

Rebel

Bad Blooded Rebel Series #1

Mei-
George

Rebel

Bad Blooded Rebel Series #1

By Mellie George

Text copyright ©2013 Mellie George

All Rights Reserved

Edited by Dawn Bourgeois

Cover Photo Courtesy of
CanStockPhoto.com

Cover Design ©2013 Mellie George

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of

the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the author.

Support your favorite authors by saying no to piracy! It is not a victimless crime.

Do your part to end the theft of many author's hard work!

The Author acknowledges referencing the following people, places, music, bands, sports teams, movies, and all that noise: Luke Bryan, Guns 'N Roses, Holiday Inn, Pizza King, The Gremlins, The Karate Kid, The Cincinnati Bengals, and The Indianapolis Colts.

This book is dedicated to all of my readers... YOU are the real rock stars! I love you all so much and thank you, thank you, THANK YOU for your continuous support! Also, I'd like to give a special shout out to Terri Anne Browning and Sophie Monroe for giving me such hot book boyfriends like Nik, Jesse, Drake, Shane, Jake, Blake, Derek, and Kevin to inspire me to create Ryder and the boys...

Table of Contents

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

Prologue

Ryder

“Good night, Cincinnati, it’s good to be home! You guys are fucking amazing, and we love you! We’ll see you next time around!” I shouted to the screaming crowd. Right before I walked off stage, I threw a handful of guitar picks into the crowd and fist pumped in the air. The rest of the guys came up next to me and we joined hands. Taking one last bow, the crowd went wild and we waved once more before we walked off the stage together. Some random

backstage crew member handed me a clean white towel and a bottle of water. While I was wiping the sweat off my face, I felt a hard clap on my back.

“Dude, we fucking *killed* it tonight!” Jude said, giving me a little shake. He then reached out a hand and fist bumped both Beau and Kris.

I nodded and tried to catch my breath. “It was a good show, guys. Seriously,” I said, and I took a long drink of water as the crowd was still chanting the band’s name. We’d been on tour all over the world for the past seven months, and tonight’s show in our hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio was our last stop. As much as I loved my boys and touring around with them, I couldn’t

wait to get home and finally sleep in my own bed. I was worn out, exhausted both physically and mentally, and just fucking dead tired. “I’m just glad this is finally over. I’m fucking beat.”

As we descended down the steps to the side of the stage, Jude nodded toward the room set up for meeting fans and grinned. There was already a long line of fans waiting and, as always, most of them were female. “Well, since this our last stop on the tour, I plan on ending tonight with a bang,” he said, eyeing the girls in the line with wicked intent.

“Literally,” I said, and he shoved me playfully.

“You know it bro,” he said.

Beau looked at him and smiled. “I

call dibs on the blonde, third from the front.”

“That’s fine by me. I have my eye on the two red heads in the middle,” Jude replied.

Kris scoffed and rolled his eyes. “You guys are whores, I swear,” he laughed as we headed past the group of fans waiting to meet us near our dressing room. Eleven years ago my best friends Jude Miller, Beau Cavanaugh, Kris Engle and I formed our band Bad Blooded Rebel when we were sophomores at Oak Hills High School in Cincinnati. We played locally for two years until we caught a lucky break when the lead singer of a huge band was in town. He happened to be at one of our

shows and offered us an opening spot on their summer tour.

We jumped at the chance, and we were signed to a label not long after. We literally exploded overnight, and everything just came fast to us after that. We had fame, money, alcohol, and women...*especially* women. We all had our pick of pretty much any girl in the venue night after night, and with the exception of Kris, who had recently gotten engaged, we rarely went to our hotel alone. Tonight would be the exception for me, because at that point I wanted nothing more than to just crash into my bed and not see the world again for twelve hours. Just one last meet and greet and then I would finally go home to

the house I haven't seen in seven months.

As we walked down the hall and past the group of screaming fans, I was starting to fantasize about finally getting a good night's rest when I saw *her*. She wasn't like any girl I had ever seen before. Just like the old cliché, she took my breath away. She had long dark hair that was black as midnight and she had a streak of bright teal blue color on one side. In her black leather cowboy boots, tight jeans, and tight Guns 'N Roses tee shirt, she definitely looked like a perfect mix between country and rock and roll.

My eyes quickly scanned down her body. She had perfect breasts that looked natural, a tiny waist, and was definitely rocking a nice full ass. What

struck me the most about her was that she looked...bored. This girl looked like she would rather be any other place in the world rather than be standing in line to meet us. I was amused, smiling slightly at her expression when she looked up and made eye contact with me. She looked shocked at first, but when she realized who I was, she rolled her big brown eyes at me. It was at that moment, everything south of my belt began to stand at attention. Well, I *definitely* wasn't tired now...at least my dick wasn't anyway.

As I walked into the dressing room one thing became crystal clear. I loved a challenge, and she was definitely going to be a fun one. I had to

know that girl, even if it was just for one night.

Everleigh

“Oh my God, I feel like I’m going to faint!” Danni squealed, squeezing my arm. “I can’t believe I’m about to meet Bad Blooded Rebel, especially Ryder Matthews. God, he’s so talented! Aren’t you stoked?”

I sighed. “No, Danni, I’m not. You know I am not a fan of this stuff, all the yelling, screaming, and growling. Why

did you drag me to this? Surely you could have found someone else that actually likes these guys.”

Danni gave me a pointed look. “Ev, I brought you because you’re my best friend and best friends do things like this together. I didn’t complain once when you dragged me along to see Luke Bryan,” she said, as I pointed my finger at her.

“Watch it, girl. That’s my future husband you just almost insulted,” I joked.

She rolled her eyes. “Ev, come on. I’m really excited about this, so please, for the love of God, don’t embarrass me in there. You don’t even have to meet them, you can just stand in the corner

while I try and get a picture, okay?”

Groaning, I said, “All right, fine. I’ll be good.” I rolled my head back, annoyed. “I can’t believe I came all the way from another freaking state for this.” Danni and I were from Muncie, Indiana and Cincinnati was the closest city that Bad Blooded Rebel was playing. When the tickets for this stupid concert went on sale, Danni quickly snatched up two VIP tickets complete with meet and greet passes and made me tag along. I really shouldn’t complain since I dragged her to the last one. We went back stage and I actually met one of my favorite country singers and Danni came with me without complaint. I needed to snap out of this mood because she really was excited to

meet these guys.

Just as I was getting myself into a better mood for my best friend, I heard screaming coming from our line. The band was walking down the hall to their dressing room and everyone began freaking out, Danni included. I sighed and looked at the group and tried to see what the fuss was about. The only thing I had ever heard about these guys were negative stories in the press. They all were tall and one was a little stockier than the others. One of them had blonde spiky hair and he reminded me of a young (but much cuter) Billy Idol. Another had wavy brown hair that would have hit him just at his jaw line if it wasn't pulled back into low pony tail.

One of them, the stocky one, had his hair buzzed into a short mohawk and had a tattoo of some wicked looking devil on the side of his head.

The last one, obviously the lead singer, had short dark brown hair that was spiked up into a faux hawk. He had tiny silver hoops in his lobes and there was an industrial through one ear. He had a silver hoop through his lip, a bar in his eyebrow, and full sleeves of tattoos on both arms. For the lead singer of a hard rock band, he was actually pretty good looking if you're into all that body art. I was about to look away and check to see if Danni had fainted but before I could, I looked at him for a moment and noticed he was staring at

me. Even from here I could see that his eyes were the clearest, bluest eyes I'd ever seen. My breath hitched a little bit and he smiled a sexy, crooked smile at me. His smile made my skin tighten and tingle...it totally pissed me off. The fact that I had acted that way made me a little mad at myself, and I rolled my eyes.

I could see out of the corner of my eye that he was still smiling at me when the dressing room door closed. Shaking my head, I decided that I was definitely going to hide in a corner when Danni met these guys. His smile unnerved me, and I planned on staying as far away as possible.

Chapter 1

Ryder

September

“Did you check out that group of chicks out there? We got some hot ass girls here tonight,” said Jude. Except for Kris, we all usually slept with a groupie, but Jude was the one out all of us who liked to double up on them. If we were whores like Kris said, then Jude was the biggest whore of us all. We all worked out but Jude was the one that looked more built. He also looked more dangerous out of all of us because he

kept his head shaved in a short mohawk to show off the devil tattoo he had on the side of his head.

Beau could give him a run for his money in the looks department. When we were in high school, the girls usually gravitated to Beau because he had the nice eyes that turned girls to goo with just one look. He grew his hair out and kept it back in a low pony tail. He definitely had the “I just got laid” look and it drove women wild.

Kris was the one that had the most potential to get girls with his spiky blonde hair and killer green eyes. He had recently gotten engaged to his high school sweetheart Jessie and definitely wasn't interested.

We all got our fair share attention, but out of the four of us I received the most by far. Women threw themselves at me in spades. I don't know if it's because of how I look or because I'm the lead singer of a famous rock band. I just knew how to charm the pants off any woman because most of them were looking for a good time and to say they slept with a rock star. "You see any you liked, Ryder?" Jude said to me.

"I don't know. That stacked brunette with the teal in her hair out there was pretty hot."

"Oh yeah, I saw her. She's pretty cute. That girl next to her with the long blonde hair was hot as hell too," Beau said. He tapped me on the arm. "I bet

they're friends, dude. We should bro up on them," he said.

I chuckled. I had been planning on skipping on the groupies for the night and just going home but once I saw the girl in the hall that plan went right out the window. "I'm all for that but to tell you the truth she looked pissed to be here. She even rolled her eyes at me when we walked past," I said, and the guys laughed.

"I think there is finally a woman out there that isn't into you. Stop the presses," Kris said.

Jude's eyes widened. "Ooh, maybe she's a lesbian. That's fucking hot!" he exclaimed.

I laughed and shook my head. I

normally wasn't into the chase, but I had a feeling that this girl would have me running a marathon. I jumped into a quick shower to wash all the sweat off of me. I dressed in a tight black shirt that had a wicked looking skull on it, dark jeans, my favorite boots, and threw some gel in my hair to restyle it. If I was going to try and impress this girl tonight, I had to go out there looking my best.

When I emerged from the bathroom, the guys were all redressed and ready to head to meet our fans. Beau clapped me on the back as we headed out the door and into the meet and greet lounge.

As soon as we walked in, the fans started screaming. It was like this

everywhere we went, so I just smiled and played the part of adored rock god. As I took my seat at the table next to Beau, my eyes scanned the room for any sign of this girl and I finally found her.

She wasn't in line with the others waiting for autographs or pictures. She was standing alone in the corner of the room, playing with her phone and still looked bored. Just watching her stand there mindlessly swiping the screen on her phone was a total turn on to me. It figures that I'd be attracted to the one woman in the world that apparently didn't give a shit who I was. That made me instantly want her all the more.

It had been about an hour since we came in the room and we finally made it down to the end of the line. The blonde girl that was standing next to the hot brunette had finally made it to the table. She quickly looked back at her friend who was still playing around on her phone and waved excitedly. Beau already had his radar on the blonde and went into full flirt mode when she turned back around. Poor girl didn't stand a chance. "Hi," she said shyly when she reached our table. "It's so awesome to meet you guys. I'm seriously your biggest fan!"

Beau extended his hand to her. "It's nice to meet you too, sweetie.

What's your name?"

"I'm Danni. Danni Sharpe."

"I'm Beau, and this is Kris, Jude, and Ryder," he said, nodding in our direction and taking her hand in his. We all waved at her and she blushed a scarlet red.

"I know," she muttered.

"So, did you like the show?" I asked her.

"Oh, totally. You guys rocked so hard out there."

"Thanks, sweetie. So, you here all alone?" Beau asked, still holding her hand. He was rubbing his thumb across the back of her hand. Beau went right for it, I'll give him that.

"No, my best friend came with

me,” she said, thumbing over her shoulder in the hot brunette’s direction. I looked at her again and still she had her phone out and not paying a bit of attention to us. All the blood rushed below my belt in a surge.

“Why didn’t she come up with you? Is she not a fan?” I asked Danni.

“No, not really. She’s more of a classic rock and country girl,” she answered. “I bought these tickets a while ago and she agreed to come with me.”

“Well, that was nice of her, I guess,” I said, amusement in my voice.

Danni smiled at me and sighed. “I know, right?”

“Well, *I’m* glad you came. It’s always nice to meet such pretty fans like

you,” Beau said, laying it on thick. I didn’t know what I wanted to do more... laugh or choke on his bullshit.

“Thanks,” she said, still smiling. “Okay, so I know this is lame and you’ve done a million of these already, but is there any way I can get a picture with you guys?”

“Anything for a beautiful girl,” Beau said, but I stopped him.

“Hold on. I’ll do it if *she’s* in the picture too,” I said, nodding at her friend who was still paying no attention to me. All eyes traveled to her, and then Danni looked back to me.

“Um, okay. I’ll be right back,” she said, and after letting go of Beau’s hand she took off walking toward her friend.

“Oh shit, you have your predator face on. This should be entertaining,” Jude said, and I flipped him off.

“Shut the hell up, dude,” I said to him. I watched the two girls having some kind of disagreement, and after a few seconds they hugged and Danni came walking back over to us with her hot friend in tow.

“Hey guys, we’re back,” Danni said brightly.

“Yes you are,” Beau said, winking at her. Danni giggled and I had to suppress my laughter.

“Who’s your friend?” I asked, my eyes staring straight at the dark haired beauty.

“This is Everleigh Stone, my best

friend in the world. Ev, these are the guys in Bad Blooded Rebel,” she said, practically bursting with excitement. Most girls try to put the moves on us and let us know they are easy as hell. Danni seemed like a genuine fan even if she was a little over enthusiastic. It was nice to see once in a while.

All the guys took turns introducing themselves to her and I went last, holding my hand out to hers. “It’s nice to meet you. I’m Ryder Matthews.”

She reluctantly placed her hand in mine, and when she did, I almost felt like it burned when she touched me. “Nice to meet you, Ryder,” she said breathlessly. She let go of my hand and tucked her hair behind one ear.

“Everleigh...that’s a beautiful name. It’s unique,” I said.

“Thank you,” she said curtly.

“You’re welcome,” I said, staring into her eyes. They were the color of whiskey...I could get drunk on them easily.

At that moment, Jude stood up and stretched his arms. “Okay, so are we taking this picture or what?”

Everleigh took a few steps back and waited as we all stood and lined up. Beau nodded at John, the head of our security team. “Hey man, can you take this picture for us?”

The big beefy man came walking over to us and nodded. When he reached us, Danni handed him her cell phone and

politely said, "It's already set. You just have to push the button." Everleigh was still standing off to the side as everyone got into position for the picture. "Come on, Ev, get in the picture," she said.

She let out a small groan and edged close to me on my right side, obviously trying as hard as she could to not be near me. Instead of being offended, I found it cute. I was obviously affecting her in some way. She finally rested on my right, just close enough so she wasn't touching me in anyway.

I decided in that moment to have a little fun, and before she could step back I took her hand and pulled her over to my left side. I wrapped my arm around the small of her back and rested my hand

on her waist, pulling her body into mine. I heard her gasp, looking up at me with a mixture of anger and nervousness in her eyes. The way I was holding onto her and how close we all were huddled together, she had no choice but to rest her hand against my chest. When her fingers touched my shirt over my heart, it started pounding faster...I'm sure she could feel it. I definitely felt her heartbeat and it was racing. I grinned at her and cocked my head to the side, and she swallowed hard.

“All right, everyone ready?” John called out. “Everyone smile on three.” Our eyes were locked together...I couldn't look away from her. “One, two, three,” John said, and out of the corner

of my eye I saw the flash. We were still staring into each other's eyes. Everleigh was breathing hard and her cheeks were pink. She was beautiful.

I heard Jude laugh. "Okay, maybe we should take one more picture. This time maybe everyone could actually look at the camera."

At that moment Everleigh blinked a few times and looked away, her face red with embarrassment. "Sorry," I said, grinning.

"Let's do this again," John said, and he counted down again. "Here we go. One, two, three," and this time everyone was looking at the camera with big smiles.

As soon as the camera flashed,

Everleigh started to pull away from me. The hand that was resting on her waist glided across her ass when she moved and my dick twitched in response. She spun around to face me, an angry glare on her face. I smiled at her. “What is it?” I asked innocently.

“I don’t appreciate being manhandled and groped. I don’t care who the hell you are,” she said angrily.

I barked out a laugh. “Manhandled and groped, huh?”

“Yes. You didn’t need to grab me like that, and you definitely didn’t have the right to grab my ass,” she said, her face flushed.

I stared into her eyes and took a step closer to her. “First of all, I didn’t

manhandle you. I simply pulled you into a better position for the picture. Trust me, baby, when I ‘manhandle’ a woman, she’s usually thanking me for the experience,” I said, winking at her. Her eyes flared angrily at me and I continued. “Second, I will admit that my hand did touch your ass but only because you pulled away before I could move my hand. Not that I’m complaining though... you do have a *really* nice ass,” I said, smirking at her. I knew I sounded like an asshole, but Everleigh’s reaction to me had me shifting around to hide my growing erection. I was making her nervous and I loved it.

“You jerk!” she said, and she raised her hand like she was going to

slap me, but never got the chance. Danni came walking over to us with Beau behind her.

“Hey Ev, you okay?” she asked Everleigh, obviously picking up on the tension between us.

Everleigh blinked her eyes a few times and turned her gaze from me to her friend. “Yeah, I’m fine. Are you ready to go?” she asked, her jaw tight.

“Um, well, Beau is having a party at his house and he just asked if we wanted to come and hang out for a bit. What do you say?” Danni asked.

Everleigh shook her head. “Danni, we can’t. I have to work in the morning and we have a long drive ahead of us.”

“You’re not from around here?” I

asked Everleigh.

Ignoring me, she looked at Beau and said, “No, we’re from Indiana.”

“And you drove all this way to see us?” Beau said to Danni, looking down to her and running his hand down her arm.

Giggling, she said, “Oh, it’s no big deal. We live in Muncie, so it’s only about a two hour drive from here.”

“Really?” I asked, cocking an eyebrow at Everleigh. That’s not far at all...*knock it off, Ryder*, I thought to myself. *You just want to fuck this girl, not follow to her hometown and make a million babies.*

She glared at Danni before turning her frosty gaze back to me. “Really,” she

said angrily. “Danni, seriously. We need to go.”

“Ev, come on. Just for a little bit?” Danni asked, sticking her lip out in a pout. I heard Beau let out a deep groan...he was a sucker for a pouty face.

Everleigh took a step closer to Danni and spoke softly, “I can’t leave him alone for long, Danni. I need to get back.”

A mix of disappointment and understanding flashed on Danni’s face, and she nodded. “I know. You’re right. I’m sorry Beau, but I will have to take a pass on the party.” *Him?* Who was she rushing back to? A boyfriend? A husband? The thought of her being with any other man made me instantly burn

with jealousy...not a normal feeling for me.

He slanted his head to the side.

“Bummer,” he said. “Here’s your phone back sweetie.”

She took the phone from and put it in her back pocket. “Thanks.”

“It was nice meeting you Danni. Everleigh,” he said, nodding at me.

“Nice to meet you too, Beau,” she said, completely ignoring me. I fought the urge to laugh. Everleigh was trying her hardest to be a bitch, but she was just coming off as nervous and uncomfortable. I got a thrill knowing I affected her that way. Jude and Kris came back over to us and bid the girls goodbye as well and when Jude leaned

in and kissed Everleigh on the cheek, it took everything in me to not knock his ass to the floor.

After Jude and Kris had went off on their own, Beau turned to Danni and said, “Hey, tag us in these pictures you took, okay? I’d like to see how they turned out,” he said, looking over at me and smiling. I smirked at him.

Danni smiled brightly. “Okay, Beau. Sure.” Before she could say goodbye, he went right for the kill and leaned in and kissed her. She gasped and he pulled her closer, wrapping his arms around her. I smiled and looked over at Everleigh who was watching Danni and Beau making out with her mouth hanging wide open.

I moved closer to her and whispered into her ear “Some people have no shame, do they?”

She flinched as my breath hit her neck. I inhaled her scent...she smelled like warm vanilla. I wanted to taste her skin. “N-no, they don’t.”

“So, are you going to kiss me goodbye too?” I asked, smiling and cocking my head to the side again.

“When hell freezes over,” she snapped, and I laughed.

“You don’t like me, do you?” I asked, and I smiled widely.

“How could you guess?” she said, narrowing her eyes.

“How can you not like me if you don’t know me?”

She sighed. “I know your type.”

I smiled at her. “My type? And what type would that be?”

“An egotistical, skirt chasing, womanizing, mangina,” she said, and I let out a loud belly laugh.

“Nice. Haven’t heard that before,” I said. “That’s a little judgmental, don’t you think? You sound like half of the gossip magazines out there.”

“And that doesn’t bother you that people think the worst of you?”

I shook my head. “Nope.”

She scoffed at me. “Why is that? Do you just think you’re above it all?”

“No, Everleigh. I don’t care what the world thinks of me because I know that none of its true. As long as I know

the people that I care about know the real me, then I don't give a shit what anyone else thinks." She studied my face for a long moment and she sighed. "What is it? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I can't tell if you are the world's biggest asshole or just have the world's thickest skin," she said, her tone softer than before. Everleigh's eyes locked with mine again and my mouth went dry. I couldn't seem to get my tongue unstuck from the roof of my mouth. This girl was gorgeous...if she batted her big brown eyes at me I bet she could get me to do just about anything. I had slept with a *lot* of groupies in my time as a musician, but I can't remember *ever* wanting anyone as

bad as I wanted this girl. She saw through all my bullshit charm and wasn't impressed by me at all. Nothing had turned me on more. Every girl always wanted something from me, but Everleigh didn't.

Beau and Danni seemed to have come up for air because I don't think either of us realized it when she joined us at Everleigh's side. "Do we *really* have to head back?" she said, dazed and dreamy-eyed.

"Yes, we do. I have to open in the morning," Everleigh said.

"Open?" I asked.

"Yeah, Ev and I are waitresses at a diner in town," Danni said, and Everleigh's cheeks flushed red. She

looked down at her cowboy boots and shuffled her feet. She seemed embarrassed.

“You all right, gorgeous?” I asked her, touching her arm. *Fuck* her skin was so soft...like rose petals.

She flinched away from me and lifted her head, a defiant look on her face. “I’m great. It was nice to meet you guys, you put on a good show. Danni, I’ll wait for you in the hall,” she said, turning on her heels and heading toward the exit.

“Hey wait up,” I called, and followed behind her.

She stopped at the door and turned reluctantly. “What do you want, rock star?” she snapped

Feeling brave, I leaned my face close to hers and pulled her against me. I wanted to feel her body against mine one more time. Her curves fit perfectly into my tall frame. Nudging past her long hair with my nose, I leaned into her ear and said, “Until we meet again, Everleigh,” and just as suddenly, I pulled away. She couldn’t hide the goose bumps on her skin as I backed away, smiling like a cocky bastard at her. This definitely wasn’t the last I would see of Everleigh Stone.

Chapter 2

Everleigh

I wanted nothing more than to get the hell out of that meet and greet room but after feeling Ryder Matthews' breath on my skin, I had suddenly lost the ability to move my legs. I felt goose bumps forming on my arms and no matter how hard I had tried to fight my instant attraction to him, my body gave me away. I hated the effect he had on me... I've never felt anything like what Ryder made me feel by just holding me for a few moments. It pissed me off. I

wondered what he was playing at. How in the hell could someone as hot as Ryder Matthews be interested in someone like *me*?

Between me and Danni she was the one that always got the attention with her long blonde hair and gorgeous blue eyes. I was the plain one with boring dark hair that I jazzed up somewhat with a streak of color every now and then. I was thicker in the hips than she was and while I did have decent sized breasts, I always felt they were too big for someone my size. I thought they always made me look bigger than actually I was.

I almost laughed aloud to myself at the thought of Ryder Matthews actually wanting me. He was probably just

looking to get his rocks off with some random slut. He probably found me interesting because I wasn't falling for his bullshit. That had to be it...*if I can't have you, I'll make sure no one will ever want you.* Those words had haunted me for the past three years...

With a sexy yet cocky smile on his ridiculously handsome face, Ryder backed away from me and with one final wink he turned and walked away. Even though I knew he wasn't *really* into me, my heart was still pounding out of my chest.

Danni came over to me at that moment, her lips still swollen from her make out session with Beau. "H-hey Everleigh," she said.

I nudged her with my arm. “Are you ready to go?”

She nodded and smiled. “Yeah, let me just get my k-keys...”

I shook my head. “You know what? I’ll drive. Let’s go,” I said, and I looked back around the room one more time, subconsciously searching for Ryder. He was already gone so I shook my head and we walked out together arm in arm. Once we made it out of the venue and into Danni’s car, I started the engine and we began our drive home to Indiana.

After we were finally on the highway, I decided to break the ice since Danni hadn’t said a word since we left the venue. “So, did you have a good time tonight?” I said, barely containing my

amusement.

“I just made out with Beau Cavanaugh. I went backstage at a Bad Blooded Rebel concert and made out with Beau Cavanaugh,” she said, still dazed. I giggled at her and I jerked the wheel and almost drove off the highway when she suddenly screamed, “I just made out with Beau *fucking* Cavanaugh! Ahh!”

I laughed out loud. “Jesus, Danni! You almost made me run off the road!”

“Sorry, Ev...I just can't believe that happened! I *so* wish we could have went to his party!”

“Yeah, I know you do. Be glad I made us leave because you probably would have ended up sleeping with him.

You might have gotten pregnant or, hell, maybe even an STD with how those rockers sleep around.”

“Hey now, you don’t know that. You don’t know anything about those guys,” Danni said defensively.

“I know enough. Have you picked up a magazine lately?” I said. “I may not like their music, but at least one of those guys is in the news every other week about their drinking and partying. They are complete man whores that don’t take responsibility for their actions.”

I could feel Danni’s eyes on me and she said, “Hey, those ‘man whores’ were perfectly nice to you back there, Everleigh. Why are you being like that?” When I didn’t say anything and stared

ahead on the road, I heard her chuckle softly. “Oh, now I get it.”

My hands gripped the wheel. “Get what?”

“Ryder Matthews got to you, didn’t he?”

My head whipped to her for a moment before it returned back to the road. “What? Are you high? No way!”

“I think he did. Anyone with eyes could see he was *way* into you, Ev.”

I shook my head. “No he wasn’t, Danni. He was just trying to figure out how to get me back to his hotel or whatever so he can add another notch in the bed post.”

Danni sighed. “I think it was more than that, and I think you do too. You

both definitely had chemistry.”

I rolled my eyes. “Trust me girl, we didn’t. Besides, even if I was interested, I don’t know what the hell a guy like Ryder Matthews would ever see in someone like me,” I said, and in that moment my chest felt tight. I never understood why any man would look at me with anything other than disgust... especially after hearing what a train wreck you are from someone you thought loved you.

Danni’s expression softened and she sighed. “Everleigh, I wish you could see how beautiful you are. I know how scarred you are by everything that happened with Scott-”

I cringed. “Don’t say his name,

Danni. Please,” I said, feeling my eyes burning with unwanted tears.

“Sorry, Ev. It just makes me so sad that the bastard is still getting to you after everything he did. You are gorgeous, girl. Why wouldn’t a guy like Ryder Matthews be into you?”

I shook my head. “It doesn’t matter anymore, Danni, because I will never, ever see Ryder Matthews again. Can we just drive the rest of the way and not talk about my screwed up life anymore? Besides, we need to make it back home by one because Trish said she couldn’t stay with Dad all night tonight.”

Danni nodded, defeated. “Okay. Let’s talk about what a damn good kisser Beau was!” she squealed, and my mood

instantly lifted. All thoughts of that worthless jerk, my terminally ill father, and Ryder Matthews were out of my head as we giggled and talked about Danni's kiss with Beau the whole way back to Indiana.

December

“Table seven's order is ready, Everleigh, and table nine wants more coffee,” said Deuce.

“Okay, thanks. I got it,” I replied, walking to the counter and picking up two trays of food. After settling them

neatly into the crook of my arm, I picked up a pot of coffee with my free hand and began making my way through the busy restaurant to deliver the food. Friday mornings at Deuce's Diner were usually extremely busy and today was no exception with Christmas behind us and New Years creeping closer. I was grateful because busy days meant big tips, and I really could use them right now.

Walter "Deuce" Downing opened Deuce's Diner in the early 1970's after serving in Vietnam and it was a local favorite of everyone in Muncie. Danni and I began working at the diner when we were both eighteen and now, six years later, most of the people in town

knew us just about as well as they knew Deuce. Out of all the staff, we were his best waitresses and naturally this meant we got the biggest tips. I had a nagging suspicion that people tipped me well because they knew I was a full time caregiver to my ailing father and they felt sorry for me. I tried not to let it get to me because I was appreciative of any extra money I could get.

I refilled the coffee for the customers at table nine and walked to table seven, placing their food on the table for them. I did a quick scan of the restaurant, and everyone seemed to be eating and chatting away. No one appeared to need anything, so I saw this as my opportunity for a break. I walked

into the kitchen and found Deuce. “Hey big guy, do you mind if I take a quick break? I need to call and check on Dad.”

Deuce, a scruffy old man that had more belly than anything else on him, nodded his head full of long gray hair that he kept in a low ponytail and said, “Sure thing, sweetie. I’ll have Danni cover your tables. Take your time,” he said, giving me a sad smile.

Out of everyone I knew Deuce knew what I was going through with Dad better than anyone. He and my dad were best friends growing up and had even served in Vietnam together, so Dad’s illness hit him just as hard as it did me. Two years ago, my dad had been diagnosed with stage two pancreatic

cancer and at the time he'd been given a good prognosis. Things just kept getting worse and worse from there no matter how many treatments he did and what medicines he took. Four months ago, Dad's oncologist had given us the grim news that the cancer was now in stage four and he would only have six months left to live if he was lucky.

We decided together to check him out of the hospital so he could spend his remaining time at home. I was trying to prepare myself mentally for it, but no girl can really be ready to lose someone as important as their father. My mother died giving birth to me and Dad was all I had. I was a Daddy's girl through and through and I dreaded the day when I

wouldn't have him anymore.

I slid into my hoodie and opened the back door to the restaurant and pulled out my cell phone as soon as I stepped outside. I dialed my home phone number and waited for someone to pick up. After three rings, someone finally answered. "Stone residence, Trisha speaking." Trisha Cramer was my father's full time nurse and had recently moved into our spare room in order to help me when I wasn't home. Thank God Dad's insurance covered it...I don't know what I would have done without her help.

"Hey, Trish, it's Everleigh. How's he doing?"

"The same as when you left this

morning. He just woke up from a little nap.”

“Good. Has he eaten anything?”

“He had a bit of toast and I got him to eat half a container of yogurt earlier.”

My heart sank. “Well, that’s better than nothing, I guess. Can you put him on? I want to talk to him while I’m on a break.”

“Sure thing,” she said, and after a few silent moments I heard a soft voice on the phone.

“Hey, Evie girl,” Dad croaked.

My heart instantly tightened and I had to choke back tears. “Hey, Daddy. How are you feeling this morning?”

“So good I could do a cartwheel,” he said, trying to joke. My dad had a

horrible sense of humor.

“Well, don’t hurt yourself. Listen, I’m going to stop by the grocery store on my way home. Is there anything you want me to get for you?”

“Oh no, honey. I’m fine.”

“Daddy...” I said, my tone stern.

He sighed. “Okay, get me some soup. Whatever kind you want to get I’m sure is fine.”

“Good. Listen, I have to head back in but I just wanted to check on you. Please try and eat something, okay? A half cup of yogurt is not breakfast, old man,” I scolded.

“Old man? Shit, I’m as spry as I ever was. Smartass,” he said, and I laughed.

“You know it. Love you, Daddy,” I said.

“Love you too, Evie girl. I’ll see you when you get home. Goodbye,” he said.

“Bye,” I said, and I hung up the phone. I fought back tears as a wave of emotion swept over me. I shook my head and took a deep breath. Now was not the time for tears. As I placed the phone in my pocket, the back door swung open. “Hey Everleigh,” Deuce said, “we’re getting pretty swamped in here. Can you come back in and catch us up?”

I smiled at him and smoothed out my apron. “Sure thing, boss man.”

“Thanks. Oh, and there’s a gentleman at table twelve in the back

that's requesting you personally to wait on him."

My eyebrows furrowed. "But that's not my table, it's Danni's."

"I know, but he was pretty insistent and all of your tables are either full or haven't been cleaned yet. I'll have Danni take over table seven so you can wait on him."

I sighed. "All right, whatever you say," I said, and I grinned at him. As soon as I walked in, I took off my jacket and hung it by the door. When I got into the kitchen I heard several people talking in loud whispers in the dining area and a few people were gasping. "What's all the commotion?" I asked Leslie Anderson, one of the other

waitresses. I placed my order pad in my apron pocket and grabbed the dish bucket so I could clear some empty tables.

Her eyes were the size of quarters. Before she could answer, Danni came bursting into the kitchen. “Um, hey, Ev...” she trailed off excitedly.

“What is it?” I said, walking toward the dining room.

Her eyes were wide as well, and I was starting to get worried. “Uh, well...”

I sighed and rolled my eyes. “When you figure out what you were going to say, come find me. In the meantime, I have work to do,” I teased, and pushed through the swinging doors.

As I walked out into the dining room toward one of my empty tables, I wondered who could have requested that I be their waitress. Curiosity got the better of me and my eyes flicked to table twelve and when I saw who was sitting there I froze. It was Ryder Matthews.

My mouth fell open in shock and I was about to back up and run into the kitchen when I hit one of the empty tables with my hip and the dish bucket fell to the ground with a loud *crash*. Heat burned in my cheeks from embarrassment and as I knelt down to pick up my mess, I nudged one of the chairs with my arm and the legs scraped the floor loudly. I looked at the ground, trying to keep my face hidden. I was

humiliated in front of the entire restaurant...and in front of Ryder. I immediately was pissed at him. If he hadn't showed up here this wouldn't have happened. What the hell *was* he doing here?

As I placed the dishes (thank God none were broken) back into the bucket, I felt the hair on my arm stand on end as a familiar and sexy voice said, "Here, let me help you with that."

I instinctively looked up and met Ryder's cool blue eyes. My whole body felt warm and my heart started beating faster as I took in his handsome, chiseled face. My cheeks had to be flaming red. "N-no, it's all right. I've got it."

"It's okay, Everleigh. Let me help

you,” he said, placing a few forks in the bucket.

“I said I’ve got it,” I snapped, suddenly aware that the whole restaurant was watching me.

Just then, Deuce came walking over to us. “Everleigh, let me get this so you can take this young man’s order,” he said, leaning down and patting me on the back.

Reluctantly, I stood back up and met Deuce’s gaze. “Deuce, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s all right, honey. Just take care of your customer,” he said, winking at me.

Ryder slowly stood up and held his arm out to the table. “After you,

gorgeous,” he said, smiling that damn crooked smile at me.

My face was now burning with a mixture of embarrassment and anger. “Fine,” I said, and I walked to the table with him behind me. He was so close I could feel the heat of his body coming off him. I turned to face him and he stopped in front of me, looking down into my eyes. I felt shivers running down my spine as he winked at me and slid into the booth. He picked up the menu on the table and pretended to look through the choices. After a few quiet moments, I sighed and said, “What do you want, Ryder?”

“Give me a minute. I don’t know what I want. Everything looks

delicious,” he said, a smirk on his face. He glanced at me for a moment and his eyes did a quick scan of my body and then they turned back to the menu.

I impatiently tapped my foot. “I don’t mean food. What are you doing in Muncie? Why are you here?”

His eyes left the menu and he looked up at me, a smile still on his handsome face. “Can’t a guy take a road trip and not get questioned? Not that I mind being interrogated by a pretty girl. You can tie me up and question me anytime.”

Pretty girl? Hardly, I thought to myself. Scoffing, I narrowed my eyes at him and said, “This isn’t a joke, Ryder. You can’t just show up at my work and

my town and embarrass me like this.”

“Everleigh, the only one embarrassing you is you. You need to relax,” he said. At that moment I wanted nothing more than to smack him, but I before I could react three women, probably college girls, came rushing to the table and practically shoved me out of the way.

“Oh my God, you’re Ryder Matthews, aren’t you?” one of them asked, squealing.

Ryder silently sighed and put his menu down. He reluctantly looked up at them and said as politely as he could, “Last time I checked.” Anyone with a brain could tell he wanted to be left alone, but these girls obviously didn’t

care.

They all squealed again, this time louder and more obnoxiously. “I knew it! God, you’re so hot! Can we get your autograph?” another girl said.

Ryder looked up at me again for a moment, and his eyes were almost apologetic. “Sure, why not?” he said, and was starting to pull a pen from his jacket when I stopped him.

I rolled my eyes. “Wait a second, Ryder. Ladies, you are going to have to go back to your table and let my customer order in peace, please,” I said.

One of the women, a snotty brunette, looked at me with contempt. “Um, excuse me. We were talking to him, not you. Go do your job, *waitress*,

and leave us alone.”

My blood was boiling...I wanted to smack the shit out of that girl but I knew I'd get fired and possibly arrested. Before I could say anything else, Ryder shoved out of the booth and stood up next to me. He placed his arm around my shoulder and pulled me in close. “Look, I don't give a fuck who the hell you think you are. Fans or not, *no one* talks to my girlfriend like that, you got it?” Ryder snapped.

The brunette's eyes widened and her face flushed red. “Girlfriend?”

“Girlfriend?” I muttered angrily to him. He gave my shoulder a quick squeeze.

“She can't be your girlfriend,

Ryder. If she is how come we've never seen you around here before?" one of them asked.

"Yeah, and I mean come on...*look* at her. You're like a sexy rock god and she's just some frumpy waitress with a big ass," another said, and then laughed.

Normally I would let comments like that go, but I couldn't lie to myself that what the little bitch said got to me. She just said everything I thought about myself every single day of my life and it bothered me. I was about to shove away from him and go ask Deuce if I could leave early, but he said, "Say one more thing about her and I'll yell to this entire restaurant how I saw you giving a hand job to some old dude in his car outside

the diner,” he said to the brunette.

She looked at him, her face bright red and shocked. “What? I di-”

“Yeah, you thought no one saw that, did you? And you don’t think she could be my girlfriend because you think she’s ‘frumpy’? Trust me, my girl’s a fucking *tomcat* in bed and hotter than all three of you skanks combined. Right, baby?” he said, looking at me and grinning sexily.

Before I could even wrap my mind around what he just said, I felt him pull me into him tighter and suddenly his lips were on mine. I was too shocked to react like I wanted to, but I knew somewhere in my mind he was just defending me and putting on a show, so I went with it. I

opened my mouth slightly and I felt his tongue glide past my lips. When his tongue touched mine, something happened inside me and my knees gave out. He gripped me tighter to keep me from falling. He pulled away first and looked at me, a satisfied look on his face. “You okay, baby?”

“Y-yeah, I’m fine,” I said quietly.

Ryder looked into my eyes for a long moment before he turned his hard gaze back to the women. “Are you still here?” he snapped, and they all turned and left in a huff. As soon as they were gone, Ryder released me and leaned back against the table. “Sorry about that, Everleigh. I just wanted to help after what those skanky bitches said.”

“And your idea of helping me is by grabbing me and tongue kissing me in the middle of a crowded restaurant while I’m at work?” I said, crossing my arms. “Look, I don’t know why you came here or what you’re expecting from me, but it’s not going to happen. Are you going to order or not? If you aren’t, then just leave. I have work to do,” I said, my face still flushed.

“Everleigh-”

“Everleigh,” I heard Deuce calling behind me, “can I talk to you for a second?”

My scalp tingled with nervousness. *Oh no*, I thought, *he must have seen what happened and now I’m going to get fired*. I turned to him and

said, "Okay, I'll be right there." Deuce nodded. I turned around to face Ryder. "Great, now you've probably gotten me in trouble! Thanks a lot, Ryder!" I said loudly.

"Hey, I'm sorry about that, but I'm not apologizing for standing up for you. I'm going to go. Here," he said, pulling out his wallet and fishing out a few bills. He tossed them on the table and said, "this is for your trouble. See you tonight." He winked at me one more time.

"Don't count on it," I snapped.

He politely smiled at me. "We'll see," he said, and he backed up and walked out of the restaurant. I didn't even look at what kind of tip he left me

when I grabbed the money and stuck it in my apron pocket.

I nervously made my way to the back room where Deuce was waiting for me. I found him in the kitchen and he was leaning against the wall. “Hey Deuce, listen, I’m so sorry...” I started, but he cut me off.

“Everleigh, calm down. You’re not in trouble, sweetheart. I just brought you back here to see if you were okay. I heard what those little heifers said.”

Relief washed through me. “I’m fine, Deuce.”

He eyed me suspiciously. “You’re not fine, kiddo. You are working yourself to death in here almost every single day plus taking care of your old

man and it's wearing on you. We can all see it," he said, nodding at Danni. "Take the rest of the day off."

"What? No way, I can't do that. We are busy out there, plus I can't miss out on the money."

"Don't worry about it, Everleigh. I'm giving you a paid day off. Go take some time for yourself. I called in Heather and she's on her way to cover your shift. Besides, I bet that guy that was just in here gave you a nice enough tip to treat yourself to something special today," he said, winking.

"Deuce..."

"Go and enjoy yourself today or I will give you tomorrow off too," he said, grinning.

I smiled and hugged him. “You are awesome, you know that? Most bosses would be threatening to send someone home if they got in trouble. You are sending me home and paying me for it,” I said, and he laughed.

“That’s right. Now go on, get out of here,” he said, patting me on the back.

I grabbed my purse and ran into Danni on my way out the back door.

“Are you off already?” she asked.

“Yeah, Deuce is sending me home early. Paid day off.”

She frowned. “Is everything okay? Why the hell did Ryder show up here?”

“I don’t know, Danni. I didn’t know he knew where I worked.”

“I don’t know either, but it

wouldn't be hard to find something like that out. He knows we live in Muncie because I told him the night of the concert. All he had to do was make a few calls."

I shrugged. "I guess so. Look, I'm going to leave here before Deuce throws me out. Call me when you're off, okay?"

"I will, girl. See you," she said, and kissed my cheek before she walked out to grab a few plates from the kitchen. I walked out to my car and unlocked it. Once I was in the driver's seat, I realized I forgot to take my apron off and I twisted in my seat, untying the string then setting it on the passenger seat. When I did, something caught my eye. Some of my tips fell out of one of the

pockets and when I got a closer look at them, my eyes bugged out. Surely that wasn't...I picked up the stack of bills which were mostly ones and fives and stopped when I saw a one hundred dollar bill. *God damn it, Ryder!* I thumbed the bill back and I gasped loudly when behind it I saw another one hundred dollar bill. I kept counting and by the time I counted the entire tip he left me, I felt like I was going to puke. He left me ten one hundred dollar bills...a one thousand dollar tip. *Holy fucking shit!* In the middle of the stack of money a slip of paper fell out. It was Ryder's cell phone number...that son of a bitch! I guess he was getting his way after all because I would be seeing him tonight...

and throwing the money back in his face
after I kick him in the balls.

Chapter 3

Ryder

As soon as I got into my white Escalade, I punched the address to the hotel in the GPS and began my drive. As I left Deuce's Diner, I couldn't help but smile to myself. Seeing Everleigh again hadn't gone like I'd planned at all, but I wasn't sorry for how it turned out. I licked my lips...I could still taste her sweet lip gloss on my tongue. She tasted like cherries. I was taking a huge gamble in coming to her hometown and looking her up but I couldn't help it...I had to

see her again.

Ever since our last show in Cincinnati I hadn't been able to get Everleigh out of my head. After she and her friend left, I tried to get her off my mind by grabbing a random groupie that had been staring at me and leading her off to the bathroom. I had never had a girl get in my head like Everleigh had and I needed to see if it was just a fluke.

As soon as the bathroom door closed, this girl started unbuckling my pants and wasted no time taking me into her mouth. It felt good but something was keeping me from getting completely hard and I knew in that moment what it was... this girl wasn't *her*. I was a horny bastard most of the time and was down

for any kind of sex every night but for the first time I can remember I couldn't keep my dick hard. A girl was literally in the middle of giving me a blow job and I went soft. Frustrated, I shoved her off and left the bathroom without saying another word. I met up with the guys and told them I was just going to head home and I left the venue. For the first time since me and the guys hit it big, I went to bed that night without having sex.

Every night (and morning) since then I went to sleep and woke up with a raging hard on. The only way I could get it to go away was by either taking a cold shower or just firing one off by thinking of Everleigh. That girl had been in every one of my waking thoughts and had

haunted my dreams for the past three months. I know the guys were sick to death of me and my moody behavior from it but I couldn't help it. Everleigh was hands down the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She had big gorgeous brown eyes, a cute little nose that was lightly sprayed with a few freckles, a full set of pouty lips, and the purest, softest skin I'd ever touched. She was curvy in all the right places and she reminded me of a classic hourglass figured beauty from the fifties. Her long raven hair suited her pale complexion and the pop of teal (which I noticed she'd now colored a bright red) she'd had set off her look perfectly. She was a siren and I was definitely ready to

answer her call.

I smiled to myself when I thought of her surprised reaction at the restaurant. I had definitely hoped that had gone smoother, but I got the reaction I was hoping for. She was completely and totally shocked to see me there and I started to get hard when her cheeks flushed a bright pink. After the mishap with the dish bucket, I was trying to get my flirt on when I that group of annoying fan girls came up to me, one of whom I'd seen jerking some nasty old dude off in the parking lot of Deuce's...classy.

When they shoved Everleigh to the side and then spoke about her like she didn't even exist, I saw red. I shot right back at them and when they couldn't

fathom in their tiny brains that I would have the hots for a smoking hot girl like Everleigh, I decided to step it up and planted a kiss on her lips. I thought she'd knee me in the balls but surprisingly she went with it and let me slide my tongue into her mouth. Thank God I was wearing black jeans because my dick was straining so hard against my zipper I thought I would pass out. My toes curled up in my shoes and I gripped her tighter...I wanted her as close to me as possible.

When the girls finally left, I tried to apologize to Everleigh because, well, it just seemed to be the right thing to do even though I wasn't a damn bit sorry. Kissing her just felt right. She got all

flushed and was obviously upset with me so I decided to leave so I didn't mess her day up anymore than I had.

However, I made damn sure that I would see her again, leaving her a thousand dollar tip with my cell phone number tucked inside the money.

I know that it would piss her off enough for her to call me and demand to give the money back, not that I would take it. I wasn't trying to buy her attention, but seeing how hard she worked made me want to reach out and help. Hopefully it didn't piss off this "guy" that she had to get back home to... my hands gripped the wheel in anger. It couldn't be have been too serious if she let me kiss her.

The GPS told me that I was close to my hotel when my cell phone rang. Excitement shot through me for a moment hoping it was Everleigh, but I frowned when I saw the caller ID. Beau's face was staring at me from the phone display and I sighed and answered it. "Hey man," I said.

"Sup big guy. Did you make it to town yet?" he asked me.

"Yeah, I've been here for about an hour now." Beau was the only one that knew I was making this trip before I left, and I'm pretty sure Jude and Kris knew by now. I don't think they would care though and even if they did, I really didn't give a fuck. We were on a break for the next few weeks before we had to

head into the studio to continue recording our next album so it didn't matter where I went. I wasn't messing up anyone's schedule.

“So, did you see her yet?” he asked.

“Uh, yeah, I just left the diner she works at.”

“How'd that go?”

I chuckled. “Well, let's see. When she saw me she dropped a bucket full of dishes, blushed like crazy when I knelt down to help her pick them up, got snapped at by some random slutty fan girls, let me kiss her, and then I left her a thousand dollar tip and my phone number before I left.” When I said it back out loud, it sounded so ridiculous.

Beau laughed out loud. “Jesus Christ, man. What the hell? You kissed her already?” I proceeded to tell Beau the story, and he just laughed harder.

“Damn, dude, you certainly know how to make an entrance.”

“Shut up, man. Well, at least after the tip I left her I know I’ll definitely see her again.”

“Yeah, and you will probably get either a face slap or a dick punch for your troubles,” he said, and I laughed.

I pulled into the parking lot of the Holiday Inn (the nicest hotel in this town) and parked the Escalade. “Well, at least her hand will be on some part of my body, so no complaints there,” I joked. I got out of my car and grabbed

my luggage out of the back seat.

“So, did you see Danni there?” he asked, not at all trying to be inconspicuous. Since that night in Cincinnati, he and Danni had struck up a friendship on Facebook after she tagged the pictures of us that John took. I knew he had a thing for her, but he wasn't the girlfriend type so he never really pursued it but I know he wanted to *bad*. I'm glad that he hadn't told Danni I was coming to Muncie because that would have ruined everything for me.

“Yeah, I saw her for a second before Everleigh came out. She looked pretty cute in her apron, man,” I said.

“Shut up. Don't put images in my head or I might just drive there and join

you,” he said.

“Well, you know where I’m staying if you do. Listen, I’m at the hotel so I’m going to get checked in. Call me if you decide to drag your ass here,” I said. “Tell the guys I said hey.”

“Will do. Good luck with Everleigh, man. I’m sure you’ll need it,” he said. I hung up with him and walked into the hotel. When I reached the reception desk, a young brunette inhaled sharply when she saw me, recognition on her face.

“W-welcome to the Holiday Inn. Are you checking in today?” she asked, shock and surprise in her voice.

“Yes I am. The reservation is under Dick Grande,” I said, smiling at

the girl. I know it was childish, but all of us guys in the group had penis inspired nicknames as the fake names we used to check in at hotels.

Her face was red and she was smiling ear to ear as she typed some information into the computer. I gave her my credit card and she swiped it and gave it back to me with shaking hands. “Here is your key, Mr. Grande,” she said, smiling and sliding a key card across the desk. After she gave me my room information, she batted her eyelashes at me and said, “Enjoy your stay.”

She obviously knew who I was but, thankfully, she didn't say anything out loud. Bad Blooded Rebel was a hard

rock band and we were pretty famous but luckily I had been able to get into town relatively unseen. I'm sure after the girls at the restaurant got onto their social media sites the press would catch wind and swarm down on me, but I hoped it wouldn't happen. I came here for Everleigh and I didn't need another reason for her to pull away from me.

I walked to the elevators and took it to the top floor. My room was the one at the end of the hall and when I finally reached it, I opened the door with the key and walked inside. It definitely wasn't what I was used to as far as hotels go, but I wasn't complaining. I had more money than I knew what to do with but I didn't like to go flashing it

around (with the exception of today). As long as I wasn't sleeping in a roach motel with crack needles everywhere, I was pretty content. I put my luggage down and flopped back on my bed, sighing. All I could do now was sit and wait for Everleigh to call me...the thought of seeing her again gave me an instant hard on. I groaned and put my arm over my face, thoughts of her lips on mine flashing in my mind.

I didn't realize I'd fallen asleep until I heard my cell phone ringing in my pocket. I opened my eyes and blinked a few times, remembering where I was. It

had gotten dark outside so I sat up and flicked on the lamp. I dug my phone out of my pocket and swiped the screen, not even looking at the caller ID. “Hello?” I answered sleepily.

“What the hell were you thinking leaving a thousand dollar tip, Ryder?” Everleigh shouted angrily into the phone.

I ran my hand through my hair and smiled. “Got you to call me, didn’t it?”

“This isn’t funny. Do you realize how inappropriate that is?”

“Well you don’t have to keep it, you know. If you want to give it back all you have to do is come to my hotel,” I said.

I could practically hear her rolling her eyes over the phone. “Nice try, rock

star. I'm not coming to your hotel room. We can meet some place public."

I grabbed the remote and flicked on the television and I was immediately bombarded with pictures of my visit to Deuce's Diner this afternoon. *Shit*, I thought. Those bitches took pictures of me and Everleigh at the diner and now they were all over the news, including the tag line "*Who is the new mystery woman in Ryder Matthews' life?*" under a picture of me kissing Everleigh.

"Uh, that might be impossible at the moment. Have you seen the news?"

"No, I've been home all afternoon. Why?" she asked.

"Well, those bitches at the restaurant put pictures up of me and you

at the diner and now it's all over the news.”

“What?” she shrieked. “Ryder, how the hell am I supposed to leave my house?”

“I can come to you if you want,” I said.

“Then the press will know where I live!” she said, sounding panicked.

“Everleigh, they are going to find out where you live anyway. It's just a matter of when,” I said.

“Oh no,” she said, sounding like she was on the verge of tears. “This is the last thing he needs right now.”

“Who?” I asked, feeling jealousy surging through my veins.

I heard her sniff. “Never mind, I'll

come to you. Where are you staying?”

I smiled. “The Holiday Inn. I think it’s on Bethel Aven-”

“I know where it is,” she snapped. “I’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

“Ask for Dick Grande,” I said, smiling.

“Really mature, Ryder,” she said, and hung up the phone. Still smiling, I got up from my bed and stretched out. I got into my suitcase and grabbed a clean pair of boxers, jeans, and a tee shirt and jogged into the bathroom. I took a five minute shower and quickly styled my hair after I got dressed into my signature faux hawk. I quickly brushed my teeth and slid into my boots just in time because after I laced them up someone

knocked on the door. I took a deep breath and walked to the door, pulling it open.

“Everleigh,” I said hungrily. My mouth suddenly went dry at the sight of her. She was wearing a pair of faded dark wash jeans, a pink cheetah print hoodie jacket, and black flats. Her hair was pulled up into a messy knot on her head and she was wearing a pair of black framed glasses. She looked like a naughty school teacher...I moved around to try and hide my growing erection. “Come in,” I motioned, moving aside to let her pass. She reluctantly passed by me and stood as close to the door as she could after I closed it. “You look beautiful.”

“Um, thanks,” she said in disbelief. “Listen, I can’t stay long. I just wanted to give this back to you. It was generous but unnecessary,” she said, holding the money I’d given her earlier.

I decided to try and get to know her a little better...like who this man is that she had referred to earlier. “Why won’t you keep it? Did your boyfriend find out about it?”

“What? I don’t have a boyfriend,” she said, and I could tell she instantly regretted admitting it. I was definitely happy by that admission.

“Really? Nice,” I said, cocking an eyebrow. “Then who is this ‘he’ you keep talking about?” I asked.

After looking at me for a moment,

she threw her hands up and sighed.

“Well, I’d say it’s none of your business but since I’m apparently being talked about on the news you’ll find out soon anyway. It’s my dad.”

I cocked an eyebrow. “Your dad? You’re a grown woman, Everleigh. Is he still that over protective of you?”

“No, if anything he’s been pushing me to have a life of my own instead of taking care of him,” she said sadly.

“What do you mean, ‘taking care of him’?” I asked.

She looked down at the carpet for a second before she looked back up at me. “He has stage four pancreatic cancer and we have a full time hospice nurse living with us now. His doctor said he

had very little time left, and that was four months ago. This is the last thing in the world our family needs right now, being hounded by camera-toting leeches while he's in his last days," she said, her eyes filling with tears.

"Oh, fuck, Everleigh. I'm so sorry," I said, and I instinctively pulled her into a hug. I felt her tense up at first, but when she couldn't stop the tears from flowing she wrapped her arms around my waist and began to sob. I held onto her and stroked her back, massaging it.

"I don't want people messing with him and coming to the house all the time. He's going to die soon and I want him to die in peace, not having people trying to peek in our windows and taking pictures

of me every time I come and go from the house. He doesn't deserve this."

"I know he doesn't. I'm going to hire security to make sure your dad gets all the privacy and rest he needs," I said.

She broke away from me and took a few steps back. "Ryder, you don't have to do that. I can find my own way to keep my father safe. I don't need your help," she said. She held her hand out that was still filled with money. "Here. Take this."

"I'm not taking it back, Everleigh. Use it to make your dad's last days nice," I said. I could definitely relate to what she was going through. I lost my dad to lung cancer when I was twenty and my mom was so devastated by his

death that she overdosed on pills two years later. If anyone could feel her pain it was me.

“I’m not keeping this money, Ryder. Take it.”

“Well I’m not taking it back, Everleigh. Keep it.”

“Why do you want to help me so much? Why did you come here?” she demanded, tears still pouring down her cheeks.

“Why do you think? You have been driving me crazy since the night of that concert, Everleigh! I knew from the first time I saw you that you were different than any girl I’ve ever met.”

“Meaning I’m the first able bodied female that didn’t immediately drop their

panties for you just because you're famous," she spat.

"No, that's not it. You didn't give a shit about me at all. You saw me for me and no one ever has besides you, my parents, and the guys in the band. You are the first girl I've met that doesn't want something from me. Everyone always has, but you don't. That means something to me."

"What does it mean, Ryder? That the only reason you came here was because I wasn't impressed by you when we first met?"

I looked at her and was completely dumbfounded. "Are you being serious? It means that I think you are the most beautiful woman on the god

damned earth and that I have dreamed of you every night and thought of you at every moment of every day for the past three months. It means that I can't get you out of my head, Everleigh, no matter how hard I have tried. It also means that if I stand here for one more second without kissing you that I'm going to lose my fucking mind," I said, and I took a step closer to her. I waited for her to stop me, to back away, to slap me...do anything to put the brakes on what was happening, but she didn't. She just stared at me with her big brown eyes as I tilted my head to the side and brushed my lips with hers. I slightly opened my mouth as I placed a hand on her cheek, tracing her jaw line with my finger tips. I wanted to

deepen the kiss so badly, but I wanted her to be the one to make the move. It didn't seem like she was going to get into it so I started to pull away. Before I could break the kiss, I felt her head tilt opposite mine and she opened her mouth. That was all the invitation I needed and I glided my tongue past her lips. When our tongues met, I heard her moan into my mouth and I felt myself getting hard again. My hand moved from her face down her neck and came to rest with my other hand, which was anchored at the small of her back.

Just as the kiss was getting deeper, I felt her pull away from me. She placed a shaking hand on my chest to steady herself. "Ryder," she whispered, "I can't

do this. I'm sorry.”

I moved my hands from her back to her shoulders and rubbed them as comfortingly as I could. “It’s okay, Everleigh. I’m sorry too.” She nodded and started pulling away more, but I gripped her tighter and pulled her back to me. “You know what? I’m not. I want you and I’m not going to apologize for it.”

“Why do you want me? You heard what that girl said earlier. I am nothing but a low class waitress. I have more ass than the average girl I’m swimming in an ocean of debt because of my father’s mounting medical bills. Why the hell would you want to chase someone like me? I’m nothing!” she shouted.

“You are *not* nothing, Everleigh, because trust me if you were I wouldn’t be here. Why do you talk about yourself like that?”

“Because it’s true! I have had enough people in my life tell me what a waste of time I really am, including someone who claimed to love me more than anything! I can’t believe I fell for it, but I’m not falling for it again. I need to leave. Now,” she said. “Let me go, Ryder.”

I reluctantly released her. “I’m not giving up that easily, Everleigh.”

“Well you are wasting your time because I will never believe anything you say to me. I won’t fall for the lies again,” she said. Who the fuck could

have told her that she was so unattractive that it was literally crippling her with doubt? I wanted to find out... and beat the fuck out of him. “Take your money back, please.”

“I’m not taking it, Everleigh. Please just enjoy your time with your dad. Trust me, you will regret not making those last days the best they can be. I know from experience.”

“How do you know how this feels?” she cried, tears pouring out of her eyes again. “Have you ever had to watch your father waste away and die before your eyes?”

The pain of remembrance stabbed at my heart and my jaw squared. “Yes, actually, I have.” Her eyes widened and

her mouth fell open. Before she could say anything more, my cell phone rang again. This conversation was opening old wounds for me, so I took the opportunity to back away from her and answer my phone. Without looking at who it was, I answered it. “Hello?” I asked, my eyes still on Everleigh’s.

“Hey man, it’s Kris. Just heard the news about your new girl,” he said.

“She’s not my girl. Yet,” I said, my eyes boring into hers. She gasped and swallowed hard. “What’s up man?”

“I was just checking up on you. I don’t know how much you’ve heard on the TV, but the press is all over this shit.”

“They are? Jesus, I haven’t really

watched any TV until just now.”

“Well, I bet if you look out your window you’ll probably see a few reporters,” he said. I walked over to the window and slightly pulled back the blinds. I saw about forty reporters and photographers with their cameras ready, waiting to snap a picture of the two of us if we tried to leave. *Fuck!* “Tell Everleigh to lay low if she can. Everyone’s wanting the story on her.” Kris was a truly nice guy and for him to call with a warning the news reports already must be bad. “You want us to come there?”

“For what? There isn’t anything you guys can do to squash this shit. I’ll just call John and have him bring the

security team here. Everleigh will need a team of her own at her house too.”

“I can take care of it, man. I still think Beau, Jude, and I should come to Muncie, though. United unit and all that shit.”

“Why do we need to be all together for this? As far as the press knows I came to a city in Indiana to see a new mystery girl,” I said. “What’s the press been saying?”

“So far just stuff wondering who she is and how could a rocker fall for a plain Jane girl like her. Mostly it’s about you ‘dumping your band brothers’ to run off and chase some girl in another city. One reporter even compared her to Yoko Ono,” he said.

I rolled my eyes. “Fuck!” I yelled, and Everleigh jumped.

“Yeah, the label called Beau this afternoon freaking out.”

“All right, fine. Go ahead and call John and I’ll keep Everleigh here with me until you all get here. I’ll call the cops and have someone go to her house and keep an eye on it.”

“She’s there with you now? Damn dude, you work fast,” he said, laughing.

“Shut up man. I’ll see you in a few hours. Be careful, the roads are pretty slick.”

“You know it. Later,” he said. I hung up the phone and started search my internet for the number to the police station.

Everleigh's eyes were still wide. "How bad is it, Ryder? Tell me the truth."

I sighed. "It's not terrible, but I think you should stay here with me for a few hours until my security team gets here. I really didn't think anyone in this town would give a shit who I was."

"People know who you are even in Muncie, Indiana. We aren't all a bunch of dumb hicks. Why did you say you were calling the cops to watch my house?"

"I want to be cautious, and since you can't leave right now I don't want anyone bothering your father."

Everleigh's eyes started to glass over again. "I swear to God, Ryder, if

any of those bastards bother my dad in any way...”

“Hey, I won’t let them. Just call your dad and check on him and I’ll make sure someone goes over there, okay?” I asked. She nodded and walked over to the bed, sitting down and taking out her cell phone. As much as I wanted Everleigh, I was quickly realizing that coming here was a huge mistake.

Chapter 4

Everleigh

I sat down on the bed in Ryder's room and dialed my home number. As I waited for someone to pick up, I watched Ryder on the phone. He was livid...he angrily yelled at whoever was on the other end of the line and I could tell that he really was upset by all of this. I know he hadn't planned on making my life harder by showing up here, but he did. At least he was trying to make it right. On the third ring, Trish picked up the phone. "Stone residence. Trisha

speaking.”

“Hey, Trish. It’s Everleigh.”

“Hey, what’s up?”

“Listen, this is going to sound strange, but has anyone come by the house or called or anything since I left a while ago?”

“No, no one’s come here, but there have been a few people that have called.”

Relief washed through me that no one had showed up but I was still irritated that they got my number.

“Who’s called and what have they said?”

“Nothing really, just asked if you lived here and if you were dating someone named Ryder Matthews. I have

no idea who that is so I told them no and to stop calling.”

I let out a deep breath. “Thanks, Trish.”

“Who is Ryder Matthews?”

“He’s the lead singer of a famous rock band.” I could have lied and said he was no one, but random people wouldn’t be calling my house asking about someone that wasn’t famous.

“Are you joking with me?” she asked.

“I wish I was joking. I met him when Danni and I went backstage at the concert a few months back and he showed up in town today at the diner.”

I could hear her smile over the phone. “So, you’re telling me the lead

singer of a rock band showed up in town for you after you met him a few months back?”

“Thanks for the playback, Trish.”

“You’re dating a rocker? Max is going to be thrilled,” she said. She was probably right...my dad was a rock fan through and through.

“I’m not dating him, and don’t tell my dad, Trish. I want to, okay?”

“You got it. Besides, I won’t be telling him anything anyway because he’s sleeping for the night.”

“Thank God. He doesn’t need this shit right now.”

“Where are you anyway?”

“Uh, I’m kind of at his hotel room.” There was no way to say that

where it wouldn't sound bad.

“Really?” she said excitedly.

“It's not like that, Trish. He tipped me way too much today and I was coming to give it back to him.

Apparently the press showed up after I got here and I'm barricaded until his security team shows up.”

“Uh huh. Well, everything here is fine right now. Just enjoy your time in lock up,” she said.

“I'll try. Ryder is on the phone with the police department right now and he's trying to get some officers out there to watch the house just in case anyone shows up asking questions.”

“That's nice of him, Everleigh,” she said, sounding sincere.

I sighed. “I know. Just keep an eye on Daddy and call me if anything happens, okay?”

“I will. I’ll see you soon, Everleigh.”

“Night, Trish,” I said, and hung up the phone. Ryder was still on the phone shouting so I decided to call Danni. I needed my best friend in so many ways right now. I wish I could talk to her about the kiss with Ryder...about how that was the most intense and wonderful kiss I’d ever had in my entire life, but with Ryder right here, I couldn’t. He already made it clear that he wanted me (and I still didn’t get it at *all*) and I didn’t want to gush about what a good kisser he was to my best friend

with him right in the room. Before I could call her, I got a text message. It was from a number I hadn't see in three years. With a shaking hand, I opened it and it read,

*Wow, Ryder Matthews, huh?
Enjoy fucking him while you can, baby
girl. Remember what I said...*

Tears immediately sprang to my eyes and I dropped my phone to the floor with a loud thud. Ryder looked up and I thought I heard him mutter a goodbye to the police. He came rushing over to me and dropped to his knees in front of me.

“Everleigh, what is it?” I couldn’t speak...I can’t believe Scott had the nerve to text me after everything he said to me all those years ago. That jerk was the reason I was afraid to let anyone in. His words hurt me so deeply and scared me so badly then that I had built up a wall around myself and refused to let any guy in. Scott told me he would make my life hell and he had kept his word.

I was crying so hard that my vision was blurred. I didn’t even see him pick up my phone. He read the message and angrily asked, “Who the fuck is Scott?”

I shook my head. “N-not now, Ryder. I can’t...”

“Is this asshole the reason you are so afraid?” he asked.

“Please, I can’t talk about this now. This has been one of the most fucked up days I’ve had in a long time and I don’t want to think about it.”

Ryder put my cell phone on the bed next to me and wiped my tears with his thumbs. “Everleigh, listen to me. I don’t know what that dick head said or did to you, but you have to believe me when I say it’s wrong. What can I do to get you to see how beautiful you are?”

I looked up at him and half smiled. “There’s nothing you can do. I trusted him with everything I had and once he got it, it was thrown back in my face like a used tissue. You are sweet to try and help me, but nothing you say is going to change the way I see myself. Being told

that you are disappointing and terrible at sex are hard things to forget,” I said, and the tears poured from my eyes again.

Anger was etched in every line of Ryder’s perfect face. “First of all, you are not an ugly girl, Everleigh. Far from it, actually. I don’t mean this to sound cocky, but I can pretty much have any woman in the world that I want, but I don’t want them. I came here for you. You are the only woman in the world I have ever chased and I want you so God damned bad. Everleigh, you are fucking gorgeous and anyone that can’t see that has some serious brain damage. I also can’t imagine you ever being bad at sex...it’s just not possible. Not to be crude, but I’m having a hard time

keeping my dick soft when I'm around you," he admitted, and surprisingly I laughed.

"Classy," I said, sniffing. "What you are saying is nice and all, but I am having a hard time wrapping my mind around it. I still don't get it."

He smiled at me. "I wish there was something I could do to make you see what I see when I look at you," he said, and I shrugged my shoulders. I know why I was guarded when it came to men, but I also know that Ryder didn't deserve to be cast aside because of it. I don't know if I was ever going to be able to really trust him but seeing how hard he was trying already made me want to try. I know he took a huge

gamble coming here to see me after only meeting me once.

I looked into his blue eyes and they were suddenly full of confliction. “Listen,” he said, “I don’t want to make your life harder by dragging you into my fucked up world. I didn’t know about how sick your dad was and the last thing you need is some cocky celebrity coming into your town and stressing you out. I know how this feels, Everleigh, because I’ve been where you are right now. If you want me to leave, say the word and I will.”

I blinked and looked at him. “You want to go already?”

“My life is crazy like this all the time and I was stupid to think I could do

something on my own for once. I was being impulsive and now the burden is falling on you. This was stupid, I don't know why I came," he said, standing up. He ran his hands through his hair in frustration.

To my surprise, I rose off the bed and followed him. "Okay, talk about your one-eighty's," I said.

He turned around and looked at me. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Come on, Ryder. You show up here *completely* out of the blue, telling me all of these things and saying you are into me and I'm beautiful and all that crap, and now all of a sudden you are ready to bail because you think it will be too hard on me? I don't get it! What is it

you want from me?” I yelled.

He took a step and closed the gap between us. “I want *you* so fucking bad, Everleigh, and I’m trying to be a nice guy for once and give you an out. I’m telling you that being in any kind of relationship with me is going to be hard with cameras following your every single move and reporters and journalists twisting every word that comes out of your mouth. You are a sweet girl from a small town and I’m a selfish prick to drag you into this life.”

“Well, isn’t up to me to decide if I want to be a part of this life?” I said, raising my voice and feeling a little bit braver. “Don’t I get a say?”

“Fine then, what do you want,

Everleigh?" he barked.

I took a step toward him and stared into his blue eyes. "I *want* to see what you see when you look at me! I *want* to understand how a man as beautiful as you could want someone as damaged as me! I *want* you to want me because I'm so *tired* of being unwanted and alone!" I shouted, and more tears fell from my eyes.

Ryder took my face into his large, warm hands and leaned his face to mine. I thought he was going to kiss me again, but he didn't. He leaned in and pressed his lips to my eyes that were still wet with tears, causing them to flutter. He pressed feather light kisses on both of my eyelids before moving his lips down

to my tear stained cheeks. I gasped loudly when I felt the tip of his tongue on my cheek and it took me a split second to realize that he was licking my tears away. He pulled back and stared into my eyes, still holding my face. “Then give me a chance, Everleigh. Just one chance, that’s all I ask. Let me show you what you do to me...let me in.”

Not able to fight how he made my body feel, I nodded at him and his lips instantly found mine for the third time today. My resolve completely disappeared and I melted into him. My body gave itself over to him and I felt myself starting to fall into his chest. I felt him smile against my lips and he pulled me closer, his tongue twisting with mine.

I felt tingles shooting all through me and my skin felt like it was stretched as tight as it could be.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and he let go of my face and wound his strong tattooed arms around my waist. He moved us backwards until my legs hit the edge of the bed and I swayed, grabbing onto him and trying to stay steady. I was unsuccessful and with a giggle, we both toppled onto the bed. My legs fell open and his body nestled between mine. He broke the kiss for a moment and laughed at me. “Clumsy girl,” he said, and his lips claimed me again.

My fingers knotted in his thick dark hair as his hands roamed up my

waist. My hoodie had slipped up slightly when we fell, baring my stomach. I shivered when his fingers grazed up my bare skin. He moved his hand up higher until he reached the bottom of my sweater. He pulled away and looked into my eyes for a moment, silently asking my permission. I nodded and pulled his head back to mine as his hand slid under my hoodie and roamed up my body. It had been three years since anyone had touched me like this and while I was scared, my body was on fire.

I was starting to wonder if this was the right thing to do since I'd only known Ryder for all but two seconds, but when his hand found my breast, I

was a goner. I whimpered into his mouth and arched my back as his skillful fingers toyed with my hard peak. “God you feel good, Everleigh,” he moaned.

“Ryder,” I breathed, unable to say much more. He twirled my nipple in his fingers through the cotton of my bra and all I felt was an intense burning and clenching in my core from the friction of our bodies rubbing together. He kept up his torturous rhythm with his hands and his hips. I was soaking wet and well past the breaking point. I was about to throw caution to the wind and beg him to take all of me when his phone rang.

I started to sit up but he rested his hard, heavy frame against me. “Ryder, your phone,” I whispered.

“Just ignore it,” he mumbled, running kisses along my jaw line.

I shook my head. “It might be important,” I said, and groaning, he nodded his head and reluctantly climbed off me. I noticed as he stood and answered his phone that he was sporting a *very* impressive erection. I watched him trying to collect himself enough to carry on a conversation and I felt like I might start drooling. His hair was messy from me grabbing onto it, his lips were still glistening from kissing me, and his tight black tee shirt that showed off his full sleeves of tattoos was wrinkled from rolling around on top of me. Oh shit, was I in big trouble.

I must have been fantasizing about

him for too long because before I knew it, I felt the bed dip next to me as he sat down at my side. “Sorry, that was Beau. Everyone should be here in about a half hour.”

“Oh, good.”

“Yeah, I think they are going to stop and pick up your friend Danni on the way over and then we’re going to chill for a minute before we decide what to do.”

“Wait...they are picking up Danni? Why?” I asked.

Ryder looked at me like the answer should be obvious. “Uh, because Beau and Danni are friends and he wanted to see her.”

“They are?” *What?* Since when

have Beau and Danni been friends, and why the hell didn't she tell me?

“Yeah. After Danni tagged the band in those pictures from Cincinnati, he friend requested her and they talk like every day. Why are you surprised? Didn't you know?” he asked.

I blew out a breath. “No, I didn't.” Danni had been messaging and talking to Beau Cavanaugh for the past three months and couldn't find time to tell me this? It wasn't a big deal really, but it still hurt me that she didn't confide in me.

He put his hands on my shoulders and massaged them comfortingly. I instantly felt more relaxed. “At this point they are just Facebook friends. It's not

like they are hooking up or anything. Well, not yet anyway.”

“I know,” I said, and I turned my face to look at him. Just as he was about to move in and kiss me again, I stopped him. “Listen, can we talk for a second?”

He leaned back and smiled.

“Sure,” he said, still massaging my shoulders.

“What just happened...Ryder that was amazing. I've never kissed anyone like that and no one has touched me like that in a long time. I'm surprised I let it get that far.”

“Well, I do have that affect on women...or so I've been told,” he said, winking.

I rolled my eyes and elbowed him

in the ribs. “Shut up,” I said, and he smiled a sexy smile at me.

“Ouch,” he joked, faking pain.

“I’m serious. Kissing you and letting you touch me just now was a huge deal for me, but I don’t want to do anything else until I know you better. We really don’t know much about each other, so if this is going to turn into something we probably should maybe learn a little bit more about each other. Don’t you think?” I asked.

Ryder nodded and gave my shoulders a shake. “Yeah, you’re right. Okay, so let’s start over.” He held his hand out to me. “Hi, I’m Ryder Matthews, and I am the lead singer of Bad Blooded Rebel. I am twenty seven

years old and I was born in raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. Football is my favorite sport and I am a diehard Bengals fan. Mexican food is my favorite, I love just about any movie made in the eighties, and I hate cats. Oh, and I think you're really hot. Okay, now it's your turn," he said, smiling a boyish smile.

Despite myself, I grinned so wide my cheeks hurt. I placed my hand in his and let out a chuckle. "Um, okay. Here goes. Uh, hi, I'm Everleigh Stone, and I work as a waitress at Deuce's Diner. I was born and raised right here in Muncie, Indiana and I just turned twenty four. I love football too and the Colts are my all time favorite team, so we might have problems with that. I love Italian

food, old movies from the thirties and forties are my all time faves, and I too do not like cats. Oh yeah, and as much as I hate to admit it, I think you're really hot too," I said, and he chuckled.

"Nice. See? Now we're getting somewhere."

"I guess we are. So, what now?"

"Ask me a question. Anything you want to know. I'm an open book."

"O-okay. Uh, let me think. Um, what's your middle name?"

He smiled at me. "Storm."

I chuckled. "Are you serious? Your name is Ryder Storm Matthews?"

"Yeah, what can I say? I was born in the middle of a really bad thunderstorm and apparently they lost

power at the hospital for a minute. I was born literally the minute the generators came on,” he said, grinning. “My dad always said I rode in through the storm.” He looked sad for a moment, but before I could ask anything he said, “So, what’s your middle name?”

“It’s Grace. Common, I know,” I said.

“No, it’s beautiful. Everleigh Grace Stone. How did your parents come up with it?”

“Well, my dad’s the one that named me, actually.”

“He did?”

“Uh, yeah. My mom died in childbirth, so Daddy basically named me after her. Her name was Grace and

Everly was her maiden name. He just flipped it and changed the spelling.”

“That’s so sad. You never got to know your mom and now you are losing your dad,” he said, looking so sad for me. “That’s awful, Everleigh. I’m really sorry.”

I felt a lump in my throat. “Thanks. It’s so hard watching him waste away. Part of me just wants him to be at peace because he’s suffering so much, but then I feel terrible for feeling that way.”

He put his arm around me and pulled me into a one armed hug. “It’s not terrible, Everleigh. I know how you feel, believe me. My dad died of lung cancer seven years ago right after we really hit it big. It was the most god awful feeling

in the world watching him go through that. My mom was so devastated over losing him that she overdosed on pain killers two years later. It just about destroyed me. I really thought our band was going to fall apart because I was so wrecked,” he admitted.

“Oh God, Ryder...I had no idea.”

“Yeah, well...” he said, trailing off for a moment, my heart constricting tightly in my chest. “I’m lucky that Beau, Kris, and Jude were there to get me through it. They all loved my parents too and it hit them just as hard. They weren’t as lucky as I was to have awesome parents and my mom and dad treated the guys like they were their own.”

“Your parents sound like they

were great people.”

“They really were. Dad was so proud of us when we signed our record deal. He kept a scrap book of all of the articles that mentioned us. He was a great guy.”

“He sounds like it.”

He took a deep breath and blew air through his lips. Giving his head a little shake, he said, “So, tell me about your dad. What’s he like?”

I smiled a pained smile. “Well, he’s a Vietnam vet and he and Deuce served together. He met my mom when he came back to the US and they were married for seventeen years before they had me. They tried to have kids for years and never thought they would be able to,

but then I came along,” I said, smiling. “Daddy said that he and mom were so ecstatic when they found out they were having me, and that she was sure I would be a girl. They knew there would be risk having a child at such an advanced maternal age but she didn’t care. They felt like it was fate. Everything had gone just fine up until she went into labor, and then things just went south from there. She ended up trying to have me naturally but there were complications and she bled out after I was born. To this day I feel guilty. My mother literally gave up her life to have me and I just feel like I’m the reason Daddy lost the woman he loved,” I said. I had never admitted that out loud before and it hurt to say it.

“Oh, Jesus, Everleigh, that wasn’t your fault. You can’t think like that.”

I shrugged. “I can’t help it. I seriously sit and think sometimes that I shouldn’t be here. My mother died to bring me into the world, my father is dying in front of my eyes, and the first guy I ever fell in love with used me just to get laid and then dumped me the next day when I told him I wanted to slow things down,” I said, and I started to cry again. I don’t know what it was about Ryder that made me feel calm enough to break down in front of him and admit all my lifelong fears and regrets, but he was like a balm to my broken soul.

“God, it’s taking everything in me to not track down this Scott asshole and

beat the fuck out of him,” Ryder said.

“What all did he say to you?”

I shook my head. “Not now, okay? Maybe later. Can we talk about something else?”

“Everleigh...” he said, half pleading and half angry.

“Ryder, please,” I begged.

He sighed and nodded his head.

“Okay. Like what?”

I thought for a moment and then bit my lip. Looking at him, I said, “Will you sing me a song?”

Chapter 5

Ryder

“A song? Really?” I asked, grinning.

“Yeah, why not? I noticed you have your guitar case over there. Sing me a song. Unless you’re scared,” she said, smiling that million dollar smile.

“I’m not scared of a damn thing, baby,” I said, and I got up off the bed and grabbed my guitar out of the case. “Any requests?” I asked, sitting on the chair across from her.

“Surprise me,” she said, and she

pulled her legs up and sat on the edge of the bed crisscrossed style.

I tried to think back to the night we met in Cincinnati and I remembered she was wearing a Guns N' Roses tee shirt. I figured that was a good place to start, so I set my guitar on my lap and began to play the first few chords of "Don't Cry." I didn't look away from her beautiful gaze the whole time I sang the song as the words poured out of me.

Our eyes were locked the whole time I sang to her. I hated to admit it to myself, but I'd never been more nervous to sing in front of anyone in my life until this moment. I was afraid to look away from her beautiful brown eyes because I thought I might stumble and forget the

words. Once the song was over, I put the guitar down and looked back up at her. Her eyes were welling with tears again, and I chuckled. “The song is telling you *not* to cry, Everleigh,” I joked, trying to play off my nerves.

“Ryder, that was...magic. You have a *very* beautiful voice,” she said almost breathlessly.

I felt redness rising in my cheeks and I looked down at my guitar and mindlessly strummed a few chords. “Thanks.” I’d been complimented before, but nothing meant more to me than what she just said.

“If you can sing like that, why in the world do you growl in most of your songs?” she asked innocently.

I laughed. “That’s the kind of music I like to sing and that’s what our fans want to hear. Besides, I don’t growl all the time, you know.”

“Well, it sounded like it to me at the show. No offense,” she said, and I smiled. “Apparently I was so out of my element there that I didn’t remember.”

“It’s okay, Everleigh. Our music isn’t everyone’s taste, but we still do okay.”

“Oh, I know. Danni’s been a freak for you guys for a *long* time, and I’ll admit, she had me banging my head a little bit to that song, oh what was it... ‘Self Destruction’?”

I nodded and smiled. “See? You’re not that out of touch.”

“Well, I liked the beat of it. Your drummer is really talented.”

“Yeah, that’s Kris. He’s a bad ass drummer and a really good guy.”

She smiled. “So tell me more about them. How did you guys all meet?”

Before I could answer, my cell pinged, letting me know I had a text message. I checked it and saw that it was from Jude. The guys were all here with John and our security team. I felt a stab of disappointment because my time with Everleigh here in the hotel room was about to end. I had been having a great time getting to know her and I didn’t want it to be over yet. “That’s Jude. Everyone’s here. They are in the lobby

checking in right now.”

“Oh. Well, great. It will be nice seeing them again,” Everleigh said sincerely.

“You mean you aren’t ready to get the hell out of here?” I asked, grinning at her.

She smiled sweetly at me. “Well, I am anxious to get home to Daddy, but as much as it pains me to admit it, I’ve been having a good time with you this evening, Ryder.”

I smiled. “See? I’m not such a bad guy, right?”

“I guess not,” she said, surprised. I put my guitar back in the case and quickly walked over to the bed. I sat down next to her and moved my face

close to hers. “What are you doing?” she asked, surprised.

“Enjoying the last few seconds I have you alone before the wolves descend,” I said, and I leaned in and kissed her, making her gasp loudly. Making the most of our moment together, I traced my tongue along her bottom lip and she opened her mouth to me. We made out like a couple of horny teenagers for about two minutes before I heard a knock on the door of my room. Groaning, I pulled away and shifted around to make my hard on go away. Everleigh fanned her face with her hand, her cheeks a bright pink. “Well, let’s get this over with,” I said.

I got up and walked to the door.

After I checked that it was the guys through the peep hole, I opened the door and let them in. “Hey guys,” I said. “You guys don’t think you’re staying in here, do you?” Jude, Kris, Beau, Danni, John, and three bodyguards dressed in black suits walked into my small room. There was a whole lot of man crammed into the hotel room.

“No, we rented out the whole top floor,” Jude said, plopping down on the bed next to Everleigh. He threw his arm around her and pulled her into a hug. “Hey, how are you doing?” he said, winking at her. “We’ve heard about absolutely *nothing* but you for the past three months.”

She shrugged out of his grasp and

stood up. “Nice to see you again, Jude,” she said, walking over to me. I wrapped my arm around her shoulders and flipped him off.

“So, how bad is it out there?” I asked John.

“Not bad. Most of the reporters seemed to have gotten the pictures they wanted when the rest of the band showed up. Some of them might try and follow Miss Stone back to her house, but we rented a black SUV to take her back home and two of our guys are going stay parked outside until this thing dies down,” he said. “Nice to see you,” he said to Everleigh, and she nodded. “I’m John.”

She offered her hand to him and he

took it, giving it a shake. “Yeah, I remember you from the show. It’s nice to see you again.” The smile on her face was so sweet and genuine, and for the first time since I’d known him, I saw John crack a smile. It seemed that I was not the only one to fall for Everleigh’s innocent charms.

“Well, I want us to stay here for a bit until I make sure it’s safe for her to go home and then she needs to get back. Her dad needs her home,” I said, squeezing her into me.

“Well, why don’t we all get dinner then? I’m starving,” Jude said.

“Dude, we just stopped at a Burger King an hour ago,” Kris said.

“Hey, I’m a big boy. I need

sustenance,” he replied. “Everleigh, what’s good to eat around here?”

She shrugged. “Mostly fast food places close to here. If it’s past ten most of the good restaurants are closed.”

“I thought I saw a Pizza Hut before we pulled in,” Beau said, and I realized at that moment that he was holding Danni’s hand. I would say the guy worked quickly but I didn’t really have room to talk. I’d been in town one day and had already practically dry humped Everleigh and had gotten my hands up her shirt. I definitely wasn’t complaining...her full breasts felt *incredible* in my hands.

“Hey, if you want pizza, I have a better place for you guys to try. If you

don't mind," Everleigh said.

"Oh no, it's fine. You know the area better than we do," I said. "What are you thinking?"

She looked at Danni. "Pizza King?" Danni asked, smiling.

"Pizza King," Everleigh said.

"I'll call them. What does everyone like?" Danni asked, walking away from Beau and grabbing the pen and paper from the night stand. Everyone told her what they wanted, and I just mumbled that I didn't care. Living on the road as long as I have, I would eat just about anything within reason.

After we were all stuffed and full of some of the best pizza I'd eaten in a long time (seriously, that shit was incredible), it was time for John and the guys to take Everleigh and Danni back home. I almost felt like a needy girl because I didn't want her to go yet. Ever since everyone had shown up, I hadn't really gotten to talk to her much. She'd spent most of the evening talking to Danni. I'd had a great day with her and I was bummed that it was going to end.

John had just left with the rest of the men in suits to do a security check of the floor when Everleigh stood up from her chair next to Danni. I may not have gotten to have much a conversation with her in the past hour, I would be damned

if I didn't get some kind of goodbye... hopefully with some tongue. "So, this evening turned out to be pretty good, huh?" I asked her, lacing my fingers through hers.

She shivered slightly as our fingers tangled together. "As much as I hate to admit it, I had fun with you guys tonight," she said. "Your band mates are pretty cool. Even Jude."

I grinned. "Wow, that's a compliment. He's usually a pain in the ass but I love him like a brother."

"Yeah, he's really nice." She sighed and gave my hand a squeeze. "Listen, thanks for taking my mind off of everything for one night."

"My pleasure, Everleigh. Listen, I

am going to be in town for at least a week. Can I see you tomorrow?”

She smiled her beautiful smile at me. “S-sure. I have to work in the morning, and then I’ll need to check in on my dad, but after that I’m free.”

“Great. I thought maybe you could show me around the city.”

“There’s not much to do here but eat and see a movie,” she said, chuckling to herself.

“A movie? Wow, I haven’t been inside a movie theater in forever,” I said.

“Really?” she asked, looking surprised.

“Well, there’s not a lot of opportunity for the lead singer of a

famous rock band to sneak away and do something by himself. Today should be proof of that,” I said, and she nodded.

“Well, maybe we can do some kind of ‘cloak and dagger’ thing and sneak away to the movie theater,” she suggested, and I smiled.

“Being with you inside a dark movie theater for two hours? That sounds like fun, but it’s probably going to be just about impossible to do that, what with cameras around.”

“True,” she said, biting on her bottom lip and frowning.

“Listen, I don’t want to push my luck, but what about if I just came and hung out at your place?”

“M-my house?” she asked,

nervously.

“What’s the matter? Do you not want me to come?”

“Oh, no, it’s not that. It’s just that my house is kind of small and plain and...”

“Everleigh, you don’t have to be embarrassed about where you live. I’d love to see where you grew up.”

She gave me a small smile, but I could tell she was still nervous. “Well, I guess we can try that. If you like eighties movies, my dad’s actually a movie buff and we have a pretty big collection. If there is a movie you want to see, chances are we have it.”

I smiled at her. “Okay then, it’s a date,” I said, grinning.

She sighed and rolled her eyes. “I guess it is,” she said. “Just what I’ve always dreamed of.”

“What?” I asked.

“Being on a date at my house with my dad there.”

I chuckled. “I’m sure it will be fine,” I said, feeling confident.

“Hey, don’t let the fact that Daddy’s sick fool you. He’s pretty protective of his little girl.”

“I thought you said he was pushing you to get a life?”

“He is, but he’s also a man and knows that most men want one thing from women.”

“Well, I could lie and say I don’t want that one thing from you but I do. I

want all of it,” I said, and I felt relief when she smiled.

“Well, you’re not getting it yet, rock star,” Everleigh said bravely, but I knew she was nervous.

“Yet? That means I’ll get it eventually, and I have no problem waiting. I have all the time in the world. Hell, I’ve been in dry dock for the past three months and I’m doing just fine. Well, kind of,” I laughed, and shifted around to make my semi go down.

Everleigh looked at me with wide, surprised eyes. “Y-you have? Really? Wow,” she muttered, looking impressed.

“Well, geez, it’s not like I won an award or anything, relax. It’s just that no one really interested me after I met you.

You've wrecked me, girl," I said.

"I just can't believe you held off that long."

"Well, porn helps," I said, and she giggled.

"Ugh, you're a freak," she said.

"Oh you have no idea," I replied, and at that moment John came back into my room giving us the 'all clear'.

"Well, guess that's my cue to head home. Thanks again for a good time," she said. She reached into her pocket and pulled something out. In her hand was the money I gave her earlier.

I shook my head. "I'm not taking it back, Everleigh."

Her brow furrowed for a moment and she sighed. She moved her hand

quickly before I could think she reached her hand into my front pocket and tucked the money inside. I could feel the warmth of her hand on my leg through the thin material of my pocket, and my dick twitched in response. “Yes you are, Ryder.” She pulled her hand out of my pocket and wrapped her arm around my waist in a quick hug. “Thanks again.”

As she broke away from me and was walking toward the door, I laughed at her. “You really think it’s that easy to get your way with me, Everleigh?”

She turned and flashed a bright smile at me. “I know it is.”

I shook my head and followed her to the door. While her back was turned, I pulled the money back out of my pocket

and folded it into my hand so she couldn't see. "Whatever you say. Call me tomorrow?"

Everleigh nodded. "As soon as I am off work."

"Can I get a hug before you go?"

Grinning, she said, "Sure." I held my arms out to her and she came willingly into them. I took advantage of having her close and I leaned in and smelled her hair. It smelled like vanilla and some kind of flower. It was intoxicatingly sexy. My hands roamed down her back and rested on her bottom. I quickly slid the money into her back pocket as my other hand caressed her bottom. "Hey!" she said, pulling back.

I flashed her a sexy smile. "Hey, I

know you want to slow things down, but I have to get my fun somehow, right? Do I get a kiss too?”

She shook her head. “Not now, you’ve been a bad boy.”

I groaned. “Aw, come on. Just one because you think I’m hot.”

She bit her lip to keep from smiling and said, “Fine.” She stood on her tip toes and lightly pecked my cheek. “There.”

I grinned. “I guess that will have to do. I’ll talk to you tomorrow,” I said, and I lightly touched the tip of her nose with my finger.

“Tomorrow. Good night, Ryder,” she said, and she and Danni walked out of the room with John and the security

team. As soon as they disappeared in the elevators, I walked back into my room and closed the door. I turned around and Jude had a knowing smile on his face.

“What is it? Just spit it out dickhead,” I said, picking up an empty pizza box.

“You are in town one damn day and that chick went from hating you to staring at you with goo goo eyes all night. You lay it on her already, man?” he asked.

I shook my head. “No, and I’m not going to push it.”

Jude barked out a laugh. “What the hell, man? You haven’t gone completely fucking soft, have you?”

“Screw you, man. I just like her

and I don't want to fuck it up already. She's pretty insecure but she's giving me a chance and I'm going to take it. If that means I have to start acting like a giant pussy then that's what I'll do."

"Well, I'm happy for you, bro. We haven't seen you smile like this since before Alan died," Kris said.

Thankfully, he didn't linger on my father's death any longer and said, "Who knows? Maybe you and Everleigh will be as happy as Jessie and I are."

"One can hope, brother," I said, giving him a nudge as I walked past him to the trash can. After the guys (with the exception of Jude, the lazy bastard) helped me clean up the hotel room, they all left to go to their rooms and get some

rest. After I'd been alone in my room for about ten minutes, John called me to let me know that Everleigh and Danni had made it home okay. I sent Everleigh a text message wishing her goodnight before I shut out the lights. I fell into a deep sleep, dreaming again of Everleigh writhing in pleasure beneath me in my bed.

Chapter 6

Everleigh

“Good night John, and thanks for the lift,” I said, unlocking the front door.

“It was my pleasure, Everleigh. My guys Kip and Nate will be here all night watching the house. If you need anything you let one of them know.”

I nodded. “I will. Thanks again,” I said, and with a wave Danni and I entered the house.

As soon as I shut the door and locked it, I heard a weak voice call out, “Evie girl, is that you?”

Danni gave my hand a gentle squeeze and said, "I'll be in your room when you're done." She walked down the hall and went into my bedroom as I followed my dad's voice into his room. When I got there, I choked back a sob and swallowed a lump in my throat at the sight of him. He just looked so weary lying in his bed.

"Hey, Daddy. I'm home," I said, and I walked over and crawled up beside him on his bed. I planted a kiss on his cheek and he smiled.

"You were out for a while tonight, weren't you? Did you go on a date finally?" he asked, smiling.

I shook my head. "No, I didn't. Well, not really."

“Not really? What does that mean? Either you did or you didn’t,” he said.

“It wasn’t a date, but I did hang out with a guy tonight,” I admitted.

He chuckled. “You mean that rocker boy all of the news outlets are talking about?”

My heart dropped. “You know about that already? Oh damn it, I wanted to tell you first!” I said.

“Why do you seem worried? Evie, this is good. I have been worried about you finding a man to make you happy and you not only find one, but he’s a musician at that,” Dad said, his eyes twinkling.

“That’s just it, Daddy, he’s not my man. Danni and I met him when we went

back stage at that concert in Cincinnati a few months ago, and I never heard from him again until he showed up in town today. He's just my friend right now."

"Well, he looked like more than a friend in that picture I saw of you two kissing at Deuce's," he said, and embarrassment flowed through me.

I sighed. "That was a misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding? How does a misunderstanding lead to a public kiss with a rock star?" he asked, smiling.

"There were some fans of his that were being rude to me when I asked them to take their seats and leave him alone. He jumped up and defended me. He told them I was his girlfriend and

when they didn't believe him he kissed me to try and prove it. We are not a couple at all. He just wanted them to leave me alone.”

Dad smiled weakly. “Well, he sounds like good people to me, Evie. How did you end up seeing him again tonight anyway?” I sighed and told him about the large tip he left me and that I was just taking it back to him. “Well, Evie, I know why you didn't want to keep it, but it's nice that he wanted to help you out. You work too hard taking care of everyone else that you should do something nice for yourself.” Before I could say anything more, he changed the subject and said, “You should bring Mr. Rocker over here before he leaves

town.”

I smiled at him. “Funny you should mention that because he is actually coming over tomorrow.”

My dad’s face lit up. “He is?”

“Yeah. He asked me to show him around town but that would be kind of hard to do with the cameras waiting to catch us out so he asked if he could come over here. He’s a huge fan of eighties movies, so you and he should get along well.”

Dad grinned. “Sounds like my kind of man. So, what’s his name again? I forget.”

“It’s Ryder Matthews,” I said, and I couldn’t hide the smile that escaped my lips. I looked at Dad and he was smiling

at me. “What is it?”

“Nothing. I already knew his name but I just wanted to see the look on your face when you said it. You really like him, don’t you?”

I playfully nudged him. “He seems nice but I don’t know him well enough yet. Don’t forget he’s a celebrity and he has probably been around the block more than a few times.”

“Well, you never know unless you take a chance, Evie girl.”

I cocked an eyebrow at him. “So, you have no problem if your daughter dates a man that has probably slept with hundreds of women around the world? How do you know he won’t dump me once he gets what he wants?” I asked,

voicing my fears.

Dad placed a weak hand on mind and said softly, “He’s not Scott, Evie. Give him a chance to prove the man he is and then make your choice.”

I frowned and leaned in and kissed him on his thin cheek. “I’ll try, Dad. I’m going to let you get some sleep, okay?”

“All right, sweetheart. I love you,” he said. “Think about what I said.”

“I will, I promise. I love you too, Daddy.” I kissed his cheek once more before I lifted off the bed and left his room. I went down the hall to my bedroom and Danni was already on my bed in her pink pajamas and was holding a bowl full of popcorn. “Get in your pj’s girl because we have some talking to

do,” she said, smiling.

I kicked off my shoes and opened my pajama drawer. As I looked for a pair of bottoms, I said, “Yes we do, like how you have been Facebook friends with Beau Cavanaugh for nearly three months and didn’t tell me.”

She sighed and pulled her long blonde hair up and tied it with a hair tie. “I’m sorry, Ev, but I just didn’t want to get too excited about it yet. Please don’t hate me.”

I pulled out a pair of pink shorts with black skull and crossbones on them and a black camisole. “I don’t hate you but I wish you could have told me about it. Why didn’t you?” I asked, walking into my adjoining bathroom and slipping

out of my hoodie.

“Well, I didn’t think anything was going to come of it. We’ve just been chatting back and forth for a few months and it was all just innocent flirting until a few days ago. He said he wanted to see me again,” she said.

“Well then I guess its lucky Ryder came to town, huh? Beau was sure to follow at some point,” I said. “So, what’s up now? Are you two, like, dating or something?” I slipped quickly into my pajamas and threw my dirty clothes into the hamper.

I walked back out of the bathroom and she was shaking her head. “No. I am trying to be realistic about this and just have fun. If something becomes of it,

then that's great but if it doesn't, I'm not going to stress out. Okay," she said, shaking her head, "enough about me. I want to talk all about you and Ryder and the fact that he came to town for you! This is so exciting, tell me everything!" she said, excitedly. I climbed onto my bed next to her and we spent the rest of the evening going over my whole crazy day with Ryder Matthews.

My bedroom door burst open and I sat up completely startled. I looked over and searched for Danni but she was gone. Where could she have gone to? I squinted my eyes to see who was

standing at my door but I already knew who it was...I could smell his musk from across the room. "Ryder?" I asked.

He closed the distance between us in two long steps and he knelt down at my side. "I couldn't sleep. I can't spend one more night without feeling your bare skin on mine Everleigh. I have to have you," he said. Before I could even draw a breath his lips were crushing onto mine. I whimpered at the taste of him. My body couldn't stop the intense want I felt and I didn't protest when Ryder threw my blankets back and found the waist of my shorts, stripping them off and taking my panties with them. He gently grabbed my wrist, pulling me up off the pillows so he could pull my

camisole over my head. As quickly as he'd undressed me, his shirt was pulled over his head and tossed to the floor. His pants and boxers soon joined the growing pile of clothes on the floor and before I could register what was happening he climbed on top of me. I shivered from the feel of our skin pressed together and instinctively parted my legs and he growled as he ground his bulging erection into me. My body was on fire from his touch and his kiss that I was already on the verge of losing control.

“God I can't wait to be inside you,” he said, and our eyes locked for a split second before his hand moved down to his length and I felt him sliding

into me. I gasped loudly and bit down on his shoulder to stifle my cries...I didn't want to wake anyone. He moved so fast and his sexual torture was so relentless that he had my body in tatters in a matter of minutes. Before I could catch my breath, I heard him groan loudly and he stilled inside me. After pausing to catch his breath, he abruptly pulled out and climbed off of me without so much as a word.

I sat up, confused. "Ryder?" I asked.

He quickly got dressed and after he finished buckling his belt, he turned and winked at me. "If I can't have you, I'll make sure no one will ever want you, baby," he said, and turned and left. I

sat there in my bed, shocked. If he couldn't have me? He called me 'baby'? Sitting alone in my bed having just been taken by Ryder and left out in the cold again, a wave of anxiety crushed me and I felt like I would break...

“Hey, Ev, wake up! Your phone is buzzing like crazy,” Danni said, giving me a nudge. I opened my eyes and took a few deep breaths...my heart was pounding out of my chest. I realized my body was covered in a cold sweat. I looked around my room for Ryder and after a few moments I realized that it had been a dream. I let out a long breath and

shivered. My dream had pierced deep down into my soul. Ryder came into my bedroom and took what he wanted from me and then threatened me like Scott had done...the thought made my stomach turn. I know it wasn't real but I felt like my subconscious was trying to warn me that Ryder was just like I thought he'd be. I was even more shaken by the fact that I had been seriously turned on...I could feel the effects of what my mind dreamed he could do to me and my heart. I was on the verge of a full blown panic attack when Danni nudged me again.

“Seriously, are you going to answer your phone?”

“Y-yeah, sorry,” I mumbled and I picked up my phone from the bedside

table. No one had called but I did have several text messages. The last one was from Ryder sent five seconds ago. I groaned...what time was it? My eyes flicked to the clock on the wall and it said six thirty seven. Why the hell wasn't he sleeping like a normal person at this hour? Still shaken from my dream, I read his message:

Ryder: Good morning, gorgeous.

I sat up and ran a shaking hand through my hair. I was debating on whether or not to text him back when Danni said, "Who was that?"

"Who do you think?" I said.

"Really? He's texting you

already? You must have been on his mind all night,” she said, smiling.

I rolled my eyes and shivered. Oh, he was on my mind too...I didn't tell her that. I needed to work this dream out for myself before I talked to anyone about it. I leaned against my headboard and typed back:

E: Morning. Shouldn't you be sleeping? I was, haha

I was about to put my phone back down when I heard my phone ping. Danni squealed and I couldn't hide my excitement as I opened another message from Ryder.

R: didn't mean to wake u, :) I was already up...you've been on my mind all night

I involuntarily shivered. I childishly wanted to be mad at him for the dream (even though it wasn't his fault), but I couldn't help but smile like a teenager.

E: well, I hope I kept your mind entertained

R: my mind, my hands, my "gun", ;)

E: ur "gun"? wow...

R: well, I am a man, Everleigh

E: believe me, I noticed that yesterday when ur "gun" was pressed

up against me

R: didn't hear u complain

E: no u didn't, ;)

R: so we still on for today or did u already talk yourself out of it

E: we're still on. my dad actually wants to meet u

R: really? Introducing me to ur dad already...love it

E: don't get ur hopes up.

Remember I'm still his little girl

R: I'm not worried. Can't wait to meet him

E: u sound pretty sure of urself, rock star

R: u don't know the half of it.

Hope u will soon, ;)

E: ;) okay well I have to get

ready for work

R: have a good day gorgeous.

Call me when u r off

E: I will, promise. I'm off at two

R: c u then, ;)

E: yes u will

After waiting for a few minutes for him to message me back, there was no reply so I took that as my sign to get up and get ready for my day. I still had another hour before I had to get up, but after the dream and Ryder's playful and flirty messages there was no way I was going to be able to sleep now.

"So, what did he say?" Danni asked, yawning.

"Nothing much, just flirty stuff," I

said. “He said he’d been thinking about me all night long.”

Danni squealed like a little girl. “Of course he did, how could he not? You are a total babe, Ev.”

I rolled my eyes. “Yeah, okay, sure I am.” I grabbed my work uniform and headed toward the bathroom.

“Listen, I’m going to jump in the shower so just get some rest until I get out, okay? I have a feeling we are going to be slammed at Deuce’s today.”

She sighed and mumbled to herself as she lay her head back down on the pillow. I walked into my bathroom and turned on the hot water. As soon as it was ready, I climbed into the shower and let the warm water soothe me. I

could still feel Ryder's hands on me, his lips as they captured and consumed mine, the heat of his skin on mine from the dream. Of course this caused my mind to start wandering I really hadn't had a free minute to myself to think over everything that had happened in the past twenty four hours and it was all crashing down on me like a ton of bricks.

Ryder Matthews showed up in town...for me. He came here and risked being humiliated because he wanted to see me. It couldn't be all about sex with him because he could have that any time he wanted with women that are ten times more beautiful than I am. Instead he abstained from having sex ever since we met and had driven all the way to

Muncie just to have a chance at something with me. Even though I had some serious trust issues, for a man to do all of this for someone like me had to mean he was different, right? Ryder had asked me last night for just one chance to prove himself, so despite my fears I decided then to give it to him.

After Danni and I were both dressed and ready for work, I gathered up my dirty clothes from my hamper and took them to the laundry room. As I was putting the clothes into the washing machine, I noticed something fall out of the back pocket of my jeans I had worn

yesterday. I looked down and cursed out loud when I saw the money that I thought I had given back to Ryder yesterday. I groaned and picked it up, placing it in my pocket. What did I have to do to get this man to understand I didn't want his money?

I put the rest of the clothes in the washer and started the load. Once I was finished, I kissed my dad on the cheek and told him goodbye for the day. Danni and I walked to the door and I yelled goodbye to Trish as we walked outside. Immediately I had to shield my eyes because reporters were furiously taking pictures with their cameras from about fifteen feet away. The flash on their cameras was almost blinding. I

registered in my haste to get to my car that I was being led to a black SUV by John. He must have stayed here all night, and I immediately felt terrible for not inviting him inside. I thought he might have gone back to the hotel but I guess he didn't.

Once Danni and I were in the SUV, John climbed behind the driver's seat and started the engine. "Good morning ladies," he said in his deep voice. "I hope you slept well."

"We did, thanks," I said to him. "Hey, I'm sorry you had to stay out here all night. I should have invited you guys in."

John chuckled and smiled. "No worries miss. It's part of my job."

“Sleeping outside a girl’s house that your boss happens to want to bang?” Danni asked, laughing. I rolled my eyes and laughed too.

He laughed. “If that’s what Ryder wants me to do, then yes.”

“Well, still, I don’t like it. If you have to be here again tonight you are coming inside and sleeping on the pull out couch, got it?” I said. “Ryder will just have to be mad at me.”

I saw him smiling in the rearview mirror. “Got it, miss.”

“Can I at least buy you a cup of coffee on the way to the diner as a thank you for taking care of us last night?” I asked.

“Oh, that’s not necessary,” he

said.

“Really, it’s my pleasure. Besides, coffee’s on Ryder this morning,” I said, holding out the money he gave me yesterday. “Order whatever you want.”

I saw John trying to suppress another smile. “Yes ma’am. Let me punch in the nearest Starbucks in the GPS-”

“You don’t need to, I’ll tell you where to go,” I said, and we pulled out of my driveway and onto the road.

After we stopped and got coffee, John dropped me and Danni off at Deuce’s, telling us he would be back to get us at two o’clock. There were a few people with cameras there too so he

thankfully escorted us to the door. Once we were inside, Deuce was putting on his apron and gave Danni and me a smile. “Good morning girls,” he said.

“Morning Deuce,” I said, hanging my bag on the hook by the door.

“How was your night last night, Miss Everleigh?” he asked me, smiling.

“Probably not as adventurous as you might think, big guy,” I said, tying my apron on. “I don’t want to talk about it anyway. We are probably going to have a busy day today because of all the damn cameras.”

“You are right about that. Okay everyone, gather around,” Deuce called out, and me, Danni, and the other waitresses and cooks came walking out

and we joined in a circle. I felt everyone's eyes on me and I was beginning to get uncomfortable. "We all know that today will more than likely be a busy day, given that we have a celebrity in town that is linked to one of our girls," he said, giving me a nudge. "However, this is a good publicity opportunity for the diner and I want you all on your best behavior, understood? I don't want anyone talking to Everleigh or Danni about all of this and I don't want anyone talking about this band all day long. It's nice that they came here, but remember that we are a diner and we need to focus on our customers, not who one of our waitresses may be dating, you got it?"

Everyone grumbled in agreement, and as I looked up I could see Leslie Anderson staring at me. She was one of the waitresses here and always seemed to be in some imaginary competition with me. Now that the focus was on me because of Ryder being in town, I could tell she was seething. I blinked a few times and sighed, ready to start the day.

After a very exhausting shift, it was finally two o'clock and I was beyond ready to get out of here. Just like I thought, the diner was packed out today with people wanting to get a glimpse of Ryder Matthews' new love interest. Half

of the people that came in just wanted to eat at the diner where a famous rocker had been just a day ago, and the other half were fans of Bad Blooded Rebel. They either wanted to congratulate me on snagging one of music's most eligible bachelors or to silently glare at me with jealousy. I didn't let it get to me today because despite it being a hectic day, I made a small fortune in tips.

As I walked to the back to clock out and get my things, I was tired and worn out but floating on a cloud knowing I had made a nice chunk of money to put in the bank. I stepped out back while Danni was finishing up and pulled out my cell phone. I knew that John was picking us up but I promised Ryder I'd

text him once I was off work. I clicked on the screen on my phone and there was already a message from Ryder. I couldn't hide my smile as I opened it.

R: hope u had a good day...I'm guessing u were a little busy

E: wow, u must be psychic, how did u know?

R: look up from ur phone and find out, gorgeous

At that moment, my head snapped up and I looked around the corner of the building. My heart skipped a beat when I saw Ryder pressed up against the side of the black SUV holding a beautiful

bouquet of white calla lilies. He was wearing dark wash faded jeans, a tight white KISS tee shirt, and he surprisingly had his hair messy and slightly flipped up in the front instead of his usually faux hawk. He looked mouth watering. I broke into a smile as he walked toward me with John in tow. “Hey there,” he said, and once he reached me he leaned in and kissed my cheek. My breath caught...God he smelled incredible.

“Hey yourself,” I said. I looked at the flowers and smiled. “It was nice of you buy flowers for John.”

He flashed a sexy smile at me. “Lilies really aren’t his favorite,” he joked. “For you, gorgeous.”

My cheeks felt hot. “These are

beautiful, Ryder. Thank you,” I said, and I leaned in and kissed his cheek. I leaned in and inhaled the scent of the flowers and I moaned. “Where did you find fresh lilies like this?”

“I don’t know how well you know your town, Everleigh, but there are a few flower shops around here,” he laughed. “Beau thought you would like roses but I took a chance that you weren’t a rose girl.”

“You would be correct on that,” I said. “Roses are beautiful, but I’m a total sucker for calla lilies.”

“Glad I took a chance then,” he said, smiling.

“So am I,” I replied.

He wrapped an arm around my

waist and pulled me into his body. He was hard and lean and felt so good against me. A memory from my dream suddenly flashed in my mind and I shivered. “What’s wrong? Are you cold?” he asked.

“N-no, I was just thinking about something.”

He cocked an eyebrow. “Really? Like what?”

I sighed. I didn’t want to go into my dream right now, but I didn’t want to lie to him. I decided to go with the truth...at least half of it. “I kind of had a dream about you last night.”

Both of his eyebrows shot up. “You did?” he asked. “Now you have to tell me about it.”

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed movement and when I turned my head I saw Danni rushing toward us. “Hey guys, we may want to get a move on. I heard a customer inside say she saw Ryder out here with you and I’m guessing people will start swarming back here any second with cell phones in hand.”

Ryder groaned and released me. We all quickly got into the SUV and John climbed into the driver’s seat. Just as he started the engine and locked the doors, about twenty people came running toward the car. Thankfully, John pulled away and out into traffic in plenty of time before anyone started smacking or rocking the car. I looked at Ryder and he

looked frustrated. “Is it like this all the time?” I asked.

He nodded. “Pretty much. I am used to it, but I know you aren’t.”

“Ryder, it’s okay. It’s all part of the life, right?” I asked.

He smiled at me and took my hand. I was sitting across from him and he pulled my arm and guided me beside him. “Right. At least there weren’t reporters this time though, those bastards are worse than excited fans. Okay, enough about camera whores. How was your day at work?” he said, nuzzling his nose into my hair. I suddenly felt embarrassed...I must smell like greasy hamburgers.

“Uh, it was good. I made pretty

good tips today,” I said proudly.

“Awesome. What about you Danni?” he asked, his lips leaving kisses against my hair. I shivered.

Danni smiled at both of us. “It was good. I made pretty good tips today, but not as good as Everleigh. Everyone just wanted to get a peek at Ryder’s new girlfriend,” she said.

“Danni, I’m not his girlfriend,” I said, frustrated. I swear I think I said that phrase a million times today.

“Not yet anyway,” he said, his fingers running up and down my arm. He moved his mouth from my hair down to my ear and my breath caught as I felt his hot tongue graze my ear.

Heat flushed my face. He was

trying to pull me into a full on make out session right in front of my friend. Danni laughed. “Okay, you two, I’m going to put my headphones in and text Beau. I’ll give you two a minute so you can suck face,” she laughed, and climbed in the back seat facing the rear window.

As soon as her headphones were in her ears and the music was blaring, Ryder grabbed my chin gently and turned my face to his. “You look really fucking hot in that apron, Everleigh,” he said, smiling.

“Ryder, don’t. I am not making out with you with my best friend in the car,” I breathed, trying my hardest to be tough. Feeling his warm, cinnamon breath on my lips was making it very hard to do

that.

“Hey, she’s got her back turned and her headphones in. We have a few minutes,” he murmured, a sexy grin on his face.

“I don’t know...” I said, my breathing increasing as he ran his fingers along my jaw line.

“Stop worrying about who might be watching and just go with it. In this moment, right now, do you want to kiss me?”

I nodded and breathlessly said, “Yes.”

“Good, because I’ve been dying to kiss these lips since last night,” he said, and before I took another ragged breath his lips found mine. I couldn’t stop the

moan that escaped me as his tongue slowly slid past my lips and touched mine. I heard him groan into my mouth and I was suddenly feeling damp in places I had forgotten existed until last night. Ryder had awakened feelings in me that I thought were long gone.

There was something different about this kiss. Of all the times we kissed yesterday they all felt either careful, like he was testing the waters, or hungry and filled with blinding passion. This kiss, however, had me balling my hands into fists to keep me from climbing on top of his lap and straddling him. He was slow and torturous with his kisses, like he was drawing out the experience. *This* was

romantic. Every time our tongues would touch, it felt like we were on the verge of something that I had never experienced before and it was amazing.

He knew what he was doing to me because my body was giving me away. I shifted in my seat, trying to get any kind of relief from the intense pleasure he was giving me just from a little kiss. His hand grazed down my arm and I gasped loudly when he moved his thumb past my nipple which was rock hard from what he was doing to me.

The world dissolved around us. Nothing mattered in that moment but Ryder and me. I wrapped my arm around his neck and held his head close to mine, not wanting to put any space between us.

The hand that was touching all over had roamed down to my leg and in one swift movement he tugged my leg up over his and hooked it around his hips. I was about to lie back on the seat and pull him on top of me when I felt a tap on my arm. Startled, I broke away from Ryder's lips and turned my head, my face flushed. "Yeah?" I asked.

I looked up and saw Danni smiling at me. "We're here."

I looked out the window. "We're at the hotel. I thought we were going to my house," I said.

"We are, but Beau asked me to drop Danni off here today. Jude and Kris sent some of the guys out last night to buy a Playstation 3 and some video

games and they've been playing on it all day. Beau got bored and wanted to hang with Danni," Ryder said.

"Okay, well, have fun, girl. Call me later, okay?" I said, giving her a quick hug.

"I will. You have fun with Ryder today. Try and make it back to your house with your clothes on," she joked, and I blushed.

"Okay, and you try to make it home tonight without getting knocked up," I said, and Ryder smiled.

"Shut up bitch," she laughed, and she quickly hopped out of the car and walked into the hotel.

Chapter 6

Ryder

As soon as Danni disappeared into the hotel, John started the SUV and we pulled out of the parking lot and began making our way to Everleigh's house. I pulled Everleigh tighter against me. "So, can we pick up where we left off?" I asked, grinning.

Her cheeks were still pink from blushing. "Actually, can we stop for a second? Maybe take a breather?"

I took a deep breath and choked down my groan of displeasure. "Sure," I

said, and I scooted back slightly.

“I don’t want you to be mad at me or anything, Ryder. It’s just that this is all happening so fast for me.”

For me it wasn’t happening fast enough. “I know, it’s okay,” I lied, wanting nothing more than to lay her down on the seats and roam my hands all over her body. “I’m not mad at you.”

“I hope not. I don’t want you to think I don’t love kissing you because I do. It’s just I’m not the type of girl that makes out with someone she barely knows and you are making me forget that. You make me want to leave that girl in the dust and that scares me,” she admitted.

I shifted around to try and make

my hand on go away, but it was no use. Hearing her admit that she wanted me so much that she would throw caution to the wind had me hard enough to drive nails into the wall. “You don’t have to be scared with me, Everleigh. The last thing I want to do is hurt you, but I understand why you are cautious. Only time will tell, I guess,” I said.

“Thanks for understanding. I just need a minute to catch my breath. We are going to my house and you are meeting my dad for the first time. I don’t you to meet him with my lip gloss on your mouth and my face all scratchy from your chin stubble,” she said, and I smiled at her.

“You’re right. I’ll be a good boy

from here on out,” I said, and I scooted a little further away from her and tried to think of anything I could do to make my dick soft. “Can I at least hold your hand?” I asked, grinning at her.

She smiled. “Of course you can,” she said, and I laced my fingers with hers. We rode the rest of the way to her house in silence and when we finally pulled into her driveway, I felt her tense up. Luckily, the reporters seemed to either have given up or Kip and Nate ran them off because they were nowhere in sight.

“Hey, Everleigh, are you all right? You seem nervous,” I asked. Hopefully she wasn’t embarrassed by her house because now that I looked at it out the

windows it was really a cute little place. It reminded me of my house when I was a kid.

“I’m fine,” she said quietly.

“No you aren’t. Tell me,” I said, squeezing her hand.

After a moment, she looked up into my eyes. “It’s just...I am nervous about you meeting my dad.”

“Why? Do you think he won’t like me or something?” I asked, and for the first time ever I actually worried about gaining someone’s approval. I didn’t know Everleigh too well yet, but I already knew that her dad was the most important person in the world to her. If her dad hated me, then Everleigh might push me away and I really felt like this

was the start of something good in my life.

She shook her head. “Oh no, my dad is going to love you. He used to play guitar in high school before he joined the army.”

“Then what is it?” I asked, tracing my thumb across the back of her delicate hand.

She bit her lip and sighed. “I am afraid of how you’ll feel when you meet him. I’m worried that you seeing him sick and helpless will drudge up all the pain of losing your own father to cancer,” she said, and my heart skipped a beat. “I just don’t want you to be sad.”

In that moment, I’m pretty sure I fell completely head over heels in love

with her. This girl is going through losing her dad and she's worried about me being upset by old memories? Wow. "I'm fine. Don't even worry about me. This is your dad, Everleigh, not mine. I lost my dad a long time ago, and even though it still hurts that he's not here, you are my concern right now. I'm just glad that I get to meet him while there's still time," I said, and I reached up and wiped a tear that had fallen down her cheek. "So, are you ready to do this?" I asked her.

She nodded her head and forced a smile. "Okay, let's do it." I opened the door and climbed out. I turned and then helped her out of the SUV and she took my hand and with a deep breath she led

me into her house. As soon as we walked in the front door, I immediately felt at ease. The house was so quaint and cozy and I instantly missed home.

“Trish? Are you here?”

A short lady who looked to be about in her forties with bright red hair came walking out from the back of the house. “Right here, Everleigh,” she said and when her eyes landed on me, she smiled. “Oh, well, I didn’t know you were bringing home company,” she said, grinning.

“Trish, this is my friend Ryder Matthews,” she said, squeezing my hand. “Ryder, this Trisha Cramer, my dad’s nurse.”

I placed my free hand in hers and

shook it gently. “It’s nice to meet you, Trish.”

Trisha smiled and looked at Everleigh before her eyes darted back to me. “Pleasure’s all mine, Ryder.”

“So, how is he doing?” Everleigh asked Trish.

“He’s doing good so far today. I just got him to eat a whole bowl of soup.”

Everleigh’s face lit up. “Really? Oh, that’s great!” she said happily. “Is he awake right now?”

She nodded. “He’s watching television in the den,” Trish said. “I’m going to start on dinner in here so you and your friend can visit with Max. It was nice meeting you, Ryder,” she said,

walking off toward the kitchen.

She turned to me and smiled. “So, are you ready to meet my first love?” she asked me, a twinkle in her eye.

I smiled and leaned in and kissed her nose. “Absolutely.” She winked at me and led me down the hall all the way to a room in the back of the house.

As soon as we walked in, I heard the sounds of the channels on the TV being changed quickly and a grumpy voice say, “Three hundred channels and not a God damned thing on.” I instantly smiled.

“Hey Daddy, what are you in here complaining about?” Everleigh asked, leading me over to a recliner. As soon as my eyes landed on Everleigh’s father,

my heart sank. He was so thin and pale...he looked just like my dad had about a week before he passed away.

“Just the fact that we pay out the ass for cable and there is always shit on the TV,” he said, smiling at her. His eyes flickered over to me and he smiled a smile so bright his face lit up. “Well, now who do we have here?”

Everleigh squeezed my hand and led me closer to his chair. “Daddy, this is my friend Ryder. I told you about him last night,” she said.

“Oh right, the rocker boy. Max Stone, nice to meet you son,” he said, weakly extending his hand to me.

I gently placed my hand in his and gave it a quick shake. “Nice to meet you

too, sir.”

Max looked at me and then at Everleigh. “Sir, huh? I like it. Why don’t you call me that, Evie girl?”

Everleigh smiled at him. “Because I don’t have to kiss your ass, old man. You already like me,” she said, and he laughed.

“Hell yes I do. So, tell me about yourself, young man. What has you chasing my Everleigh to town?” he asked, smiling at me.

“Honestly? How can I not? I mean look at her, she’s gorgeous,” I said, and he laughed.

“That she is,” he said, and Everleigh blushed.

“It’s not just that though. When we

met she saw through all my charm and fame and didn't give a damn who I was at all," I said. "No one's ever done that."

Max looked at Everleigh and smiled. "That's because my Evie's a good girl and I taught her right," he said. "I'm glad she has a boyfriend that seems to appreciate what a special woman she is."

Before I could answer, Everleigh interrupted. "Dad, Ryder isn't my boyfriend."

Max laughed. "Okay, honey, whatever you say. So, Ryder, tell me, what's it like touring all over with your band?" he asked, motioning to the couch next to his chair. I sat down and

Everleigh sat on my other side and we spent most of the afternoon talking about touring around, celebrities I know, and different kinds of music. Max was a cool guy and I could see why Everleigh loved him so much. He reminded me so much of my dad. The thought made me hurt deep inside because just even though I had just met him, I knew I would be reliving my dad's death all over again soon.

After chatting for a few hours and watching a couple of movies with Max and Everleigh, Max was finally asleep and I had Everleigh tucked under my arm

on her couch. She had left Max and me to chat and watch “The Karate Kid” while she went to take a shower and ever since she came back the smell of her vanilla shampoo was going right to both of my heads.

As the credits rolled on “The Gremlins”, she sat up and stretched. “Looks like Daddy’s down for the count,” she said, grinning. “I should probably get him to bed.”

“Let me help you, Everleigh,” I said, taking my arm from around her and standing up.

“Oh, no, I can have Trish help me, Ryder. It’s okay, really.”

“Don’t worry, it’s fine. I want to help, please?” I asked, putting my

bottom lip out.

She sighed. “I guess if you want to. I can take one side and you can take the other and we can help him into his bed.”

I shook my head and walked over to Max’s chair. I gently wrapped his frail arm around my neck and I lifted him off the chair with ease into my arms. Everleigh gasped and I turned around to her. “Which room is his?”

“First door on the right,” she said, almost a whisper. I nodded at her and carried him down the hall to his room. Once I was inside, I placed him onto his bed and pulled the covers around him. I didn’t realize Everleigh had followed me until I felt her pass me and go around

to the other side of the bed. She leaned in and kissed his cheek saying, “Good night Daddy,” she whispered, and she motioned for me to follow her out of the room. She took my hand and led me down the hall and for a moment I thought she was taking me back to the den, but she didn’t. She stopped outside a door at the end of the hall and turned the knob. She pulled me inside and as soon as I was in, she leaned against me, causing my body to close the door.

“What is this room, Everleigh?” I whispered, my voice cracking from her body being so close.

“It’s my room,” she said, and she brushed her hand past my wrist and she locked the door.

I swallowed hard and before I could think her mouth was on mine. Her tongue licked my bottom lip and my eyes crossed. As good as she tasted, for some reason I stopped her. “Hey, whoa, what are you doing?”

“Taking a chance,” she said, and her lips found mine again. I knew I should stop because I knew she didn’t really want to take things this far, but I think I blacked out for a moment when I felt her fingers graze my stomach and dip into my pants. I groaned and pulled her close to me, kissing her like I had wanted to all day. Hands were roaming and tugging and pulling at clothes and hair as she pulled me toward her bed. She turned around and with a hard shove

I fell back on her bed.

“Everleigh, wait...” I said. I knew if that we took this step now and I let this happen it would be the worst mistake I could make. I didn’t want the first time we slept together to be because we’d had a good day with her ailing father and she wanted to show her appreciation. I was about to sit up but before I could, she had stripped her shirt off and was standing before me in only a pair of jeans and a hot pink bra that barely contained her full breasts. She climbed on top of me and straddled my lap, my erection pressing right into her heat. She leaned into me and pressed her lips to mine again. I wrapped my arms around her small waist and roamed my

hands up her bare back. My fingers instinctively found the clasp on her bra and she nodded her head against my lips, telling me to take it off. In that moment, I knew I had to put the brakes on this whole thing. Once I saw her bare breasts I knew I wouldn't be able to stop myself. "Wait, stop," I said, forcefully sitting up.

"What's the matter, Ryder?" she panted.

"Everleigh, this has to stop. Now," I said, breathing heavy.

"Why? Don't you want me?" she asked, a quiver in her voice.

"Oh shit, babe, that's not it. I want you. I want you *bad*," I said. "But this isn't right. We can't do this tonight. Not like this."

“Not like what?” she asked.

“The first time we do this, I want it to be because you are actually ready for something real with me, not because I carried your dad to his room and put him to bed.”

“*That’s* why you think I want to do this?” she asked, her lip quivering.

“Ryder, what you did was wonderful, but that’s not why I want you.”

I stared pointedly into her whiskey colored eyes. “Yes it is, and you know it. You can’t lie to me, Everleigh.” She blinked a few times and the tears started rolling down her cheeks. “Sweetie, please don’t cry. I’m sorry.”

She shook her head climbed off of me. “No, you’re right. I just wanted to

do something for you since you were amazing today with my dad. Please don't think badly of me," she cried. "I just wanted to forget about everything for a minute."

I pulled her into my arms. "I don't think badly of you, sweetheart. I know how it feels to want to forget the bad things in your life. It's probably why I partied and slept around as much as I have for the past seven years. It's easier to numb the pain when there are things to distract your mind."

"God, I'm so embarrassed," she said, trying to cover her chest with her arms.

"Hey," I said, lifting her chin with my finger, "don't be embarrassed. You

are so beautiful, don't ever hide from me. I want to see you," I said, kissing her lips lightly. "Believe me, you taking your shirt off in front of me just now is nothing compared to what I have done to try and forget."

"I don't think I want to know about that, Ryder," she said, sniffing.

"Believe me, I don't want you to know. I just got you and I don't want to lose you already."

She looked into my eyes and sighed. "I'm so sorry for this."

"Don't apologize. Just try and restrain yourself next time because I might be able to stop myself if you do that again. It's been three months, Everleigh," I said, smiling, and she

laughed.

“Well, I can’t lie and say I’m not attracted to you now,” she said, smiling.

“Out of curiosity, how far were you willing to take this?” I asked.

She shrugged. “As far as you would have let me, I guess.”

Suddenly, I was feeling bold and I cleared my throat. “Do you trust me?”

She stared at me for a long moment and slowly nodded her head. “I do.”

“Listen, I want to try something and if it gets to be too much or you are feeling like it’s going too far, just tell me and I’ll stop, okay?”

She stared at me with wide eyes. “Okay.” I leaned my lips back to hers

and kissed her. I thrust my tongue into her mouth and she moaned loudly. I leaned her back on her pillow, my mouth never leaving hers. After we kissed deeply for a few moments, I moved my mouth down her neck and started to suck and gently nip at her neck. “God, Ryder,” she breathed.

I slowly began to move my hand down her soft curves and once I reached the waist of her jeans, I gently slid my fingers into the waist band at the button. I murmured against her skin, “Is it okay if I unbutton these?”

“Yes,” she said, instantaneously. I slid the button out of the hole and she was breathing heavily.

“Can I unzip you?” I asked, and

she nodded, her eyes fluttering and her lashes brushing her cheek. I slowly slid down the zipper and she moaned as my fingers grazed the bare skin above her panties. I toyed with the waistband of them and I asked, “Can I touch you under these?”

She whimpered. “Yes, Ryder, please!” she moaned as quietly as she could. “Please touch me.”

I slid my trembling hands into her panties and slowly made my way down to her searing heat. She was already soaking wet and ready and that alone had me ready to come in my pants. I moved my fingers around her clit and she bit her lip to keep from screaming.

“You like when I touch you like

this?” I growled into her ear.

She nodded rapidly. “Yes, oh God, yes!”

I kissed my way down to her breasts which were still covered by her hot pink bra. I teased one of her nipples with my teeth and she whimpered. “You like when I kiss you there?”

“Yes,” she panted. “Please, Ryder,” she moaned. “Please.”

“What do you want me to do, Everleigh?” I needed to hear it...I had to know she wanted me to touch her like I was dying to.

“I want to feel you inside me,” she whispered. “Touch me, please.”

I moaned and slowly slid a finger into her dampness. She gasped loudly

and rocked her hips into my hand. Fuck...she felt incredible. “God, you feel so good,” I moaned.

She arched her back and I felt her hands grabbing onto the waist of her jeans. She was tugging them down and trying to slide out of them. “I need these off now,” she said, and I used my free hand to help her pull her jeans off while my other hand was still touching her. As soon as her jeans were off, she kicked them to the floor and parted her knees to give me better access. I groaned and moved myself on top of her, my hand never leaving her warmth. My mouth found hers again as I slowly slid another finger into her. She was so tight and my dick was quivering in anticipation for

when I would finally sink myself into her. I never broke away from her lips as my fingers wiggled inside her, trying to help her find her release. I wanted her to feel what I could do to her body so she would never want anyone else to touch her again.

Her body started shaking as I sped up my rhythm with my hand. “Oh my God Ryder,” she moaned into my mouth.

“Just feel it, Everleigh. Let go for me,” I said, and at that moment she cried out in pleasure and her muscles clenched around my fingers.

“Ryder, oh God,” she moaned as she came hard against my hand. Her body shook and she whimpered as she came down from her orgasm.

“That was so fucking sexy,” I whispered into her ear.

“That...was...amazing,” she said, breathing heavily. “I’ve never felt anything like that.”

I grinned. “You mean you’ve never had an orgasm before?” I asked, withdrawing my fingers from her.

Still panting, she said, “I have had one before but nothing that...strong.”

Smiling wide, I leaned into her and kissed her deeply. “Well, I’d be happy to do that any time.”

She smiled and bit her bottom lip. “So, do I get to reciprocate?”

My eyebrow cocked up. “What did you have in mind?”

In one quick movement, Everleigh

shoved against me until I was lying back on her bed. She placed a shaking hand on my stomach, and my abs contracted at her touch. She leaned in and pressed her lips to mine and I immediately opened my mouth to her and thrust my tongue inside. We kissed for several minutes before I felt her hand roam down to my pants and she quickly slipped her hand inside. I inhaled sharply as I felt her hand grab my dick, which was so hard it was actually hurting. “Oh fuck,” I moaned.

“Oh wow,” she said, “you feel huge,” she said, and I grinned. She gave me a timid look and then whispered, “Can I see it?”

“You can do whatever you want,

Everleigh,” I groaned. She took her free hand and tried to undo my belt buckle but she was shaking and couldn’t unfasten it. “Let me,” I said, and she nodded. I quickly unbuckled my belt and unzipped my pants for her, and I could feel her breathing increase as she slowly pushed my pants down past my hips so she could see my dick. When she did, she gasped loudly.

“Oh my God, you *are* huge,” she said, and she started to stroke my length up and down using both hands.

My hands twisted the blankets on her bed as she slowly moved her hands up and down my shaft. “God damn that feels good,” I groaned. I pulled her lips back to mine and her gentle hums of

pleasure were the only sounds she made as she increased her pace. The feel of her small, delicate hands stroking my cock over and over was making me see stars already. “Oh God, Everleigh, I can’t hold on much longer,” I growled through gritted teeth. She nudged my tee shirt up over my stomach and never broke her rhythm as I felt my orgasm building. “Fuck, I’m going to come,” I moaned, and she moved her hands up and down my dick one more time before I exploded like a rocket. I leaned up and kissed her as she drained the rest of my release. Thankfully, it landed on my stomach and not on her or her bed...that would have been embarrassing. “Oh damn,” I said, pulling her into me and

snuggling with her. “That was amazing.”

“Really?” she asked. “You’re not just saying that to be nice?”

“Of course I’m not. Why would you ask that?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know.”

I sighed. “It’s about that dickhead Scott, isn’t it?”

She shook her head and sat up. “Here, let me get you a towel,” she said, and quickly climbed off her bed.

I leaned up on my elbows and watched her walk into a little bathroom. “Why do you do that?”

She flicked the light off and walked back out to her bed, holding a towel. “Do what?” she asked, climbing

back on her bed.

“Make comments about yourself and then close off when I ask about that guy.” I took the towel and wiped my stomach until it was dry.

She took the towel from me and half smiled as she tossed it into her hamper. “I just don’t like to talk about him, Ryder. I thought Scott loved me but he was only using me for sex. He was pretty convincing and I am ashamed of myself that I believed every lie he told me. Talking about him just brings it all back and I can’t deal with it right now with my dad being sick. I cry already for him, so I don’t need to cry over my asshole ex boyfriend either.”

“Okay, I understand that. I’ll let it

go for now.”

She smiled at me and stifled a yawn. “Thank you.”

“You’re sleepy, aren’t you? You want me to head out so you can get some rest?”

“No, you don’t have to go yet.”

“But you need to rest. I don’t want to keep you up.”

She blinked a few times and then said, “Will you stay with me?”

I smiled at her. “Like here? In your bedroom?”

Everleigh nodded. “Yes, where else?”

“Sure, I’ll stay with you. If you need me, I’m here.”

“Thank you Ryder.”

“You’re welcome. Let me just send a message to the guys and let them know where I am,” I said, and she grinned brightly at me.

“Okay. I’m going to get into some pajamas. I’ll be right back,” she said, and she leaned in and kissed me quickly before climbing out of her bed. I smiled and sat up, pulling my shorts back up and sliding out of my jeans. I got my phone out and quickly texted Jude, Kris, and Beau and let them know I wasn’t coming back to the hotel tonight. After I was finished, I lay back in her bed and waited for her to come back out of the bathroom, eager to feel her beautiful body sleeping in my arms.

Chapter 7

Everleigh

I woke up the next morning feeling more rested than I had been in a long time. I opened my eyes and it took me a second to realize the reason...Ryder had stayed with me last night. I was so comfortable with his strong arms around me and it was a nice feeling. I wanted to stretch my arms out but I couldn't move. He had me in both of his arms, his front to my back. I turned my head to look at him and he was still asleep...he looked so peaceful.

I let my eyes roam down his arms which were heavily tattooed and for the first time, I really saw them. They were beautiful and bright. Most of them were tribute tattoos for his parents. I saw one that caught my eye...they were words in beautiful black script. They read,

*My Champion, My Protector, My
Friend*

In Memory of Alan Matthews

I felt a lump in my throat as I read the words. Ryder obviously loved his father very much and I hurt for him that he had lost him at such a young age. If anyone would know what I was going through, it was him. Instinctively I

leaned my lips in and kissed the words and when I did he jolted awake. I turned my face back him and his blue eyes were staring into mine. “Good morning,” I said.

“Good morning, gorgeous,” he answered and leaned in and kissed me. “How did you sleep?”

“Like a baby. What about you? What’s it like to wake up a bed that doesn’t cost a fortune?” I asked.

He smiled a crooked smile at me. “I’d sleep in a field if it meant waking up to your face in the morning,” he said, and I smiled back at him. “So, do you have to be at work this morning?”

I shook my head. “Deuce closes the diner on Sundays.”

“So I have you all to myself today?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Almost. You are going to have to share me with Daddy.”

“Well, he’s the one guy I don’t mind sharing you with. He’s a cool guy.”

“He seems to like you too,” I said.

He snickered. “Yeah. I wonder if he will still like me when he finds out I spent the night with his only daughter.”

“Well, we didn’t really do anything bad,” I said.

“No, we didn’t. What we did was *very* good,” he said, winking at me. I felt tingles shoot through me straight to my belly.

“Yes it was,” I admitted.

“Care to repeat it?” he asked, his

eyes burning into mine.

“I don’t know, Ryder. My dad and Trish are probably already up. They might hear us,” I said.

“Well I can be quiet if you can,” he said, grinning. He leaned in and started kissing my neck and it was taking everything in me to keep my wits in check.

“Ryder, wait, I don’t know,” I breathed, muscles in my belly clenching with need.

The arm I wasn’t laying on roamed down to the waist band of my pajamas and his fingers started to slide inside my bottoms. “Tell me you want me to stop and I will, Everleigh.”

“I don’t want you to stop,” I

breathed. “I’m just afraid we will get caught.”

“That’s half the fun, sweetheart. Is your door locked?” he asked, still kissing my neck.

I racked my brain for a second and then remembered that I had locked the door the night before. I nodded my head and whispered, “Yes.”

“Then we won’t get caught. Do you want me to touch you again, Everleigh?” he said, tracing my collarbone with his tongue.

“God, yes,” I said, and his hand slipped further into my bottoms and inside my panties. I sucked in a harsh breath and bit my lip when his fingers found my slick folds and just as I wanted

him too, he slid two fingers inside me. “God, Ryder,” I moaned, and he silenced me by crushing his mouth to mine. His tongue parted my lips and I whimpered as our tongues tangled together. If he could make me crazy with just two fingers and a kiss I could only imagine what he could do with his other appendages.

I reached out a shaking hand and touched his hard dick and he growled into my mouth. Once I ran my hands along his length he rocked his hand into me more and I almost screamed as an orgasm suddenly hit me hard. This man not only gave me the best orgasm of my life last night, but he just gave me another one that rivaled the first and it

took all of five minutes to do it. I shivered and tried to get my pounding heart back to normal as he removed his hand. “Wow,” I breathed.

“I take that as a good wow,” Ryder said, grinning.

“That was a *great* wow. That was a nice way to wake up,” I said, and he laughed.

“Well, I’d be happy to wake you up like that any time,” Ryder said.

“So, is it my turn now?” I asked, licking my lips. Before he could answer, there was a knock at my door. I quickly scrambled to sit up and Ryder smiled at me, readjusting himself under the blankets. “Who is it?”

“It’s Trish, honey. Listen, Ryder’s

bodyguard is here and he says he has an important phone call.”

I sighed and Ryder rolled his eyes. “Can it wait a minute?” I called.

“No, he says it’s pretty urgent.”

“All right, he’ll be right there,” I said, throwing off my blankets.

Ryder groaned as he pulled on his jeans. “Sorry Everleigh. I don’t know what could be so important this early in the morning on a fucking Sunday.”

“I don’t know either but you’d better find out,” I said. He pulled on his tee shirt and quickly slid into his black motorcycle boots.

When he was dressed, he walked over to me and pulled me into his arms. “Can I call you later?”

“Of course you can,” I said, and he leaned in and kissed me.

“Thanks for a great day, night, and morning, Everleigh,” he said.

“You’re welcome, rock star.”

“Tell your dad goodbye for me, okay?”

“I will, I promise. You’d better get going,” I said, and he nodded. I walked to my door and unlocked it, and he followed me out into the house. I walked him to the door and when he stepped outside, he turned to face me.

“Sorry about this. It’s probably the label freaking out. I’ll call when I know what’s going on,” he said.

“It’s okay. Go take care of business. I’ll still be here when you get

back.”

He smiled at me. “Promise? You’re not going to freak on me and try to convince yourself this is a bad idea, are you?”

I grinned and shook my head. “No way, not after last night and this morning.”

“Damn right,” he said, winking at me. “See you later, gorgeous.” He leaned down to me and pressed his lips to mine, stealing my breath.

“Later,” I breathed, and he walked to the SUV with John in tow. As soon as he was gone, I walked back in the house and into the kitchen. I could feel Trish’s eyes on me as I made myself a bowl of cereal. “So, how is your morning?” I

asked her, sitting down at the table with my food. “Did you meet John?”

“I did. He’s a nice guy.”

“He didn’t sleep out in his SUV all night again, did he?” I asked, suddenly feeling guilty that I had forgotten about him again.

“No, he crashed on the couch. He tried to go out to the car but he mentioned you might be upset if he did,” she said.

“He’s right, I would have. So, how is Daddy? Is he up yet?”

“No, he’s still asleep. It’s a wonder he is,” she said, smiling.

“Why is that?” I asked.

“Well, I know I had a hard time sleeping through all the moaning and

panting coming from your room last night,” she said, winking at me.

My face felt instantly hot and I almost choked on my cereal. “Y-you heard that?”

“Uh huh,” she said, laughing.

I put my spoon down and put my hands over my face. “Oh God, I’m so embarrassed!”

She was still laughing as she took a seat at the table next to me. “Everleigh, look at me,” she said, pulling at my arms. I reluctantly moved my hands and I looked at her, feeling more mortified than I had in a long time. “Sweetie, you’re twenty four years old. It’s okay if you bring a man home with you once in a while. Or like the first time ever.”

“Gee, thanks for reminding me I have had no life,” I said, and she chuckled.

“Well, you’ve been busy caring for Max. You haven’t had time to have a social life. You don’t need to be embarrassed about Ryder staying here. What you two do in your room is your business.”

I sighed. “That’s just it, I wasn’t meaning for us to do anything up until last night. I’d had a great day with him here, but when Dad had fallen asleep on the recliner, I was going to find you and have you help me take him to bed but Ryder just jumped up and carried him like it was nothing. He carried Dad to bed like it was just a normal thing to

do,” I said, my voice breaking. “After that, something changed for me. I just... lost control of myself.”

“It’s not a bad thing to lose control once in a while, Everleigh. He really seems to like you, you know, judging from the noises you two were making,” she said, laughing.

“We didn’t have sex, if that’s what you are implying, Trish. We just did... other stuff,” I said, and she giggled. I looked down at my bowl of cereal, which was already getting soggy.

“You didn’t have sex? It sure as hell sounded like it. Why didn’t you?”

“Well, after what he did for Dad, I would have if he’d let it get that far, but he didn’t. He said he knew that I wasn’t

ready to take that step with him yet and he didn't want me to regret it in the morning.”

Trish stared at me for a moment before answering. “Wow, Everleigh... he seems like the real deal, honey.”

“He does, doesn't he?” I asked, my eyebrows furrowed.

“Well, of course he does. He met you, what, a couple of months ago and you guys talked for like an hour, and now here he is in Muncie freaking Indiana for you.”

I sighed. “I know. God, is it crazy of me to think this might actually be real? That I didn't dream this? That a gorgeous man actually followed me to my hometown because he wants to be

with me for real?”

She smiled warmly at me.

“Everleigh, that’s not crazy. You deserve a guy that will sweep you off your feet and treat you like a princess because that’s what you are. Everyone knows it but you,” she said.

I shook my head and looked down.

“I’m hardly a princess, but thank you for saying it.”

“Well, I think Ryder seems like the perfect guy for you.”

“I’ve only technically known him two days but I already feel at ease with him. I just hope I’m not making a mistake.”

“Well, only time will tell, sweetie. You just have to take a leap of

faith.”

“I know. Thanks, Trish,” I said, picking up my spoon and taking a bite of my half soggy cereal.

“Any time, Everleigh. I’m going to check on Max,” she said, and stood up and walked down the hall.

I ate my breakfast in silence, still in amazement over how drastically my life had changed in the past forty eight hours. I went from being a nobody with the weight of the world on her shoulders to a rock star’s love interest with my face probably on the front page of gossip magazines. I honestly didn’t know what to think or how to feel about all of it yet, but one thing I did know was that Ryder had definitely made his way through the

walls I had built up and it scared me.

About an hour later, I had cleaned up my breakfast dishes and was heading to fold the laundry when my cell phone pinged. Hoping it was Ryder messaging me, I rushed to check it but it wasn't him. It was Danni. I clicked on the message.

D: hey girl, u busy?

E: not really, just cleaning.

What's up?

D: did you hear from Ryder this morning?

E: not since he left an hour ago, John came and got him saying he had

an important phone call.

D: he stayed there last night? :D

E: yes, but it's not what you think...he just slept over.

D: uh huh. Anyway, I was just wondering what this important phone call was about. Beau got dragged out of his room this morning too.

E: and how do you know that, may I ask? ;)

D: because I stayed with him last night and it IS what you think, ;)

E: Danni...

D: we can chat later...LOTS to tell u, girl, xoxo, if u hear from Ryder before I talk to Beau let me know, okay?

E: I will. Ttyl

I put my phone back in my pocket and picked up the laundry basket. Ryder had to rush off this morning, and now Beau? I hoped nothing was wrong...or that I was the cause of it.

After another hour of cleaning, I was about to sit down for a minute and watch some TV when my cell phone rang. I pulled my phone out of my pocket...it was Ryder. I swiped the screen and answered it. "Hello?"

"Hey Everleigh," he said, sounding frustrated.

"Uh oh, what's wrong?"

"I have to go back to Cincinnati tonight."

Disappointment shot through me.

“You do? What happened?”

He sighed. “Our manager called this morning freaking out. Apparently the label is pissed that I just up and left in the middle of recording our new album—”

“You what?” I asked.

“It’s fine, Everleigh. We already have seven tracks finished and we have the other songs written, arranged, and ready to record. Anyway, he’s in a panic so the label is demanding that we come back and finish the album so they can start promoting it. It’s not even fucking finished yet and they already want to promote the damn thing. Hell, we still have two months before the deadline!”

“This is because of me, isn’t it? You guys are getting all this publicity

now because you came here for me and now they want to monopolize on it, don't they?"

"I wish I could disagree with you but I think you are right. They will do or say anything to make fucking money. It doesn't matter to them if the album is complete shit just as long as they get their take from it," he said angrily.

"It will be okay, Ryder. You need to do what you have to for your band. Don't let me get in the way of that, please," I said.

"I just don't want to leave yet. I have a feeling you will change your mind about this thing with us before I can come back," he said.

"Ryder, I won't. I told you I would

give this a real chance and I will. No one has made me feel the way you have in the past two days. I know it's like, crazy fast, but..."

"It's not been crazy fast for me, Everleigh. I have dreamed of you for three months."

"I know," I said, breaking off into a whisper. "Hey, it's not like it's forever, right? I mean, we can text and talk on the phone and-"

"Send naked pictures back and forth?" he laughed.

I giggled. "Come on now, you really think that's smart considering you are famous and all?"

"Well, we can Skype then," he said, and I could hear the smile in his

voice.

“So you seriously think I’m going to have Skype sex with you?” I asked, grinning.

“I think if I put my mind to it I could. I got you to give me a chance in the past two days, now didn’t I?”

“Yes you did, Ryder.” I heard male voices in the background and then he said, “Listen, we’re packing shit up, so I’ve got to jump off here. Can I call u once I’m on the road?”

“Sure you can,” I said. “I wish I could see you before you go.”

“Funny you should wish that...” he said, and at that moment I heard a knock on the door.

I felt myself smiling as I half ran to

the door and threw it open. Ryder was there standing on my doorstep wearing faded jeans, a Social Distortion tee shirt, his leather jacket, and his black motorcycle boots. He was beautiful.

“Hey,” I said, putting my phone back in my pocket.

He took a step toward me and wrapped his arm around my waist. “Hey yourself, gorgeous.” His lips were on mine in a flash and I opened my mouth for him. Our tongues touched and it caused my blood to start racing through my veins.

Once we broke apart, I leaned against his tall frame. “I’m glad you stopped by,” I said. I reached into my pocket and pulled out the tip he gave me,

minus the money I spent buying breakfast the day before. “For you.”

He grinned at me. “What the hell is this?”

“Oh, you didn’t think I forgot about this, did you? Sneaky slipping it into my pocket while grabbing my ass, by the way,” I said.

Ryder laughed. “Oh, I knew you wouldn’t. Keep it, seriously.”

“I can’t keep this Ryder, you know that.”

He sighed. “Well, how about you give it to me when I see you again?”

I smiled. “Deal. I am really glad you came by before you left.”

“I wasn’t going to leave without seeing you, Everleigh,” he said, and

kissed my lips quickly again. “This sucks so bad.”

“It does, but I’ll be fine here. You need to go do your thing. Don’t worry, I’ll be here if you decide to come back,” I said, the lump in my throat getting bigger. God, why was I on the verge of tears over someone that’s not technically my boyfriend?

“Come with me,” he whispered.

“W-what?” I asked.

“Come away with me, Everleigh.”

I swallowed hard. “I...I can’t, Ryder. My dad...I can’t.”

His jaw squared. “I know, I understand. I just don’t want to leave you alone in this. You’re going to need someone with you.”

“I won’t be alone. You’ll be with me even from far away,” I said, tears welling in my eyes.

“If anything, and I mean anything, happens to Max at all while I’m gone, you call me and I’m here. Just like that,” he said, running his thumb along my bottom lip. “Okay?”

I sniffed. “Okay.”

“I have to go if I’m going to make it to Cincinnati by sundown,” he said. He pulled me closer and kissed me again. He was a phenomenal kisser, but something about this kiss was almost... sad. It was like he was saying goodbye and unsure of when we would have this again. “Don’t forget me,” he said.

“Don’t *you* forget *me*, rock star,” I

said, and with a final quick kiss, he turned and walked to his Escalade. I held my tears in as long as I could and as I watched him drive away, I finally let the tears flow down my face. Just as I was about to head back into the house, I saw Danni's car pull into the driveway and she jumped out, looking as miserable as I felt. She had the best timing in the world, because right now it was clear to see we'd both fallen hard for rockers and needed each other.

A few hours later, it had gotten dark outside. I had spent some time with Daddy before he drifted off to sleep for

the night, and now Danni and I were sitting in our pajamas on my bed surrounded by junk food. We'd been commiserating over our respective love lives, including the details of Danni's night with Beau and my night with Ryder. "God girl, he was *amazing*," she gushed. "I swear to God I've never had an orgasm that intense before. Or should I say 'orgasms'."

I sighed and smiled at her. "Yeah, I know what you mean."

She took a bite of a cheese puff and smiled. "Wait, I thought you two didn't have sex last night."

"We didn't."

"Ooh, did he go down on you?" she asked.

I blushed. “God, Danni, no.”

“Well, what did he do?”

I don’t know why this was embarrassing to me to talk to Danni about this kind of stuff. She knew the ins and outs of my relationship with Scott, but I was having trouble admitting to her that he’d gotten me off with his hand alone. “He...used his hand,” I said, looking down at my nails.

She squealed. “And? How was it?”

I smiled timidly. “Incredible,” I said, and she bounced up and down excitedly. “I swear it was never like that with...” I trailed off.

“With Scott,” she answered for me. “I know, Ev. You don’t like to talk

about it, but I really think you need to.”

“It just hurts too much. I feel like a fool for believing anything he said to me.”

“Well, you were in love. How were you supposed to know he’d flip like that?”

I sighed. “I can’t believe I fell for him. He always seemed so patient and sweet and all of the foreplay...it was good,” I said. “I thought the butterflies I felt were normal. In hindsight it was my body trying to warn me not to take things that far.”

“I’m sorry, Ev.”

“Well, I have no one to blame but myself.”

“Everleigh, you are not to blame

for what Scott did! You told him you didn't feel comfortable sleeping with him again after that first time and that you needed time to figure things out. You did the right thing for you and it's not your fault he went crazy over it!"

"He texted me Friday night after Ryder's visit hit the news," I admitted.

Her eyes went wide. "What? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, we've both been a little busy," I said, smiling weakly. "Ryder saw the message and flipped out. He wants to know what happened with Scott, but I haven't been able to tell him yet. This is the most I have talked about Scott in three years."

"Well, you're going to have to

eventually, especially since Scott is messaging you. If you are going to go into a relationship with Ryder full force, you both need to be on alert. Scott isn't going to let you go that easily."

"Well, I'm not his to hold on to anymore. He broke up with me because I didn't want to sleep together again until I was sure I loved him, so he gets no say in who I choose to date now."

Danni smiled at me. "Good for you, Ev. Still though, be careful. Remember what happened that night outside the bar last year when that guy asked for phone number?"

I cringed, remembering Scott pressing the guy up against a wall and punching him repeatedly in the stomach.

I didn't understand Scott...we slept together, but afterward I politely asked him if we could wait before we did it again because of all my fears. He flipped out, called me about every name you can think of, and dumped me right then and there.

The next day he sent me a text message threatening that he would make sure no one else would want me because he couldn't have me. I didn't understand him at all and it's taken me a long time to try and get past it. "I remember. I just wish he'd leave me alone."

"That's why you should tell Ryder about it. He has the means to keep you safe from him."

I shrugged. "I don't know. I'll

think about it. Right now I want to hear more about Beau and your multiple orgasms,” I said, smiling. Thankfully, she took the bait and our conversation moved to Beau and away from my crazy ex boyfriend. Danni was right...I would have to tell Ryder about all of this eventually, but for now I just wanted to focus on my dad and trying to get through all of the sadness to come. I just hope I didn't completely fall apart.

Just as Danni was getting really personal and telling me about how big Beau's junk was, my bedroom door burst open. It was Trish, looking as white as a sheet. My heart immediately sank. “Trish, what's wrong?”

“It's Max. You need to come

quick.”

I flew up out of bed and took off down the hallway to his room. “What happened?” I asked, frantic.

“I went to check on him and he had blood coming out of his nose and mouth. I’m going to call his doctor but I think you need to be with him right now,” she said, her tone suggesting this might be one of the last times I would have with my dad.

I heard Danni say behind me, “I’m going to call Beau and have him let Ryder know.”

I shook my head. “No, Danni, don’t. He just left and he’s got his own shit to deal with right now. I’ll call him later,” I said.

“Ev, he will want to be here.”

I shook my head. “I can’t let him watch this again, Danni.” She stared at me with a confused look on her face as I took a deep, terrified breath and I put my hand the door knob leading to his room, petrified of what I’d see when I walked in. Selfishly, I thought to myself, *Ryder, I need you...*

Acknowledgements

Okay, I'm going to try really hard and not get all mushy this time...I'll keep this short and sweet. Thank you so much to all of my readers!!! I can't believe how many wonderful people I have met since I first hit that "publish" button four months ago. Some of you have even become friends I'll have for life...I love you all!

Thank you over and over to my fierce little band of Rebels...Dawn, Sam, Leanne, Tiffanie, and Fiona... thanks for having my back and helping pimp me out to the masses! I love you goddesses!!!

To my Facebook family (most of them talented authors themselves)...
Sidda, Melissa, Cassandra, Danielle, Ryter, Chris, Kimberly, Kat, T.H., Terri, Georgie, Julie, and everyone I am forgetting...please forgive me, my brain is mushy! I love you all, you are insanely talented, and I am so happy to know you!

Thank you again to my wonderful salon family...I love you all so much and I am so proud to be on a team as awesome as ours!

Thanks to my family that has supported me. You know who you are.

Thank you to my husband and daughters for your continued support. I love you all!

Last but not least...thank you again

to Casey. You will continue to inspire me daily and I will forever miss you. I love you, girl!

I encourage all of you to please donate to a special trust account set up for my late friend Casey Kreb's children. She was an amazing mother and would have done anything for her children and I want to help them now that she can't. The information is below...please donate if you can. Do your part to put an end to domestic violence!

PrimeTrust Financial Account

#980224
3700 W. Bethel Ave.
Muncie, IN 47304
Phone Number: (765) 281-6003
www.primetrustcu.com

I love, love, LOVE to hear from and interact with readers and other authors, so look me up! I am on Facebook (Mellie George), I have an author page for you to “like” (https://www.facebook.com/pages/AuthcMellie-George/329475417182667?bookmark_t=page), I’m on Twitter (@AuthorMellieG), and I am also on Instagram and Pinterest! Come and stalk me, you know you want to, lol! See you all again soon!

Also available from Mellie George:

Say Yes (Glenbrook Girls Series) Book
1
Back To Life

Coming Soon from Mellie George (in
NO particular order):

Rouge (Bad Blooded Rebel Series #2)
Renegade (Bad Blooded Rebel Series
#3)
Redeemed (Bad Blooded Rebel Series
#4)
Come Back Home (Glenbrook Girls

Series) Book 2- coming in 2014
Fighting For Us (Sequel to Back To
Life)-coming in 2014

Ryder's Playlist

1. Don't Cry- Guns 'N Roses
2. Mystify- Saving Abel
3. Bad Blooded- Black Rebel
Motorcycle Club
4. Over and Under- Egypt
Central
5. Anywhere But Here- Five
Finger Death Punch
6. Miles Away- Memphis May
Fire feat. Kellin Quinn (I'll be
honest...this was playing when
I wrote Ryder and Everleigh's
goodbye at her door steps, can
you tell?)

7. Adrenaline- Shinedown
8. The Hangman's Body Count- Volbeat
9. I Will Be Heard- HateBreed
10. Off With Her Head- Ghost Town
11. Can't Forget You- My Darkest Days
12. Next To You- Buckcherry
13. Young- Hollywood Undead

Everleigh's Playlist

1. Sparks Fly- Taylor Swift
2. Downtown- Lady Antebellum
3. Between The Raindrops-

Lifehouse featuring Natasha
Beddingfield

4. 93 Million Miles- Jason Mraz
5. Tennessee- The Wreckers
6. Who Are You- Carrie
Underwood
7. When You're Gone- Avril
Lavigne
8. Watch Over Me- Hanson
9. Don't You Wanna Stay- Jason
Aldean & Kelly Clarkson
10. Brave- Sara Bareilles
11. Begin Again- Taylor
Swift
12. Drunk On You- Luke
Bryan
13. Ready- Kelly Clarkson

**Excerpt from Rogue: Bad Blooded
Rebel Series #2...Coming in
December 2013!**

I rolled my eyes. “Why does everyone think I can’t handle this? My dad’s gone and nothing is going to change that.”

“We know, but we also know how bad you slid off the rails when he died. You were even worse when your mom passed on too. You fucked anything that moved and nearly drank yourself to

death. We are just worried that watching her dad die will send you into a tailspin again,” Jude said, and for the first time in a while he looked genuinely worried about me.

“Are you really going to sit there and judge me for sleeping with too many women, Jude? Really?” I growled, and he huffed. “Look, you guys, I’m fine. I’m not some punk ass kid anymore, so don’t think I will break down when Max passes away. I’ve been through this and I know what to expect. However, Everleigh hasn’t and she’s going to need someone there who lo...uh, cares about her,” I said, catching myself before I said I loved her. I know that Kris, Steve, and Jude all picked up on my slip but

they thankfully had enough sense to keep it to themselves.

Before anyone else could say anything, Beau came walking into the recording booth, his face full of concern. My heart jumped. “Beau? What’s up man?” Kris asked.

“I just got off the phone with Danni,” he said, looking straight at me.

“Just spit it out, man,” I said, my palms starting to sweat.

He blew out a breath and said, “It’s Everleigh’s dad. I guess the nurse found him bleeding from his mouth and nose and they don’t think he’s gonna hang on much longer.”

Panic shot through me. “Fuck! I’m leaving. Now,” I said, looking around

for my jacket and the keys to my Escalade.

“Ryder, you can’t drive back to Indiana alone like this. I’ll go with you,” Beau said.

“We’ll all go. Fuck those two shitheads,” Jude chimed in. “We can have a couple of guys load our shit up and bring it to Indiana and we can record there.”

“That sounds like a plan. I’ll take care of everything guys. You all go,” Steve said, clapping me hard on the back and handing me my jacket.

“Why didn’t Everleigh call me?” I asked Beau.

“Well, she’s a little preoccupied right now, Ryder,” he said.

“I understand that, but Danni could have at least called my phone and let me know what was going on.” He looked like there was something he didn’t want to tell me and I was starting to panic.

“Beau, what is it? Did he already die?” I asked, a lump forming in my throat.

He shook his head. “No, not yet. It’s just...aw, fuck. Everleigh told her not to tell you.”

“She did what?” I asked, feeling as if I’d punched in the gut. “How could she not want me there?”

“I don’t know man. She’s a pretty selfless girl, Ryder. Maybe she just wanted to grieve alone, or maybe she didn’t want to burden you with her problems when you have problems of

your own.”

“Well, my problems don’t mean shit right now. Putting out a rushed album to please a couple of rich pricks doesn’t concern me at all when Everleigh is going through something like this. Where the fuck are my keys?” I shouted, looking around the room frantically.

“Calm down, man. Here,” Jude said, tossing me my jacket. “Keys are in your pocket.”

“All right, I’m leaving,” I said, sliding into my jacket and heading for the door.

“Wait, Ryder. Let one of us ride with you,” Beau said. “You shouldn’t drive alone on an icy highway when

you're panicked like this.”

“I'll go,” Kris offered. “The rest of you guys can go in the SUV with John.”

Everyone nodded, and I said, “Whatever. Let's go,” I said, and Kris followed behind me as I opened the door and heard Steve call out a goodbye.