, and then my girlfriend breaking up with me because of my scar, I holed up here and kept to myself.”

“Oh Jax.” My hand covered his and squeezed, producing a little zing, but I kept it there for comfort. “I’m so sorry about your mom. When you told me about Christmas being her favorite holiday, I heard the fondness in your voice, but I thought you were

just a momma's boy.”

“I guess you could call me that.” He stopped to clear his throat. “Especially now that she's gone, and I know what I'm missing.”

“That makes sense, and it's sweet.” I knew I should probably stop while I was still ahead, and he shut down on me again, but I couldn't help but ask, since he was talking to me and opening up. “Did the two happen close together?”

“Depends on how you look at it. It had been about six months since...” he looked down, running a hand through his messy hair. I had a feeling he had repeated that motion quite a few times while I had been tucked away in my room today. “The incident in the bar was around six months after she died. I was finally over the roughest part of losing her. It was still hard, though, but I was... better, I guess.”

He shrugged like he couldn't find the appropriate word. “Then my girlfriend could barely look at me without bursting into tears, only for her to break up with me.”

With my hand still on his, I squeezed again and held it. “I can see how that would be hard.” Leaning forward in my seat, I asked, “Do you think your scar makes you ugly or scary?”

I took a deep breath in as I waited to see if he'd answer or leave.

“When people look at me, they look away after getting a good look at my scar. What else am I supposed to think?”

“I think it has to do with your demeanor. First, your size draws attention. You're tall and in great shape. That's going to draw anyone's eye. Second, you're gorgeous, so women are going to look, and men are going to be jealous.”

“And the third?” he asked with a shy smile.

“Are you fishing for compliments?”

Jax shrugged, and I laughed. “Okay. Third, I’ve already mentioned your voice. Seriously, you could do voice over work or be a book narrator. You’d have all the ladies swooning.”

He turned his head and held my gaze. “Is that what you’re doing? Swooning?”

“How could I not?” I pursed my lips fighting a smile. Maybe, just maybe, I was starting to break through.

“I wish I could see myself as you see me. Even in the darkness, you see so much.”

The sadness in his voice made tears sting the back of my eyes.

“Me too. I know I’ve only known you for a couple of days, but...” I paused trying to decide if I would lay myself bare for him. Was it worth it when I’d be gone soon?

“You can’t stop now. I thought we were getting to know one another.” He smirked at using my previous words against me.

“You want to know what I was about to say?” I asked with a tilt of my head. He nodded almost too eagerly. What the hell was I being so timid for? I might as well spit it out. “I was going to say that I’ve been drawn to you since the moment I woke up. At first, I thought you were my angel, then I heard your voice, and I was a goner. I know I haven’t seen you in the full light of day yet, but from what I’ve seen, you’re gorgeous. Inside and out.” I gave him a pointed look I wasn’t sure he could read in the dim light. “You didn’t have to take me in or help me. I can’t remember the last time I felt anything like this for another person, if ever. There’s something about you



that I can't explain."

Jax sat with his mouth open before he cleared his throat. "I don't know what I was expecting you to say, but that wasn't it. Is that really how you feel?"

Giving him a small smile, I answered, "I wouldn't have said it if it wasn't true."

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His throat bobbed as he swallowed hard and looked out the window for a brief moment. Turning back to me, Jax spoke in a shaky voice, “I don’t know if I can open up to you that way, knowing that you’re leaving soon.”

I tried to smile, but my lips turned down when I said softly. “You just did.”

9

Jax

We stoodside by side as Gabi helped me wash and dry our bowls. I’d already put the remaining soup in a container to keep for tomorrow. The refrigerator was no longer cold, so any food that I wanted to keep was now outside in a cooler.

“Well,” Gabi trilled her lips, breaking the silence. “That didn’t take long. There certainly isn’t much to do once it gets dark and the power’s out.”

Drying my hands, I replied. “I wish I could offer you a movie or something.” There wasn’t anything to do except talk, and so far, that hadn’t gone well.

“What would you be doing right now if I wasn’t here?” Gabi asked as she leaned against the counter. Even in my sweats that were far too big for her, she was sexy in everything she did.

Humming to myself, I thought about it. “With the power out, I’d probably sit by the fire and try to conceptualize the next motorcycle I’m going to build.”

“You build motorcycles?” Her eyes widened as she licked her full lips and edged closer.

“Out in my garage. I didn’t mention that before?”

“No, you didn’t. Do you ride also?” Her hand went to her neck as she subconsciously pushed her breasts out, or at least I thought it was subconsciously.

“I do. I don’t think I’d be a very good builder if I didn’t. You need to know how a bike handles and the way it should feel between your legs.”

Turning her head to the side, she whispered out a curse. “Is that a good or bad thing?” Moving back to the table, Gabi pushed her chair in and straightened the rest.

“Depends on how you look at it.”

She looked up and locked her eyes on me. “It’s really fucking hot.”

Good to know.

“I think I’m going to head to bed now. Thanks for dinner.” Her voice was high, but I didn’t get a chance to ask if she was okay. Instead, Gabi quickly turned and walked out of the room.

Deciding it was probably best if I didn’t go after her, I took the soup outside and put it in the cooler. When I got back to the sliding glass doors, Gabi was standing there watching me. I guess she’d changed her mind about going to bed. That or she needed something.

I thought she would move back from the door as I stepped inside, but I couldn’t have been more wrong. Gabi’s hands came up to rest on my chest as she tipped her head

back. Following her gaze, I stopped breathing when I realized we were under the mistletoe.

“Gabi, what are you doing?” I asked hoarsely.

“Testing destiny,” She answered before lifting up and crashing her lips to mine.

For a moment, I stood unmoving at the shock of her kiss. Tilting my head, I let my lips melt into hers. Cupping my cheek in her tiny hand, Gabi licked my lower lip, and I happily opened for her.

The world burst into technicolor as our kiss went frantic, tasting each other. I blinked my eyes open to see Gabi staring up at me. The power had come back on, and we were spotlighted by the outdoor light and the one coming from over the kitchen island.

Instead of looking around at her surroundings now that she could, Gabi only had eyes for me. Her hand tentatively reached up, and with one finger she lightly traced her finger over my scar. She started at my eyebrow and stopped by my eye only to curve around my cheekbone. A look of wonder came over her face. My eyes closed from her delicate and reverent touch.

“God Jax, you’re gorgeous.”

Warmth swelled in my chest, and I couldn’t hide the smile that came over my face. “I could say the same about you.”

She had been beautiful before, but now in the light, she was spectacular. Her skin glowed with a slight flush; her rich, chocolate brown eyes filled with undeniable heat. My very own brown-eyed girl. Her lips were swollen from our kiss.

Lifting up on her toes, Gabi brushed her mouth back and forth across mine only to stop and nibble on my lower lip.

“Kiss me, Jax,” she panted.

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Palming her hip, her leg instantly wrapped around me, pulling us even closer together. I couldn't stop myself from grinding my erection against her softness and the heat emanating from between her legs.

"Gabi, you feel so good." My body surged with electricity. For the first time in a long while, I felt alive.

Threading her fingers in my hair, Gabi jumped up and wrapped her legs around my waist. Her mouth moved across my jaw and down my neck. My hands palmed her ass, fingers digging deep into her flesh with each step I took toward my bedroom.

All thoughts of Gabi leaving the next day were gone. Only my blinding need for her remained.

Placing her on my bed, I climbed on top of her. One hand skimmed up her smooth stomach, pushing her shirt up, revealing her heaving breasts. Creamy skin highlighted her rosy nipples that were begging for my attention. My lower body had a mind of its own. I couldn't stop myself from grinding my hard cock against her hip.

One touch of her skin, and electricity charged me. I was humming. Alive. One taste of her mouth, and I needed her desperately.

My tongue swept inside, and I couldn't hold back my groan. Gabi panted underneath me, wrapping her legs around my hips, pulling me closer. My fingers fisted in her silky brown hair, tilting her head to the side, so I could taste more of her. I bit and nipped down her neck, using my tongue to soothe as I went, until I reached her pert nipples.

My tongue swirled around her rosy tip, feeling it harden as Gabi arched up into me, moaning. Grappling for my pants, she pulled them down as far as she could with her hands, and eventually her feet, as I continued to pinch, bite, and lap at her gorgeous breasts. Moving on to trace my tongue on the intricate tattoos that graced her collarbone.

All thought left me when I felt the heat of her tiny hand wrap around my cock.

“Fuck, you feel so damn good,” I moaned into the side of her neck. I was enraptured by each sweep of her thumb over my tip as she took the moisture and coated my cock, making it slick. Her hand moved up and down my shaft with eagerness—the twist she applied each time at the end drove me wild.

“Tell me you want this,” I rasped out as my hand fumbled desperately to open my nightstand drawer to find a condom.

“I want you, Jax,” she answered back breathlessly, hands running up and down my thighs while I straddled her sexy as fuck legs.

Never had I been as amped and nervous to be inside someone as I was in that moment. I knew nothing would be the same after I’d been inside her. Pumping my cock a few times, I squeezed the head and let out a moan. Gabi laid beneath me watching my every move, enraptured. With one lick of her lips, I was desperate to be inside her.

“I need you, Jax. Please.” She squirmed underneath me with want.

Her hair was fanned out on my pillow, her eyes heavy-lidded as she looked up at me. I couldn’t wait a second longer to be inside of her. I needed her just as much as she needed me.

As I slid into her, everything was right in the world. I squeezed our intertwined hands and slowly withdrew.

I never wanted to leave the warmth of her body.

I never wanted her to leave.

I had found my destiny.

My soulmate.

10

Gabi

Stretching out against Jax and yawning, I wrapped my arm and leg around him, nuzzling closer, not wanting to let go. Today was my last day in Fairlane, and I didn't want to leave. But Jax had never mentioned seeing each other again, so I would suck it up, head back to LA, and try to forget about him.

I knew it was the only way my heart wouldn't stay broken. I could already feel an aching hole starting to form. I had only known Jax for a few short days, but I was more heartbroken about leaving him than my band breaking up.

Sliding out of bed and slipping on my sweatshirt from yesterday, I made my way down to the kitchen to make some breakfast, only to find the refrigerator empty.

"What are you doing? I woke up, and you were gone." Jax stood leaning against the doorway with a scowl. His hair was messily tousled from my hands the previous night, making him look sexy and downright irresistible. He had slipped on a pair of jeans and left them unbuttoned. His shirtless chest heaved. Had he thought I'd



somehow left?

“Oh,” my hand came to my mouth with his sudden appearance, but I quickly placed it on the counter next to me. “I thought I’d make us some breakfast, but I forgot all the leftover food was outside in the cooler.”

Jax looked at me for a moment, as if trying to see if my statement was true. Maybe he thought I was regretting last night, and that’s why I had slipped out of bed. There was no way I would ever regret it. The only thing I’d regret would be my heartache when I was gone.

After watching me for a few moments, he pushed off the wall and started to walk toward the sliding glass doors. “I’ll go grab the cooler and put everything back in the fridge. Even with the food, I still have little to offer you for breakfast. Is cereal okay with you? I ran out of eggs the day before the ice storm and didn’t make it to the store before the weather got bad.”

He didn’t make eye contact as he spoke, walked to the door, and slipped on his boots. Maybe Jax regretted last night.

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Biting my lip as I watched him, I answered with a lump in my throat. “Cereal’s fine with me. I’m not picky.” I wasn’t hungry anyway.

As Jax went out to get the food, I scanned the kitchen, seeing it for the first time now that the lights were on and the sun was shining. The counters were black marble with a black, white, and gray backsplash accentuated by black cabinets with silver hardware and stainless-steel appliances. I was shocked to see how modern and clean everything was. Surely Jax had to hire someone to come in to clean, because I’d never met a man alive who lived in a house this clean without help.

Jax cleared his throat, startling me. “What’s with the shocked look?”

Whipping my head around, I knew I had a nervous smile on my face, but I couldn’t hide it. “Your kitchen is amazing. Beautiful, really. I was just thinking that I didn’t know any men who kept their houses this clean. Someone must come in and clean for you.” I had a feeling I could probably walk through the house, swipe my finger over any surface, and not come up with a speck of dust.

Jax shrugged his shoulders as he stepped passed me and to the fridge. “My mom engrained in me to keep a clean house. It stuck. It’s not a bad thing, is it?”

“Bad? No, it's amazing. You’re amazing.”

Peeking his head out from the door, he gave me a shy smile before ducking back inside. “I’m glad you think so.”

With us both sitting at the table silently eating cereal, I peeked up after each bite to

get a better look at Jax. He hadn't looked at me once. Instead, he somberly stared down into his soggy cereal. I wanted to say something, anything, but I had no idea what to say. It was, perhaps, one of the most awkward moments in my life. I wanted to know what he was thinking, and I was quickly running out of time.

You would think that being the lead singer for a very popular rock band, I would be used to one-night stands, and even though I'd had my fair share, I'd never gotten accustomed to the awful, used feeling that inevitably came the next day. Men had sex with me and used me, so they could say they'd had sex with the singer from Shadowed Alley, and when I needed that itch scratched, I let them.

There came a time a few years ago when I couldn't look myself in the mirror and decided I would only have sex with someone if I was in a relationship with them. It wasn't the best plan. Being in a relationship was hard enough, let alone when I was either in the studio or on the road most of the time, but I had managed one for a short period of time. Hence, why I hadn't had sex in so long.

Jax stood with his bowl, taking it to the sink. "I can take care of the dishes if you want to take a shower before we have to go. We should leave a little earlier, so that we can swing by your rental and grab your suitcase and anything else you left in the car. I'll call the rental company tomorrow so they can send someone out to tow it. I hope you got rental insurance."

He wasn't going to say a word about last night.

Feeling the sting of tears, I pulled myself together and gave my bowl to Jax before I hustled my way into the bathroom to take a quick shower. As the hot water rained down, I let my tears flow, and once that dam was broken, I retched out a body-shaking sob. There was no telling how long I stood there crying and shaking. It didn't matter how hot the water was turned up, I couldn't warm up or stop my body from trembling. I only got out once my tears dried up. Looking in the mirror, there was no

way to hide that I had been crying, but I wasn't going to let myself be ashamed of opening up and letting Jax in. He was the one who had clammed up this morning. He was the one who had made the best night of my life alone-night stand.

\* \* \*

Pulling over to the curb at the airport, Jax glanced at me only to turn to look out the windshield. "I guess this is it."

"Yeah, I guess so. Thanks for everything. I appreciate you taking me in." I bit my lip to keep from saying anything else. I was not going to open myself up to him after he had made it perfectly clear that he regretted being with me last night.

Clearing his throat and turning in his seat, Jax finally looked at me for the first time today. His eyes raked over my jean-covered legs, darkening as they swept over my sweater-clad breasts, and softened as he took in my face. "Fuck," he shook his head sadly, reaching over and taking my hand. "I wish we had more time together. I like how you make me feel about myself. I've felt like a monster for so long."

"Jax," I unbuckled my seatbelt and slid over to cup his scarred cheek. "You're the furthest thing from a monster; if anything, you're an angel."

He closed his eyes and soaked in my words and touch, gracing me with a smile. When he opened his eyes, a spark had been lit. I wasn't sure what had happened, but whatever it was, I liked it.

"Gabi, what if my mom was right? What if you're my destiny?" he asked hoarsely, his eyes bright with hope.

"Are you going to let your destiny climb out of your truck and board that plane, never to see her again?"

No words left his lips. Instead, Jax lunged across to my side of the truck, taking my mouth in a deep searing kiss. It was desperate, frantic, and hot. It was life.

I couldn't hold back now.

"I don't want to go," I sniffed as I pulled away. My hand wiped away the moisture that was dangerously close to slipping from my eye. I pressed my lips together as I looked up at him.

How had this man become my world in such a short amount of time?

"I don't want you to go either." Jax's eyes glistened in the bright sunshine, emotion brimming. "You could stay."

I could stay, but what would I do? I'd lived my entire life in LA. I didn't know if I could stand living in a small town like Fairlane or tolerate the weather. I liked my sunny skies and warm weather year-round.

Could I give up everything California had to offer for Jax?

11

Jax

## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:17 pm*

Gabi glanced back to the airport. I'd do anything for this to not be the end, but I didn't have much to offer. From everything Gabi had told me during our brief time together, I wouldn't blame her for not wanting to stay. Fairlane couldn't be too enticing for a rock star.

Her friend is a famous actor and lives here, so maybe Fairlane and I have a chance.

Looking back at me, she bit the inside of her cheek. Her big brown eyes glittered with unshed tears. "What would happen if I stayed?"

"Stayed?" I croaked out. With hope swelling in my chest, I cleared my throat. "If you stayed..." Reaching out, I cupped her face between my calloused hands. When she smiled at me, my lips mirrored hers. I couldn't believe how different I felt after only knowing her a few short days. I was almost a new man. "If you stay, I'll give you everything."

A lone tear slipped down her cheek. I sat transfixed as I watched it slide down and splash on my hand. My thumbs automatically swept under her eyes to rid her of the wetness.

Fuck! She was going to leave.

Blinking a few times to clear away her tears, a slow smile started to form and brighten her gorgeous face. "I guess I could stay a few more days."

Or years.

Or forever.

Sliding my hand to the back of her neck, I tilted her face up to look at me, and when our gazes connected, I crashed my lips to hers.

Gabi's body melted into mine as her mouth opened and our tongues danced together. Her mouth tasted like home. I knew without a shadow of a doubt, Gabi was meant for me. Everything I'd endured through the years had brought Gabi to me.

Sighing, a puff of breath ghosted across my wet lips making them tingle. Threading my fingers through her hair, I angled her head for better access when a sharp knock on the window startled us.

Gabi jumped back, her hand to her chest as she blushed furiously.

My eyes narrowed until I caught the security guard staring at us with a stern face.

"Move it along," he groused.

"Are you sure about this?" I asked, giving her one last shot to change her mind.

Quickly moving over into her seat, Gabi clicked her seatbelt into place before looking back over at me with a beaming smile. "I've never been more sure about anything in my life.

Putting my truck into gear, I waved to the guard before lacing my fingers with Gabi's and placing them on my thigh.

Squeezing my hand, she looked over at me. "Now that I'm staying, do you think you could take me over to Luke and Alex's house?"

Was she planning to stay with them?

Taking a deep breath, I kept my eyes on the road and slowly let out the breath. “Sure, their address should still be in my phone.”

“I think you’ll like them,” she hummed.

I wouldn’t like them if I was leaving her with them.

Clearing my throat, I admitted. “I don’t do well with new people.” I shrugged. “Or people in general.”

“You were perfectly fine with me,” she countered.

True.

“Saving a beautiful woman on the side of the road will do that to a guy.”

“Smooth talker,” she murmured, leaning her head on my shoulder.

The moment Gabi’s head rested against me, my entire body heated, and my cock strained against the denim of my jeans.

We drove in silence as I followed my phone’s GPS directions. I wasn’t sure if I was ready to meet Gabi’s friends or to give her up at the end of the day. Pulling up in front of the gate, I looked over to find Gabi searching through her purse frantically.



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“For the love of God, it’s got to be here.” Shaking her head in a jerky motion, Gabi removed everything from her purse and stared into the empty bag.

“Hey,” I placed a soothing hand over her own. “What are you looking for?”

“The code. It’s not like there’s a list on the intercom.”

“Maybe you could just call them and let them know you’re at the gate.” Although I wouldn’t be sad if we left and crawled back into bed for the rest of the day.

“You’re right. I wanted it to be a surprise, but I guess calling and letting them know I’m here is surprise enough.” Laughing without humor, she put everything back into her purse before looking for her phone through her disheveled bag.

She really needed to get a smaller handbag or have a lot less stuff in her current one, but I’d wait until another time since she seemed a little out of sorts at the moment.

I watched as she dialed and waited, chewing on the inside of her lower lip. “Hey, Luke.” She answered and then laughed. “You’ll never guess where I’m at.” Pausing, she smiled over at me. “No, but good guess. I’m actually at your front gate. I didn’t have the code to—.” She paused again. I had to assume her friend was surprised. “You would not believe what I’ve been through the last few days, and if you let me in, I’ll tell you all about it.”

Not even five seconds later, the gate started to open, and Gabi grinned so big, I thought her cheeks might split in two. It was obvious her friends meant the world to her, and I’d try my best to be open about meeting them. I wasn’t the best at making

friends. It had been a long while since I'd been social. Most of my interactions were with clients, and they were the less than chatty variety.

The moment my truck came to a stop, Gabi ripped off her seatbelt and flung open the door. I thought she was going to run up to the front door and was surprised when she stopped by the hood of the truck to wait for me as she bounced in place. I couldn't help but smile at her excitement.

Clasping our hands together, she pulled me toward the front door, looking back at me every few seconds with a wide smile on her face. We hadn't even made it up the steps before the door swung open and a little blonde woman engulfed Gabi in a fierce hug, swaying back and forth.

A tall blond man with broad shoulders and wary eyes, cleared his throat. "Hey, beautiful, why don't you let Gabi breathe and introduce her guest." Even in grey sweatpants and a white t-shirt, he looked like a movie star. How the hell had I never heard of him?

Pulling back, the petite blonde turned to look at me and the second her eyes landed on me, her mouth formed an O. "Who's this, Gabi?" She winked and gave a flirty little smile.

Gabi hooked her arm around mine, her smile brighter than the sun as she beamed up at me. "Luke and Alex, this is Jax. Jax this is Luke and Alex, the ones I told you about."

"Hi." My lips turned up at the ends as I gave a little wave. This was more than a little awkward. "It's nice to meet you."

"You too," Alex cracked a grin as she thrust out her hand. Keeping my eyes on her husband, who had his arms crossed over his chest, I reluctantly shook her hand.

I was getting two very different vibes. Alex seemed welcoming, almost a little too much, while Luke seemed to want me far away from his house.

“Please come in,” Alex motioned toward the door. “Luke could stand out here all day and never get cold, but I’m freezing, and I’m sure you are too.”

We passed by Luke as we stepped inside the house; he had a wry grin on his face while shaking his head.

“Oh my God, I can’t believe you’re here. When Luke said you were at the gate, I think my jaw hit the floor.” She scanned Gabi up and down after taking her lightweight coat. “Do you guys want some hot chocolate or anything? I was just getting ready to make myself a cup.”

Gabi shivered and wrapped her arms around herself. “If it’s no trouble, I’d love some.”

“Oh,” Alex laughed as she pulled Gabi along with her. “It’s no trouble at all. It’s a K-Cup. The Keurig is doing all the work, but maybe if we ask really nicely, Luke will make us some of his yummy Swedish cinnamon rolls. They’re to die for.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle. She was all but drooling thinking about those cinnamon rolls.

“Luke,” Gabi turned to him with sad puppy dog eyes, “I would forever be in your debt. We’ve been eating whatever was easiest for the last couple of days... what?”

My eyes had been trained on Gabi as she animatedly tried to get her friend to make her food, looking hot and adorable at the same time.

I was gone for this girl, and I didn’t even care. I thought I was going to be alone for

the rest of my life. Never did I think helping someone on the side of the road would change my life forever.

I'd fallen in love with her, and I'd almost let her get on a plane and fly halfway across the country from me.

“What do you mean ‘we’ve’?” Alex asked with a knowing smile. Turning, she placed her hands on her husband’s chest and raised up to kiss him. She whispered something we couldn’t hear before turning back to us. “Okay, we’ll feed you, but you’re going to explain who this handsome man is standing in my kitchen, and what you two have been doing for the past couple of days.”

Heading over to the counter, Alex reached inside a cabinet and pulled down four coffee cups. “Please sit and make yourself comfortable. I’ll do the easy part and make the hot chocolate. Do you want marshmallows?”

“God, yes. I need a sugar fix something bad.” Gabi eyed the bag of tiny marshmallows with hearts in her eyes. I loved learning something new about her.

“What about you Jax?” Alex asked with a tilt of her head. I had a feeling this was a test. A strange test, but still a test.

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“Please.” I smiled at her my most charming smile, or at least I hoped it came off that way.

“Perfect,” she chirped.

Gabi’s hand slid into mine without thought as we made our way to the island and sat on stools. Gabi seemed to be oblivious to the looks she was getting from her friends. Either that, or she didn’t care, and I took my cue from her.

“Before I start, can I say that your kitchen is gorgeous? It’s so homey, warm, and welcoming. I absolutely love it, and now I know why you spend so much time in here,” Gabi gushed. “You should see Jax’s house. He’s done all the work himself and it’s amazing.”

Turning from the counter by the stove where he’d been rolling out the dough, Luke looked over his shoulder with eyes narrowed. “How did you meet?”

If Gabi hadn’t spoken so highly of him, it would have bothered me, but instead I liked that he was looking out for her.

Gabi scoffed and rolled her eyes. “Geez, I’ll get to it. Where’s my cinnamon roll?” Her question came out on a growl.

Alex winked and giggled from across the counter. Sidling up behind Luke, she wrapped her arms around him, resting her head against his back. “Relax. Can’t you see how happy she is?”

Nodding his head, Luke went back to doing whatever it was he'd been doing. I had been expecting him to pull out a roll of cinnamon rolls from the refrigerator and sprinkle something on top or something like that. Not to actually have them from scratch.

"Please continue. We'll try to keep our questions until the end." She tried to hide a smile but wasn't successful.

"As you know, I wasn't planning on coming to your New Year's Eve party because I had planned to be in Vegas." Gabi took a deep breath. "The guys decided to kick me out of Shadowed Alley."

"What?" Alex gasped, eyes wide.

Luke turned around his mouth hanging open.

"No one was more surprised than me," she laughed bitterly.

"What were they thinking?" Alex asked. Her eyes turned sad.

"They didn't like not being the center of attention. They're starting a new band, and I'm not invited." The last was said on a sad murmur.

"Well, they're fucking stupid," Alex slammed her hand down on the island. "They won't last if they ever get started."

"Are you going to go solo?" Luke asked as he put the rolls in the oven.

"I have no idea what I'm going to do except take a much-needed break. Surely you can appreciate that." She eyed the actor.

“After all the back-to-back projects, living out of suitcases and hotels, I totally know where you’re at. I appreciate all my time here with my family and away from the limelight. If there’s anything you need from us, just let us know.”

Gabi’s eyes softened, and a sweet smile graced her lips. “I will. Thank you. So,” She drew out the word. “I decided what better way to drown my sorrows than to surprise you guys by coming to your New Year’s Eve party.”

Alex’s brow furrowed. “But you didn’t come, and we canceled the party.”

Letting out a laugh, Gabi shook her head. “I tried to come. I booked the first flight here and rented a car once I got here. I think the ice storm started while I was waiting in the airport.”

“Oh no!” Alex inhaled sharply.

“Let’s just say I didn’t get very far. My phone was already dead by the time I landed, or I would have called, and I don’t know what I would have done.” She shook her head. “I guess ask you to come rescue me. Anyway, that’s how I met Jax,” Gabi looked over at me with nothing but stars in her eyes.

Hell, she was good for the ego. I hadn’t felt wanted in so long, I didn’t know what to do with all the emotions she invoked in me.

Lacing her fingers with mine, Gabi squeezed as if she had been reading my mind. “I wrecked my rental car and was unconscious when he found me.”

“You were unconscious?” Alex squeaked out. “Did you go to the hospital?”

“Fuck no! Can you imagine what would happen if it got out that Gabi Santana was in the hospital from wrecking her car after Shadowed Alley broke up?”

Luke grunted from where he stood by the oven. A frown marred his face.



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“Gabi,” Alex came around to stand next to her and put her arm around her shoulders. Alex’s voice was quiet when she spoke. “You could have had a concussion or worse.”

“I know,” Gabi answered back just as softly. “But Jax took good care of me so no need for you to worry now.”

The timer went off and everyone’s attention went to the oven. Luke pulled out a baking sheet full of these twisted looking bun things. They looked nothing like a cinnamon roll.

“Where’s the icing?” Gabi stared down at her plate of cinnamon rolls sans icing.

“There’s no icing on Kanelbullars,” Luke answered with a distinct Swedish accent.

“That’s what I said the first time I saw them,” Alex grinned around a bit of her twisted bun. “But trust me, they’re to die for. It’s what’s on the inside that counts.”

Gabi smirked but still didn’t take a bite. I lifted mine up and bit into the warm cinnamony goodness.

I hummed and took another bite. “I don’t care what they’re called, I’ll eat them any day of the week.”

“Do you ever have him speak Swedish just to hear that accent?” Gabi winked at Alex.

“It’s pretty hot, but I think just about everything he does is hot so...” She shrugged

and looked away with pink-tinted cheeks. “But that’s beside the point. Eat your cinnamon roll and tell us more about how you came to be here.”

“Fine,” Gabi grumbled and took a bite. Her eyes lit up, and she gave a thumbs up to Luke as she devoured the entire thing. Once she was finished chewing, Gabi took a sip of her hot chocolate. “Divine. You can cook for me any day.”

“Stop stalling,” Alex sing-songed.

“Where was I?” Gabi looked around the room clearly stalling. “Oh, yeah, so Jax found me and helped me to his truck. Using his phone’s GPS, he drove us here, but the power was out and there was no way to call you.” Taking a bite out of her second bun, she continued, “I don’t have anyone’s phone number memorized, so I decided I’d go to a hotel, but when Jax called, it was full. You guys live in the smallest town ever,” Gabi complained.

Alex leaned into her husband. “It’s not that small, but when you’re used to LA, it does seem that way. One good thing about Fairlane is there’s no paparazzi and most people leave you alone.”

“Where’d you go if the hotel was full?” Luke squared his shoulders.

“Jax offered his house and before you say anything, yes, I know it wasn’t a smart move because he could have been a serial killer.”

“She did ask if I was a serial killer,” I added with a chuckle.

“And he said no, so I went home with him. To the dark.” She said it like she was in a horror movie, and I couldn’t help but chuckle at her. “Damn ice storms are no fun.”

“They don’t happen all that often here, but when they do, they’re bad. That’s why we

have a generator.”

Turning to look at me, Gabi said matter-of-factly. “If I’m staying, you’re getting a generator.”

Both Luke and Alex’s mouths fell open.

“Deal.”

12

Gabi

Jax tapped his fingers on the steering wheel as he drove us back to his house. He’d been mostly quiet the entire time we’d been at Luke and Alex’s, but I’d come to realize Jax was a quiet man. He had either been that way all his life, or it stemmed from being alone for the past two years.

We’d stopped by the grocery store and loaded up on food. I may have gone a little crazy, but I hadn’t been to a grocery store in I don’t remember how long. In LA, going to the grocery is a hassle with fans and paparazzi around every corner, so when I was home, which wasn’t very often, I either had someone get whatever I needed, or I ordered it online.

I never knew going to the grocery store could be fun and relaxing. The only contention was when it came time to pay. I had put way more into the cart than Jax had, but he refused to let me pay. I was so used to everyone around me expecting me to pay, so in a way, it was sweet. I could get used to someone wanting to take care of me. To be my partner.

“Is it always so low key at the grocery store?”

Jax burst out laughing. Putting a hand to his stomach, he continued to laugh for a good full minute. “That was it when it’s bustling. You won’t see it any busier than that on any given day unless the forecast is for snow or ice. Then you better get there early because all the bread, milk, and beer go fast.”

My surprise was evident from my gaping mouth. The local grocery store barely seemed to have anyone in it, and that was when it was busy.

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“I’m not sure how Luke lives here.” Coming from LA to Fairlane must have been a culture shock.

“It’s not too bad,” Jax countered, staring at the road. His jaw ticked, and I knew I’d hurt his feelings by my remark.

“It’s not bad. It’s just so different and unexpected, but I understand its appeal.”

“Riverside is bigger and is probably more up to your speed. Lots of people go there to shop, but I wasn’t sure the condition of the roads getting there, otherwise I would have taken you.” He shrugged, and I had a feeling Jax might have been embarrassed when he shouldn’t have been.

“Next time. I definitely don’t want you to wreck your truck or be stuck in a ditch. I’ve had enough of that for a lifetime. So,” I drew out the word, smiling over at Jax. His gaze flickered over to me, but he kept his eyes on the road. “I thought today went well.”

“You mean with your friends?”

Of course, I meant with my friends. Me not leaving to go back to LA went well beyond okay. At least in my book.

Jax let out a loud sigh. “I told you, I don’t do well with new people or people in general.”

“You did great,” I assured him. “I was shocked when Luke asked you to go watch

soccer, and you said yes.”

My eyes might have almost fell out of my head while I’d watched Jax follow Luke out of the kitchen.

“I was trying for you.”

“Well, I appreciate you trying for me. Luke really is an easy-going guy.”

Jax smiled over at me. I felt a little flutter in my stomach at the sight of his devastating smile. He had no idea that his smile could make panties vanish off any woman he shined it at.

“Did you like Luke and Alex?” I desperately wanted him to like my friends so we could spend time together.

“Yeah, baby I liked them. don’t worry.” He winked at me. “I like how they look out for you like family.”

If it was possible, I would have melted into the seat right there and then.

“That’s how they feel to me, like family. I hadn’t felt that in a long time. Not until I met them. Alex doesn’t have any besides her son Mason, Luke, and her friends. She’s made a family out of those who are dear to her.”

His eyes softened as he looked at me. “Does Luke have family?”

“He does, but they live in Sweden for the most part, so he doesn’t get to see them very often.”

Reaching over, he wrapped my hand in his and placed them on his thigh. “When he

took me downstairs, he threatened to kill me if I ever hurt you. Once I told him I had no intention of ever hurting you, he softened some. After I cheered for his soccer team, I was golden.”

“I’m glad he’s got someone to watch his soccer with. I know Alex watches it with him and said he can be very intense.”

“That’s one word for it,” he laughed. “I can’t imagine what he’d be like if he was actually there with all the people and charged atmosphere.”

“Thank you for going out of your comfort zone.”

I couldn’t imagine how difficult it must have been for him, but I knew the more he got out and saw that no one cared or noticed his scar the more he’d open up.

Bringing my hand to his mouth, he kissed my knuckles and smiled. That was enough for me. I looked out at the snowy landscape we passed by. Who would have thought I’d enjoy this winter wonderland?

We were quiet the rest of the way back to his house. I was lost in thought on what I was going to do with my life now that I was no longer in a band and had met Jax, who I was sure I was already in love with. I didn’t really have a life back in LA. I had a place to stay when I was in town, but that’s it. I used to have my band and the only real friends I had lived most of the year in Fairlane.

As we hopped out of the truck and took the groceries inside, I asked myself one simple question: would it be so bad to live in a small town where no one knew me or bothered me?

I took the groceries out and placed them on the counter, and Jax put them away since I had no clue where anything went. We worked together well even if it was a simple

task. Once I was done, I continued to stand in the kitchen, looking around at all the work Jax had done. His house was old, but it was beautiful. Even with snow and ice covering every inch of the backyard, it was picture perfect. I could imagine spending summer days lounging by the pool and nights staring up at the stars, all with Jax by my side. I could see myself here for the long run.

Feeling a tug on my hand, I looked up into the worried eyes of the man who'd come to mean so much to me in only a matter of days. "Are you regretting your decision to stay?" His voice was quiet and laced with sadness.

My heart sank at his words. "Jax, no." Lacing our fingers together, I led us into the living room to sit in front of the fire.



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Jax's hair fell in front of his eye, and for the first time, I realized he might keep his hair longer to help cover his scar.

"Since we left the store, you've been deep in your head." It wasn't a question but a statement.

It was strange because in so many ways, I felt as if I knew everything there was to know about Jax, but once I said I'd stay, I realized how little I really knew.

"I've been thinking about my life in LA." Jax's face fell, and I wanted to crawl into his lap and show him how much I wanted to be here with him.

So, what's stopping me?

Crawling into his lap, I cupped Jax's scarred cheek. Closing his eyes, he leaned into my touch. "Gabi." My name on his breath felt like a caress.

Brushing our lips together, his hands gripped my hips, pulling me closer until I could feel our hearts beating as one.

"Tell me what you were thinking." His dark eyes begged.

"I've lived in LA for as long as I can remember, and yet I only have my condo there. A condo that I've barely spent more than two weeks a year in. My only friends were my bandmates and Luke and Alex." His eyes brightened at my confession. "Luke plans to spend most of the year here, and now that I've met you—"

“Now that you met me?”

“I’m trying to figure out what I’m doing with my life now that I have all the time in the world and no job to fill it. I can’t think of a better place than Fairlane to spend my time.”

Jax opened his mouth about to speak, but I placed my index finger over his plush lips to quiet him. “I’ll need to go back to LA at some point to get more clothes and a few other things for my stay here.”

“I can live with that,” he said against my finger. He bit the tip, smiling mischievously. “Now,” he thrust his hips up to meet my core. “I can think of better things to do while we sit in front of the fire.”

“Oh.” I ground myself against his denim bulge. “I like the way you think, and I can’t think of a better way to work up our appetite for dinner.”

Jax growled as he flipped me over to lay on the floor. “I’ll have my dessert now.”

Whipping his Henley over his head, I stared at his muscular chest. The sparse hair that covered his pecs and happy trail glinted in the sunlight. Even when it had been dark, I’d known he was gorgeous, but I’d had no idea the true magnitude of his beauty.

Throwing my boots over his shoulder, Jax slipped my jeans and thong down my legs.

Laying down on the floor, his hands caressed up my legs as he kissed up my inner thigh. Strong hands gripped my hips, his thumbs spread me wide open. “You have the prettiest pussy I’ve ever seen.”

Never with all my lovers had I heard such words, and I’d never been more turned on

than in that moment. My fingers tangled in his hair, and I pulled him to my aching core. “Stop talking and fuck me with your mouth.”

Jax’s eyes flashed with lust the moment before his warm tongue licked up my center. His mouth made love to my sex. His skill was unparalleled. With only a few well-placed licks and his finger rimming my hole, my back arched off the floor, and I moaned his name like a prayer.

Panting, I ran my hands through his overly-long hair that was smooth as silk. Kissing my inner thigh, Jax rested his head on my leg as he looked up at me. “I could do that all night.”

“Let me return the favor.”

13

Jax

I watched as Gabi packed whatever she needed from her bathroom. The urge to ask her to move in with me on the tip of my tongue. It was too soon, but I knew if she ever left, I'd never be the same.

Every few minutes, she looked over her shoulder at me and smiled, then went back to shuffling around and throwing something new into her bag.

Looking back at me, she dropped whatever was in her hand and quietly made her way to me. Settling herself on my lap, Gabi smoothed her thumbs over my brows. Her eyes following the movement. Shifting back to see me better, she frowned.

“What’s going on? You’ve been abnormally quiet the whole day.”

We'd caught an early flight yesterday and planned to stay a few days. I'd never been to California, and since Gabi was a native, she wanted to show me everything I'd been missing. Tomorrow, we'd drive up the Pacific Coast Highway and find a secluded beach to enjoy. Yesterday, she'd showed me all over LA in her convertible as the sun kissed our skin. After one day in her city, I understood why Gabi had been hesitant to stay in Fairlane. California had everything to offer... but me.

Should I ask and risk getting my heart broken?

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Why not? I took a deep breath to center myself. “What would you say if I asked that we pack everything up?”

Tilting her head to the side, her long hair fell over her shoulder. “I’d ask why you want me to pack everything up.”

Shit. Why didn’t I just ask her? Stop being a pussy!

Clearing my throat, I brushed my thumbs across her sun kissed cheeks. “I want you to move in with me. Permanently. You can... you can keep your condo and rent it or whatever you want to do with it. Sell it, and I’ll build you a studio. Or keep it, and we’ll visit as often as you’d like, but I want us together. Always. Sorry, I’m rambling.”

“No,” she shook her head. Her grin was so big, this time I was certain her cheeks would split in two. “You’re speaking from the heart and that’s what I love about you. You don’t speak often, but when you do, you mean what you say, and it comes from right here.” She rested her hand over my rapidly beating heart.

Had I misheard her words?

“You love me?”

“I think I’ve loved you from the moment I heard your voice on the side of the road. Did you think I was some silly girl with no self-preservation instinct?” She threw her head back, laughing. I joined right along with her.

Gabi loved me!

I knew my smile matched hers from only moments before. Today was the best day of my life. But just as quickly as my smile had appeared, it slipped from my face. Gabi hadn't agreed.

"Angel," she cooed, "let's turn that frown upside down. I just told you I loved you."

"I know." I brushed her hair behind her ear and pulled her closer to me. "It's the best day of my life."

"Then why are you pouting?" Slipping her thumb into my mouth, I sucked on it hard until she moaned my name. She squeaked as I bit the tip.

"Tell me my home will now be our home," I growled playfully at her, knowing how much she loved it.

"I thought saying I love you was yes enough, but if you want to hear the words then yes, Jaxson Stone, I'd love to move in with you."

I pounced. There was no better way to describe the animal that overtook me as I twisted and threw her down on the bed. Whipping her t-shirt over her head, my mouth crashed into hers. It wasn't soft or sweet. I was claiming Gabi as mine for always and forever. My hands palmed her lace covered breasts roughly. Feeling her nipples pebble at my touch, I yanked down one cup and latched onto with my mouth, swirling my tongue around her stiff peak until she pulled my head away and directed me to the other. I couldn't wait any longer. Sitting up, I tore her black lace thong from her body as Gabi undid my belt. We were frantic to connect as one. I needed to be inside her like I needed my next breath.

Pulling out my cock, Gabi's thumb glided over the bead of moisture that was already

there for her. Bringing her thumb to her mouth she sucked the pre-cum off and moaned around her digit.

“You taste so fucking good.”

Impaling her in one swift movement, she let out a sharp breath. I stilled only for a second before gripping her hips and angling her higher. I thrust my hips with savage force as I dug my fingertips into her smooth, silky flesh.

I watched as her hand went between her legs and one finger circled her clit. I loved watching Gabi touch herself, and she knew it. She had to be close and wanted me right there with her. Pumping faster, I leaned down licking up the column of her long neck.

“Jax,” she moaned, “I’m so close. I want you to come with me.”

I kissed her, desperately seeking the pleasure we were both crashing toward. Pulling away, Gabi bit down on my shoulder as her walls clenched around me.

Wrapping her in my arms, I stilled deep inside as she milked my cock of every ounce of pleasure. Only when I’d finished did I pull her with me as I fell onto my back.

I ran my fingertips up and down her back as we both caught our breath. The feel of her warm breath fanning over my chest slowed my heartbeat even more. When I felt her shiver, I leaned down and pulled the comforter up over us. Gabi snuggled deeper into me and the bed and I knew in a few short minutes, she’d be asleep.

Kissing the top of her head, I murmured. “In case you didn’t already know, I love you, Gabi.”

She kissed my chest and let out a soft breath, instantly falling to sleep.

I wanted to get up and celebrate, but instead I stayed in bed and enjoyed her warm soft body next to mine.

One day, I'd ask her to marry me. I knew we were moving fast, so I'd wait until the time felt right, but I knew Gabi was the woman for me. Too many, I'm sure, will doubt our love after only knowing each other for a couple of months, but I didn't care. I only cared about the woman snuggled up in my arms.

My destiny.

Epilogue



New Year's Eve

The next year

Pulling me flush against his long, lean body, Jax asked huskily, "Are you going to find me under the mistletoe at midnight?"

"You bet your sweet ass I am. Why tempt destiny?"

My hand gave that sweet ass of his a slap before it slipped underneath the black button-down shirt he'd left untucked, skirting up his muscled back, feeling each muscle tighten and ripple at my touch.

He kissed me behind my ear on the spot that always made me melt for him. His gravelly voice sent shivers down my spine. "I thought you didn't believe in destiny."

My hands roamed to the front of his shirt, feeling the light smattering of hair along his rock-hard abs and traveled up his smooth skin until my hands covered his pecs. Jax smiled down at me knowingly. I couldn't get enough of him or stop touching him when he was near.

Leaning up on my tippy toes, I kissed the side of his neck. "It brought me you, didn't it? Let's not tempt fate."

"I like the way you think," he murmured as our lips touched. My hand cupped his cheek as my thumb traced along his scar. Pulling back, he smiled down at me. "Say hi to Alex for me. I'm going to go find Luke and the guys. See you at midnight, if not

sooner.” He gave me one last kiss before sauntering off to find his friends.

I stood watching as Jax moved through the crowd, how his dark jeans hugged his tight ass with every step. It wasn’t lost on me how many women at the party turned their heads as he walked by.

I was still in awe at how quickly Jax had done a complete one-eighty after I’d decided to stay a year ago. After only a month, his whole demeanor had changed, and he’d become more outgoing. From the impression I’d gotten when I’d met him, and the way he’d talked, Jax had seemed extremely anti-social. His ex leaving him had nearly destroyed his self-esteem. Now, you’d never know that Jax had once had a complex about his scar. From the beginning, I’d thought it was hot, so I made sure to let him know every chance I got, which was daily.

When Luke and Jax had met, their friendship had been instant. They were like two peas in a pod. It had made me so happy that they had clicked so well. Jax had hardly any friends, and I was used to the hustle of LA, so I wanted to be able to hang out with my friends when they were in town and available.

Fairlane had been a culture shock with its limited shopping and no one giving a damn about who I was. Missouri was nothing like California, and it had taken me a good while to get used to it, if that was even possible. The weather was crazy unpredictable with one day being in the high sixties and the next day being in the twenties. I never knew what to wear and was constantly hot or cold. Jax and Alex always made fun of me.

When Luke had introduced Jax to a bunch of guys Alex had gone to high school with, I had been a little nervous, but I’d had nothing to worry about. They’d brought him into the fold, and now they all got together once a week, either to watch sports or to play poker. Luke had even managed to get the guys into watching soccer.

While the guys did their thing, Alex and I usually sat around drinking and singing. She wouldn't admit it, but she had a great voice. She transformed from this tiny girl into a powerhouse whenever she sang.

Hearing Alex's laugh from the other room broke me out of my thoughts and sent me in search of her. I headed to the kitchen, where I was sure I'd find her. She was always in her kitchen, eating or making something. Not that I blamed her; her kitchen was as gorgeous as the rest of the house. I'd never been one into design or knew the type of style a house was called, but it reminded me of what you'd find in Tuscany. It was warm and cozy and made everyone feel at home with its rock walls, exposed wood beams, and the comfortable furniture that went impeccably well with the house.

Just as I'd expected, Alex and her friend Taylor were standing at the kitchen island, laughing and eating.

"Hey, girls!" I greeted as I came up on them, putting my arms around them both and giving them a hug at the same time.

"You're finally here!" Alex exclaimed in excitement, hugging me back. "I was starting to think you'd never show up."

Shaking my head, it was all I could do not to smile. "You're being ridiculous. We're only twenty minutes late. Jax decided to join me in the shower, and well, you know how that goes. I'd say I'm sorry I'm late, but I can't. It was too good."

"Oh, please, don't start talking about all the sex you guys are having," Taylor replied, trying to give us a stern look, but didn't manage it in the least. "I can't even remember the last time I had sex. I forgot how little sex drive I had after Ben was born. I'd much rather sleep or read than have sex with my husband."

"I like sleeping and reading too, but sex is so much better than the two combined. No,

let me take that back. Good, no, amazing sex is so much better.” Alex laughed before taking a sip of her drink.

“You know, I don’t begrudge you for having great sex,” Taylor said hugging Alex and rubbing her back. It was obvious now that they had both been drinking. Taylor always became even nicer, if that was possible, when she drank, and all touchy-feely. Alex, on the other hand, laughed and got loud, and then tried to jump her husband. “If anyone deserves it, it’s you, but you don’t have to remind me how often you’re getting it. I mean, you guys should be past the stage of every day.”

“Every day?” I questioned. I could feel my eyebrows were almost to my hairline with Taylor’s proclamation. How the hell did they have sex every day? They’d been together for almost three years, if my math was correct.

“More like twice a day, at least,” Taylor interjected. “I don’t know how they ever make it out of the bedroom.”

“Because it’s not all in the bedroom. We’ve had sex all over the house and outside.” Alex blurted and then blushed.

It was sweet. I wasn’t going to tell them that Jax and I were the same way.

“I don’t even know how you even have the energy.”

“All I have to do is look at Luke, and he gets my engine fired up. When he takes his shirt off, it’s all I can do not to jump him on the spot. Well, I mean I do, if we’re at home and alone. I swear he gets hotter as he ages. I’m seriously going to have a complex when I start going gray and getting wrinkles. I don’t think I’m going to have the same luck and keep getting better with age.”

“How drunk are you?” Taylor asked, affronted. “You are gorgeous, and you’ve

gotten better looking over the years. Don't act like your hottie of a husband doesn't tell you all the damn time that you're beautiful."

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“Yeah, because that’s his job,” she cried out, loudly.

Yep. Drunk.

“And do you tell him how hot he is because it’s your job?” Taylor and I asked at the same time. We already knew the answer before Alex ever opened her mouth.

“No! I tell him because he’s hot as fuck. Hence, why I jump him every chance I get.”

“Alex,” I laughed as I put my arm around her shoulder and gave her a side hug, “Luke feels the same way about you. He doesn’t tell you that you’re beautiful because it’s his job. Speaking of jobs, I need to go find my boyfriend so I can kiss him underneath the mistletoe at midnight.”

“Oh shit! I thought someone was supposed to tell us when there was five minutes before the countdown. I put the mistletoe by the doors leading out to the deck. Good luck and happy kissing!” Alex called as she scurried out of the room in search of her husband. I had a feeling we wouldn’t be seeing her for the rest of the night.

“Go find that handsome boyfriend of yours,” Taylor said after she took a large chug of her wine. “I need to go find my husband. After all this talk, I plan to get lucky tonight.”

“Good luck,” I called as I walked out of the kitchen to find Jax. I couldn’t say I was shocked to find that Jax had beat me there. He was leaning against the door right underneath the mistletoe. A big smile broke out on my face as I walked toward him. The past year of my life had been the best, and I knew it was only going to get better.

“Ten”

“Nine”

“Eight”

“Hey, do you come here often?” I joked as I slid up next to my man.

“Seven”

“Six”

“Five”

“Every New Year’s Eve,” he replied as he looked me up and down.

“Four”

“Three”

“Two”

“One”

Our lips crashed against each other as I wound my leg around his. If the room hadn’t been full of people, I would have climbed him.

Blinking away the heat and stars from our midnight kiss, I gazed up at my handsome boyfriend who looked so nervous he could puke. I wasn’t sure how it was possible to go from giving me one of the best kisses of my life to this sudden change.

Cupping his face, my brows furrowed as my thumb tried to rub away his worry lines.  
“Jax, sweetie, what’s wrong?”

Slipping from my hands, I watched as Jax went down on one knee and gazed up at me with so much love in his eyes, it took my breath away. His large calloused hand held mine, both trembling.

Was he doing what I thought he was?

In the background, I thought I heard a gasp and someone clap.

“My beautiful brown-eyed girl, I never thought I’d be down on one knee, or finding the love of my life, but that all changed the moment I found you on the side of the road. That ice storm a year ago was the best thing that has ever happened to me. Every day, I’m thankful that you didn’t get on that plane and took a chance on me.” He drew in a deep breath and let out a nervous chuckle. “I know it wasn’t easy moving here, but you’ve never once complained about leaving your life behind and moving to this small town where the weather is as unpredictable as you are. I want to spend the rest of my life showing you how happy you’ve made me – made me the man I am before you. I want to kiss you at midnight under the mistletoe for the rest of my life.”

We both looked up at the mistletoe above us with a smile.

“I vow here and now to never let a day go by without showing you how much I love you. Gabriella Santina, will you please do me the honor of becoming my wife?”

Tears slipped down my face, my smile so big I watched him slide the most beautiful princess cut engagement ring on my ring finger. I had no idea of the size, but it was perfect. Just like my gorgeous Jax.



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Falling down to my knees, I wrapped my arms around his neck and placed kisses all over his face as we both laughed happily.

A deep rumbling laugh filled the air. His arms holding me tight. “Is that a yes?”

“Yes! Yes! Yes! How could you ever think it would ever be anything but yes?”

“Just wanted to make sure.” He winked at me. “Now, let’s say our goodbyes because I can’t wait to get my fiancée home and ravish her.”

“Yes, please,” I answered as I laced our fingers together and started pulling him to the front door.

We said our goodbyes to those we knew, and I was surprised to see Luke and Alex waiting for us by the door. I had a feeling they’d known what Jax had planned. I would talk to Alex about that later. Right then, I had better things to do.

After a short drive, we made it home. We stumbled into the house, ripping each other’s clothes off as we went, knowing instinctively where we were headed. This New Year’s Eve wasn’t as cold as the last, but it was still too cold to be running around outside naked. The cover was already off the hot tub as we slipped into the hot water, and I straddled Jax on the bench seat.

“Touch me,” I moaned as I angled myself above his thick cock to take him deep within me. “I love feeling your hands all over my body.” His hands cupped my breasts, kneading and squeezing, tweaking my nipples.

Lowering myself, I took in every inch—at the slowest pace. I wanted to remember this night forever and savor every bit of his large cock.

“Oh God,” he moaned when he was all the way in. “You feel so fucking good. I need you to ride me now, baby.”

“Your wish is my command.” I nibbled on his lower lip as I started to glide up and down his cock slowly, rocking back and forth, until his hands left my breasts to hold onto my hips. Jax’s fingers bit into my skin as he moved me faster and faster. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I licked up his neck as my fingers threaded through his thick black hair and tugged.

He growled. “Fuck, baby, you know what pulling my hair does to me.”

Yes, I did know; that’s why I did it.

Pistoning his hips, I ground down on his cock, hitting my clit with every long stroke. Bracing my hands on the side of the hot tub, I rode him just the way he wanted. Hard and fast. His hands clenched, and the thick cords of his neck tightened to let me know he was close to coming. Thank God, because I was so close, and I wanted us to come together this first time as an engaged couple. When I thought he was going to fall over the edge, one of Jax’s hands slid between us. One rough fingertip rubbed my clit in furious circles until I clamped down, milking every last drop from his throbbing cock as we both fell over the edge.

Panting, I laid my head on his shoulder, placing kisses anywhere I could reach from my little perch.

“Happy New Year’s, Jax. This is going to be the best year yet.”

“Happy New Year’s, baby.”

“Thank you for finding me on the side of the road.”

“Thank you for taking a chance on me and kissing me underneath the mistletoe.”

He kissed my shoulder and up my neck. “You’ve made me the happiest man in the world. I love you, Gabi.”

“And I love you, my angel.”

~The End~