

I Knew I Loved You

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I Knew I Loved You

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Summary

Fate has its strange ways when it comes to love. The true and crazy love...

Notes

They could have met before. Who knows? A little pre-BJ fic. Enjoy!

Chapter 1

He was watching him intently. Long hair flowing in the air as the man was jumping around, lean body doing some acrobatic moves that would give most pole dancers a run for their money. There was something in the way he was singing, his plump lips glued to the microphone, giving him an uneasy feeling as if the singer was devouring it. He shifted in his seat, his cap pulled down over his eyes.

And then the singer finally saw him and stopped for a while, furrowing his eyebrows. The dark-haired guy was there again, sitting in the audience and staring at him. He had already seen him a few times and the thought that he was sort of being followed made him a little uncomfortable but he immediately got it off his mind. After all, everybody got in the same few clubs to jam so there was a good chance they'd bump into each other sooner or later.

Suddenly, a wicked thought came across his mind.

You want a show so I'm gonna give you one.

He pushed his hips forward, one hand clutching the microphone, the other tracing a haphazard pattern on his exposed chest. With a broad smile on his face he sung a few verses in a low, raspy voice, never breaking the gaze with the man sitting in front of him. When the stranger got a little jumpy in his seat, it gave him a sense of victory, a kind of odd pleasure to have such a power on another person. He certainly never thought he'd be that pleased about having another man sexually turned on.

A flicker of a sly smile chased across his lips. He grabbed the microphone stand and rubbed against it, only to notice the dark-haired man turned his head sideways. He didn't remember smiling so broadly.

I got you!

A growing feeling of getting aroused made him a little uneasy, though. He didn't mean to get himself hard but it was too late now. His cock was pushing against the thin layer of leather pants and he was quite aware of the show he was making.

Let's make it baby.

A raspy cry left his mouth just before the lights went off and went right on again. The stranger was staring at him unabashedly now.

His legs were shaking so much he barely stepped off the stage and made his way into the dressing room. As soon as he got there and was about to open the door, he felt a light grip on his shoulder and almost screamed. When he turned around, a pair of dark eyes was watching him intensely, the heat emanating from their bodies almost burning the place down. He put

his back to the door and, with his eyes wide open, he observed the other man drawing closer until he could feel his beer breath on his face.

“I liked it. I liked it very much,” he murmured, his eyes gleaming in the dim light of the corridor. The slightly parted lips barely grazed his cheek, dangerously close to his lips. Instinctively, he made a small moan and pushed his hips forward.

I've wanted to kiss you since the moment we met.

And then the stranger, who didn't feel like one anymore, smiled that gentle smile that made his legs even weaker, pressed up against him and put his big mouth on his own. The kiss was rough but his lips felt surprisingly soft and they almost distracted him from the oddness of their hardened cocks rubbing through the close contact they made.

That was strange at first, and then it wasn't strange.

Chapter 2

He shivered from the cool air hitting his warm skin when the other man moved away and involuntarily screwed up his face. He didn't want to stop just yet, the pleasure barely started spreading through his body. The handsome brunette surely knew what he was doing to him, a gleam sparkling in his eyes and a smug smirk spread on his full mouth, now moist and slightly swollen from the intense kiss they'd shared.

"I'll be playing a gig here tomorrow. Hope to see you around and pull our conversation back to where we've finished," he flashed a smile, showing a row of white teeth. "And my pleasure."

It seemed the man's cockiness had no limit and it surely felt a little uncomfortable. He inhaled sharply, trying to hide his irritation. He wasn't used to being the one who was left hanging like that. The one wanting more.

"Who told you I was coming?" He muttered through the clenched teeth, still sounding more desperate than he wanted.

"Let's say it's my gut feeling."

He noticed that the other man's features softened and his grin slowly faded into something more pensive. Slightly confused, he watched the stranger's back as he turned and left. Only after his tall silhouette had disappeared in the smoky haze of the corridor, he realized he didn't even know his name.

"Oh, fuck!" Jon cursed under his breath, rubbing the reddened skin as the dull pain was spreading through his right hand. He couldn't focus on anything that day and was clumsier than ever. He didn't even notice the damn thing when he hit it.

"Hey, man! You OK?"

A chirpy male voice rudely interrupted his thoughts. He lifted his head and saw a familiar face.

"Alec! What are you doing here?"

"I was in the neighborhood, so I figured I'd just drop in. Jon, you finally need to see that kid who's playing with me. He's really good!"

Jon winced. He definitely wasn't in a mood to look for a new guitarist, even though Dave didn't make it a secret him being in the band was just a temporary solution.

"Oh, come on. Another average guitarist from around here? Man, I don't feel like going to a bar today," Jon objected but Alec seemed undaunted.

“He’s playing with his band in Vault tonight! You’ll thank me for that, I’m telling you!” Alec said firmly, ignoring his protests.

Jon usually half-listened to such lame attempts to get another homeboy in the band but after hearing the name of the club, he felt all the blood drain from his face.

When Alec noticed the somewhat angry stare, he raised his hands up in mock surrender.

“Don’t look at me like that. It’s just this one time. I promise I won’t bug you again.”

“Is he even cute?” Jon mumbled after a while, the very thought oddly amusing.

Alec furrowed his eyebrows and gave him a questioning look but Jon just shrugged.

“Never mind. I’m in a weird place now. Well, I guess I have nothing to lose anyway.”

“Great! It starts around 9.30. See ya there!” Alec patted him on the arm with a huge smirk on his face. Jon hesitated for a moment.

“Erm, you know, had to spend some extra cash this month and I’m out of gas. Will you...?”

“No problem. I’ll pick you up. Be ready at 8:30.”

“Thanks.”

Once Alec left, his mind went back to the moment he met the dark stranger. He ignored the nervous knots in his stomach.

Hell only knows how much I want Alec to shut the fuck up. Yeah, I will show him his little friend is not good enough. I’ll show them both.

Chapter 3

Fuck. I don't even know his fucking name.

Jon was spitting out angry words while picking through his clothes, furrowing his eyebrows at yet another outfit and throwing it away on the pile on his bed. Furiously, he grabbed the first thing he found in his closet and dressed quickly.

It's not a fucking date, for Christ's sake!

And then, he found himself in front of the mirror. A pale face with dark circles under his eyes was looking back at him. He barely slept these days, working at the store and then playing in clubs at night. He held his hand out towards his stuff sitting on the bathroom shelf but withdrew it as soon as he'd realized what he was doing.

It's getting ridiculous.

He took a random baseball cap and tucked his hair in under it carelessly.

When he left his house and got a chilly wind blown into his face, a disturbing thought came across his mind. He didn't even know why he even gave in to Alec's whining as it certainly wasn't because he wanted to do some impromptu audition for a new guitarist. It was as sick as it gets and the fact that he didn't know what to expect somehow terrified him. He half hoped it was just a drunken incident and the guy wouldn't even be there, yet something stronger than him pushed him forward. The uneasy feeling of being attracted to another man poked its head up in the depths of his mind but he chose to ignore it until the last shreds of doubt were drowned by a growing excitement in the pit of his stomach. He gritted his teeth and put his hands deeper in his pockets as the wind picked up, howling its way through the growing darkness. Alec was already waiting for him in his car.

Once inside, Alec went to the bar to order a beer while Jon sat at a table and looked around. The place was full of more or less drunk people, the noise vibrating in his ears. The band on stage was covering some current tunes but they were rather amateurish and Jon soon got awfully bored. He was tapping his foot impatiently, waiting for them to finish and for Alec, who was nowhere to be seen.

Fuck.

Finally, the last chords faded away and the band started packing their stuff so the others could set up their equipment. Alec emerged a few minutes later and banged beer glasses on the table, almost spilling the golden beverage.

"Sorry, Jon! Met some dude from my previous band and he filled me in on some interesting news," he said apologetically. "The guys should be here any minute," he nodded towards the stage and grinned.

As if on cue, it got crowded with the musicians going back and forth, checking up on amplifiers, cables, and microphones but the dark-haired guitarist was still out of sight. Jon felt sick and cringed in his seat, which didn't escape Alec's notice.

"Jon, you're OK?"

"I'm fine," he grunted a reply and fixed his eyes on his mug. Alec didn't have time to answer because he already caught a glimpse of his friend from the corner of his eye.

"Well, here he is! Let's go and say hello," Alec smiled broadly but Jon just waved his hand at him.

"You go, I'll stay here and watch him play. If he's good, I'll might talk to him later but don't get your hopes high. You know I'm not easy to please."

"Man, you're acting really weird," Alec frowned, baffled. "I'll be back in a minute."

Jon was observing him approach the stage and give the other man a half hug. They were talking for a while and then Alec turned around to point to his table. Jon flinched but it was too late now as the guitarist noticed him and a wide smile lit his whole face up. A wave of heat went through his body and Jon felt his cheeks flush red. He grabbed his mug and took a few big gulps, hoping the weird sensations will go away.

When Alec returned, Jon had already drunk his beer up.

"Okay, next round's on me."

On his way to the bar, he heard the husky voice greeting the audience; all he knew was he never wanted a drink so badly in his life.

Chapter 4

"Jon?"

"Huh?"

Alec gave him a funny look.

"I asked what do you think of him?"

Jon felt way more relaxed as the beer went to his head now and the weird tension eased enough to allow him to enjoy the gig. He played a game of pretending he wasn't that much interested, though.

"It just occurred to me - a funny thing. Richie Sambora and Friends. Oh, how original!" He smirked, taking another sip of his beer. "And if you want an honest answer, he's a little too blues edged for my taste. I mean, he's not bad but I need somebody who is more into rock'n'roll, you know?"

"It's been just three songs. He's quite versatile, this kid can play everything!"

Jon didn't seem convinced.

"OK, listen. Thanks for trying to help me out but I sure can find the right guy in Dave's place. He's just..."

He let the thought trail away when he realized the music stopped and he felt the guitarist's eyes on him.

"The next piece has a very special meaning to me. It's a song by Bad Company, hope you know it," he said in a low voice and started playing.

Jon recognized the song as soon as he heard the first few notes and wriggled in his seat.

"He doesn't seem to give up," Alec said with a cryptic smile on his face.

"Whatever," Jon shrugged but couldn't help feeling uncomfortable. "How long are they going to play? I'd rather just get over with it since I'm not going to take him on anyway."

"Two more songs. Richie is a great guy, you'll like him."

"Who said I wanted to make friends with him? It's a strange, stubborn faith you keep to think that coming here tonight has any kind of purpose."

"I just think he's the last guy that's missing in our band, that's it. There is no ulterior motive here," Alec looked at him rather surprised. "I still think you should give him a chance."

“How much did he pay you to bring me here?” Jon asked, slightly slurring his words, and laughed loudly.

“He didn’t ask me. It was actually my own idea,” Alec got a little touchy. “Thought you were rather pressed for time to start the band since you got the record deal.”

Jon promptly realized there was no point in arguing with Alec because they had two totally different experiences with Richie and he preferred to keep that to himself. He wasn't going to hang out with him ever again, either, so it made their meeting considerably less awkward. Jon knew he could handle it and being a little drunk definitely helped.

“All right, all right, I’ll talk to him. Look! It seems they’ve just finished anyway.”

Jon watched the dark-haired guitarist put aside his guitar and give his bandmates a few instructions, this funny feeling having his stomach in knots again. When Richie finally approached their table, Jon could see his smug smile and it ignited some raw, inexplicable anger in him.

“Hi, I’m Richie.”

Jon gave him a hard, defiant look across the table and firmly shook the outstretched hand.

“Jon.”

“Mind if I join you?”

Jon noticed Alec's expectant gaze and rolled his eyes before fixing them back on Richie.

“No, go ahead.”

“Thanks.”

“OK, I’ll bring some more beer,” Alec offered and disappeared in the crowd before either of them managed to respond.

Chapter 5

Richie was standing there, a faint smirk still playing in the corners of his mouth. "I knew you'd be here," he spoke softly.

Jon blinked. "Alec wouldn't leave me alone," he mumbled and wrinkled his nose. "He can be such a stubborn fucker sometimes."

"It wasn't the only reason, was it?" Richie locked eyes with him and Jon got suddenly afraid he would find something that even he wouldn't admit to himself. That, in fact, he was attracted to him against all common sense. Against everything that was like day and night to him, that was clear and unchanging. His jaw tightened.

"Don't presume you know me," Jon replied harshly.

"I don't but I do want to know you better. If only you let me."

Jon felt the nervousness was taking him over again. He wanted to bite back but found himself unable to respond. "What was it?" His heart pounded fiercely when he finally choked out the words.

"What do you mean?" Richie frowned in confusion.

"The song."

"Thought you'd like it," Richie said and smiled broadly as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

"Quite an unfortunate choice of words, given the fact Johnny didn't end up well there. I might think you'd want to see me dead or something," Jon let out an awkward laugh and immediately hated it. "Look, I don't know what games you are playing with me but I'm not buying it. Let's be honest here. Whatever Alec told you, we're doing completely fine," Jon swallowed as his mouth went annoyingly dry. "You've got some serious skills and no offence, but it's not what we're looking for."

Richie's face fell immediately.

"I'm not playing any games with you and I'm certainly not a desperate loser. I have my own band and my own label." He leaned over and hissed, "Come on, don't pretend you don't know what you're doing. What you were doing to me the other night. And that you didn't enjoy what happened afterwards."

Richie's words hammered in his head and just as he was about to lose his nerve, Alec returned with the beer and set the mugs down with a clink .

"Sorry, guys, took me ages, but did you see that queue?! So many drunk idiots I had to elbow my way to the bar!" He exclaimed angrily while pointing towards the counter. He flopped on

the chair and picked up his mug.

“Let's drink to our meeting!” He grinned and only then did he notice that both men were staring each other down, tension so heavy you could cut it with a knife.

"Jon?" He asked tentatively but he got no response. Finally, Jon turned his head and forced a smile.

"Shouldn't have. See, we're done here."

Richie ground his teeth and didn't say anything for a moment. Then, a wicked thought came to him as he approached Alec.

"You know what? Actually, I could use some cold beer right now."

Chapter 6

Jon was watching them in silence but inside his head there was a storm of angry thoughts. He couldn't believe they would flat out ignore him like that! He was fighting the urge to snap at them but he knew he would only make a desperate fool of himself. Not that he cared much what they would think of him.

Yeah, right.

The beer felt more and more tasteless in his mouth with every gulp. Alec and Richie were seemingly engrossed in conversation, cracking inside jokes and patting each other's arms. It couldn't have been more than ten minutes but Jon already wanted to break some bones. He approached them with a smirk plastered across his face.

"Done yet, lovebirds?"

Alec smiled at him innocently.

"I didn't know you were in a hurry."

Jon forced an equally fake smile.

"The gig's over. I'm leaving, there's nothing here for me."

Alec slowly drained his mug and looked back at him, arching both eyebrows with poorly hidden mockery.

Oh, here she comes, a fucking diva throwing a hissy fit again!

"Man, are you nuts? Leaving before midnight? And in case you haven't noticed, I'm still talking. If you wanna go, then feel free to do so. For me things are just starting to get fun," he waved his hand towards the counter. "So many lovely ladies I'm gonna meet tonight."

He and Richie looked at each other and grinned like that was the right answer. Jon stared him down to make it clear to him that he was not amused at all.

All right, I should have known that. Fucking loser.

"Fine. I'll find my own ride home. Have fun!" He said through gritted teeth and turned to Richie. "Well, guess it's time to go. See you around."

Jon didn't get five steps before he felt a tight grip on his shoulder. He turned around and saw Alec, his dark eyes burning.

"What the fuck is going on with you, man? You've been acting strange since we came here," he spoke in a hushed whisper. "He's a good friend of mine and you're treating him like a piece of shit!"

Jon tightened his lips.

“First, get your hand off my shoulder. Second, I’m bored out of my mind. It’s not my thing and I’m not gonna stay here any longer so I’m going home with or without you!”

Alec blinked.

“Did he say anything to you? Why are you so weird around him?”

“I’m not!” Jon protested, praying to God Alec wouldn’t notice his reddened cheeks. “I’m just tired,” he lied smoothly.

“But did he?” Alec insisted, suddenly alarmed.

“No, no, nothing like that,” Jon rasped out. “And it’s OK, I get it that you wanna stay longer. I think I’ve seen some buddies across the room.”

“I’m actually leaving early, too. If I’m not mistaken, your house is on the way to mine so I can drop you off.”

Richie’s calm voice caught both men off-guard. Before Jon managed to say anything, Richie spoke again.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to butt in, just wanted to say goodbye. Jon, I can pick you up if you want,” he offered with a faint smile.

Alec stared at him disbelievingly, trying to figure out what was happening. He couldn’t make sense of it but slowly the pieces started to fit together. He bit his lower lip so he could keep a straight face.

“Perfect! So now everybody’s happy! Too bad you need to go now, too, Rich. It was great to see you again, though. Hope to catch you later,” he pulled him in a half-hug briefly.

Jon started growing impatient, thinking of how to get out this hell of a trap, the strain already too much on him. When Alec looked at him questioningly, he just shrugged.

“Whatever. Or I should say, thanks,” he said casually, nodding at Richie but without actually looking at him. “See you tomorrow.”

As soon as Richie had headed towards the door, Jon turned back to Alec, the blue of his eyes piercing.

“I hope it wasn’t your fucking idea,” he hissed.

Alec narrowed his eyes.

“I fucking wish it were.”

Jon moved his jaw with the idea of saying something but decided against it. When he finally rushed to the door, he saw a familiar black mop of hair. Richie was standing there and

waiting for him, hands in pockets. “Let’s go,” he mumbled and followed him into the parking lot outside.

They didn’t say a word during the whole way to Jon’s house except for a couple of details how to get there. It wasn’t until Richie cut the engine that Jon finally spoke up.

“I’m sorry.”

Richie flinched at the sound of his voice and turned to examine Jon’s profile.

“Why are you fighting so hard?”

Chapter 7

Jon frowned but didn't reply.

"What are you afraid of?"

Jon refused to look up, working his jaw. Only when Richie gently touched his leg, he jerked, startled by the unexpected move.

"What are you doing, man?" He gasped, staring into his eyes now.

"I'm asking you the same," Richie replied in a low voice. "I mean.... I'm sorry, I don't want to scare you....," he hesitated. "It's just things went from bad to worse. I didn't expect you'd... sort of hate me so much."

He hung his head, looking down at the steering wheel.

"If it wasn't for the fact you'd left your car home, we wouldn't even have this conversation now."

Jon was breathing hard, trying to process everything. The truth was, he'd rather get out of this car and just forget about what had happened but he knew the perverse fate worked against him and he was stuck. Stuck and overwhelmed with conflicting emotions.

"Stop asking me questions I can't answer. You somehow make me feel fucking guilty! You... it's like you fucking expect something from me, hell knows what! I don't know what got into me that fucking night! And now... now I need to deal with that, whether I like it or not!"

It wasn't entirely true, though. Jon did feel confused in his head but his body reacted in a rather straightforward way. Even now, with them both crammed in the cell that was Richie's car, Jon could feel his skin tingle, partly because of fear of the unknown and partly because of excitement building up inside him.

Richie peered ahead, a dark shadow spreading on his face; his grip tight on the steering wheel.

"You confuse me, too. I thought you made it clear what you wanted and now you're acting like I'm forcing you into something you don't like."

He sighed and turned to Jon again, a tentative smile began to lift up the corners of his mouth. "If it's any comfort to you, it's always been girls for me, so it's new to me, too. I'm terrified, and yet strangely... aroused."

The raw and unfiltered honesty painted his cheeks with burning shade of pink. Once the dam broke, though, even drowning was a relief, as the nagging feelings were finally brought to the surface.

They broke the eye contact. The silence fell between them like a thick blanket for a while which felt like a lifetime, until Jon sighed heavily.

“It’s fucked up, man. We’re fucked up. It shouldn’t have happened.”

Neither of them dared to look at each other. Richie blinked back tears, he knew he was losing it.

“But I remember how you and I... I thought that maybe it’s worth a shot, even though there are millions of reasons to quit before it even begins. I’ve never felt anything like that.”

“Or maybe I was just playing with you.”

Jon’s harsh words cut him off and left him speechless. Anger welled up in him like wildfire about to consume everything around. His lips formed a tight line and his nostrils flared noticeably as he breathed heavily.

Jon felt a shudder when Richie drew so close their faces were inches apart and hissed out: “Is that what lies look like?” He grabbed Jon’s face and kissed him roughly. The smaller man squirmed under the assault and used his both hands to push him away, biting Richie’s lip so hard it bled.

“Ow!” He gasped and pulled away, touching his aching mouth.

They were looking at each other, flushed and panting.

“You weren’t that fucking drunk when you fucking danced for me on that fucking stage and when we fucking made out in that fucking corridor. I don’t believe a word you say but hell, if this is what you want, fine by me! Nice to meet you Jon, my pleasure.”

Jon felt so numb he couldn’t say anything. His body went weirdly robotic; he couldn’t control himself when his hands yanked open the door and he got out of the car without looking back. The cold night wind whipped his face but it didn’t wake him up from this strange coma. Tears heavy in his chest, he only flinched when Richie’s car screeched away and disappeared in the dark, leaving a billow of dust behind.

Chapter 8

Jon was standing in the kitchen in front of the open fridge and looking for a beer. His head was pounding like hell and he was wordlessly cursing his inability to hold his liquor. It'd been worse before, he wasn't dying, but it certainly wasn't his idea of a perfect day. And it was going to be a long one.

"Hey, man! What's up?"

Jon flinched at the sound of Alec's voice. "How come you always stalk me at my place?" He snarled angrily.

"Oh, sorry? Didn't know you were busy. And by the way, the door were open. Again."

"I'm not busy. Tried to write some but no luck," Jon shrugged. "Guess it's one of those days." He picked the bottle and closed the fridge door so he could face the bassist.

"I see," Alec nodded sympathetically and put one hand on his arm. "Everything's OK? You look like shit today."

"I don't need your pity but uhm... thanks," Jon laughed and winced at the pain it caused. "I just didn't sleep well last night."

"Too much booze? You were drinking like a pro, dude!" Alec patted him on the shoulder and grinned. "Didn't help to get you in a better mood, though."

"Then don't spoil it any more," Jon waved his hand impatiently. "I still have a few things to do today."

"OK, easy, hot shot! I'm not bumming around, either. Actually, dropped in to see Rich in the morning and he was not at all happy about it. It looked like he had a rough night, too, but that must've been another hot-blooded beauty of his! The guy's not wasting his time. You should have seen his mouth!" Alec chuckled, clearly amused. "Pretty sure that's why he left so early yesterday."

Jon coughed. "That's so sweet," he said sarcastically, "But dunno, we didn't talk much." He unscrewed the bottle and took a long swallow. "And I couldn't care less. Anyway, what brings you here because surely not the clever shit we're talking about right now?"

"Actually, yes and no."

"What do you mean?" Jon eyed him curiously.

"You know, I've been one of the regulars on the Jersey bar circuit for some time now and I've seen lots of cool cats out there. I have a pretty good nose for talented guys and a wide range of contacts to help you out. There's this one drummer I want you to meet. He's insane!"

Alec noticed with satisfaction that Jon focused all his attention on him now. He paused for a while before he continued, trying to keep the excitement out of his voice. "And the good news is that they're playing in the Vault tonight!"

Jon rubbed his chin. "Sounds good, why not? But can't see what it has to do with this situation."

"Well, my band is playing there, too. And since you and Rich finally met, it should be less awkward than last time. I swear, what the hell got into you?! I actually thought for a moment that it all would go wrong for some reason."

"If you had given me the fucking lift home, it wouldn't have been awkward," Jon hissed out, more annoyed than he wanted to admit. He took a deep breath to calm himself down. "See, I've already told you that. I can't picture him playing his bluesy notes in a rock and roll band, that's it! And he's got some nerve, couldn't really take to him. Sorry, I know he's your buddy but just not my kind of people."

Alec frowned, puzzled by Jon's answer.

"He's one of the nicest guys I've ever met, honestly. Well, he might have come across as arrogant but wait until you get to know him better. We all have worse days," he threw up his hands. "I don't know, shit happens to everybody. In fact, recently he's been so far away that sometimes when we're at the rehearsal, I'm wondering what's going on with him but he won't tell me."

Jon didn't respond. Try as he might, he couldn't lose the knot that twisted his guts. The memory of their first encounter flashed before his eyes; the memory that wouldn't fade but still tingle a spark to his bones. He groaned and clapped his palms over his temples, the emotions intensifying the dull headache. After all, he was getting tired of Alec's shit.

"God, this thing is going to explode! Listen, thanks for help, just need some rest. I'll do whatever you want, just leave me alone for a second, please," he gave Alec an apologizing look and nudged him towards the door.

"OK, OK, I was about to leave anyway. You sure you're gonna make it to the Vault tonight? Sheesh! That's a pretty bad hangover, man!" Alec asked, watching him carefully.

"Yeah, I'm gonna be fine by then, thanks. I'll call you later. See you there."

Jesus, I'm screwed.

Chapter 9

It was already dark outside when Jon stepped into the smoke-filled club and headed straight for the crowded bar area. He ordered a beer and kept looking around, waiting for Alec to show up. Not that he was in a hurry or anything, quite the opposite. Alec was an old trouser and knew his ways like no other so he decided to trust the older man's guts. He needed a band and he needed it badly.

He almost jumped in his seat when he felt somebody tapping his back.

"Jonny! Good to see you! Now... is your pain any better?" Alec asked, trying to shout over the other people. He was flushed and had this face-splitting grin that made it obvious to Jon the small guy had already downed a few. And probably snorted some, too.

"A few pills and I'm ready to kill again," Jon smirked and took a gulp of his beer. "So, where's your band?"

"Ah, crap. This one dude in the other band turned the volume up too much or something and blew his amp and now we're stuck. We were supposed to start twenty minutes ago but those fuckers are still fixing their shit."

"Need to clear your ears out, man. The boys are almost finished with packing their toys so get your ass on stage and help us out, if you please." Richie appeared out of nowhere, a small smirk playing on his lips as he was drawing on a cigarette.

"What about you? Just standing there and looking pretty?"

Alec sounded offended and Richie tried not to laugh.

"I'll be back in a second."

When Alec finally walked away, Jon's mouth went dry. They were left alone and it made him rather uncomfortable, the weird sensations just wouldn't wear off.

Fuck.

"Hi, Jon."

Jon fought the urge to pull his cap deeper over his eyes and suddenly became very interested in sliding his thumb up and down the mug handle.

"Hi."

He winced at how raspy his voice sounded. He could almost taste bile at the back of his throat.

"I wasn't expecting to see you here."

“It's Alec,” Jon muttered and then cleared his throat. “It was his idea.”

“Nice. I’ve surely underestimated his persuasive skills. He’s clearly better at matchmaking than his bass playing,” Richie gave a wry, quick hiss of a laugh and this was what made Jon finally look up.

His eyes automatically landed on the bruised, puffy bottom lip and the dark pink shade surrounding the bite. He frowned at the sight, strangely mesmerized, his mind devoid of any thought. Only when he registered the curious look on Richie’s face, he snapped out of it.

“Listen, I’m sorry,” he said softly. “But you fucking provoked me.”

Richie leaned down and said in a hushed whisper: “It was going better when we didn't do so much talking.”

There was an irritating undertone about the way he talked to him and Jon noticed he was starting to lose his cool again. He clenched his jaw angrily.

“Today I'd put a fist to that.”

“The fact you didn't just shows how lucky I am, I guess.”

Jon felt a flush of heat creeping up his face. “You’re fucking clueless,” he said through gritted teeth and gave the dark-haired man a challenging stare.

“Stop trying to control everything and fucking let go! You did once. You surely made it obvious for me. Every fucking inch of you,” Richie answered slowly, pronouncing each word, then straightened up, that enigmatic smile plastered firmly on his face again. “But it’s okay, I found a good match. Sorry, gotta go.”

Chapter 10

And then Jon found himself sitting in the audience, the raucous noise of obnoxiously drunk men spreading through the whole place and bouncing against the walls, though this time it felt like sitting in the eye of a hurricane or swimming underwater with muffled cries coming from outside. He was experiencing the weirdest déjà vu, listening to that song with mismatched lyrics that still didn't make sense to him, and reliving their last conversation. He wasn't lying nor he wasn't avoiding the truth. He always knew what he wanted, forging ahead with a clear vision and steady focus on his goals. And now he was just scared. Scared of his little, well-organized world being shattered to pieces; scared of letting a stranger blow it all from the inside. Yet, oh, did he want to go – run – against the wind and get carried away. So maybe it wasn't that much of fear itself as the danger of the proverbial forbidden fruit, the thickness of unspeakable secrets yet to be revealed. He was developing this peculiar feeling in the pit of his stomach; a feeling beyond shock and sickness. Anger and wariness gradually gave way to something less defined, yet powerful; conflicting inner voices his persistent nature just couldn't and wouldn't ignore. He would either conquer or submit to them, there was nothing in between.

Challenge accepted.

“God, I’m so pumped! Gonna grab a beer. You’d better move your ass and fetch yourself some, I’m not turning into your babysitter!” Alec yelled and rushed to the bar. “And you’d better hurry. The guys are playing in a moment and you’re gonna love it!”

Jon’s expression twisted into a smirk as he looked at Richie, who raised his eyebrows and pointed his thumb at Alec disappearing in the crowd. The moment their eyes met and that bruised mouth curled up in a sly smile, the shadows of his doubts vanished like frightened birds taking flight off the ground.

“You’re boring with your setlist. Killing the guy again, seriously?”

“I knew you'd like it,” Richie replied with a crooked smile, the wound clearly giving him a little hell. “And I have something for you.”

Intrigued, Jon watched him take a crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket.

“What is it?”

Richie smiled. “It’s a song.”

“A song?”

“Thought it might interest you.”

Jon studied the first few verses and slowly began to understand.

“It’s really good. Is it yours?”

“It’s something I’ve been writing since I learnt how to play the guitar. I’ve always wanted to be more than just a guitarist. Maybe we could give it a go. I mean, try writing a song together. For a start.”

Before Jon could respond, he saw Alec out of the corner of his eye. He moved his hand forward to give it back but Richie closed his fingers over his palm.

“I want you to read the whole thing.”

Jon nodded, folded the paper in half and tucked it back in his pocket just in time Alec returned, laughing loudly.

“The show will knock your socks off! You’re so going to thank me, man!” He raised his mug in a toast.

Richie gave Jon a funny look and he had to crack up. “He’s putting my band together.”

It was only then that he realized what it meant and smile froze on his lips. His dream began to take shape and the thought alone sent shivers up and down his spine.

And when the show was over, he knew it was this guy or no one. Now he only had to convince him to give up on everything and take a chance and trust his vision as if his own heart wasn’t already a stormy sea itself...

Chapter 11

Jon hardly had any sleep at night and the day dragged mercilessly . He tried to get some work done but couldn't concentrate on anything, getting weirdly restless as the hours went by. Clutching a cup of lukewarm coffee in one hand and holding a pen in the other, he was staring at a clean sheet of paper in front of him.

Fuck!

He swore wordlessly and put the pen down, having realized he wasn't in the mood for writing. He stood up and started pacing back and forth, trying to figure out his next move. It turned out Alec had already dragged Tico to one of his shows and apparently he impressed the experienced drummer so much he didn't have to be persuaded for too long. This short Cuban guy had this calm, big brother aura around him; a man of few words but when he spoke, his deep voice carried great maturity and wisdom.

The smooth course of events thrilled him to the bone; his band was almost complete. Almost. He knew it still missed the key member and it drove him crazy. Not that there weren't any talented shredders in the area, they would come up to him after every show, but nobody seemed to be the perfect foil for him. Great rock songs were his ticket to stardom and although he got the record deal on his own, he knew he'd always wanted a gang of brothers having his back. At the same time, he didn't try hard to disguise a sense of exasperation, he could almost hear hours ticking away around him each time he turned down another six-string player who could only mimic some current tunes. It was no mystery to him the singer and lead guitarist duo was the creative heart and soul of many rock outfits, the songwriting team whose dynamics made the things work or flop. God, he didn't want another copycat; what he needed was a guy who could do more than just pluck the strings.

With a heavy sigh, Jon turned his attention back to the squared notebook spread on the table; its blank pages throwing a challenge to him as he approached the scattered papers and flopped on the chair. His fingers blindly found the crumpled sheet with song lyrics Richie gave him the night before and toyed with it for a while. Out of curiosity, he finally decided to read it, letting his eyes skim over the neat handwriting. His chest tightened when it occurred to him he'd just read one of the most beautiful, profound poems; oddly enough, it spoke to his heart, giving the answer to questions he never dared to say out loud.

*And now my life is like a storm
Growing stronger every day
Like the unrelenting wind
That comes to blow our lives away
So I live each day like I know it's my last
If there is no future there must be no past
Now I know the answers never meant a thing
And with each instant that I breathe
I feel the joy that life can bring*

*Come along with me, come along with me
Seek the truth, you shall not find another lie.*

His fingers trembled slightly but he chose to ignore it, the words coming to life with the quiet sound of the pen scribbling the lines.

*So you think you'd just live and let go
Of heaven's heavy door,
As the days and nights go by
One after another, as in a dream,
Before the chances dry up and die
And the truth's worth no more than a lie.*

Jon stopped abruptly and blinked at the verses as if he couldn't believe what he'd just written. He gripped the pen so hard it snapped. He half-closed his eyes and breathed through his nose, trying to calm himself down. Only when the stickiness of the ink started seeping into the skin of his palm, did he open his eyes and slowly relaxed his grip. Blankly, he was watching a black puddle form on the sheet of paper, staining it and blurring the lyrics.

Chapter 12

You're fucking sick and perverted.

Jon squeezed his eyes shut, trying to hush the dark voice that kept telling him how disgusting it was, pushing him deeper and deeper into shame and guilt. He knew he needed to act tough because this is how you handled yourself in New Jersey. Not a good place for mommy's boys; if you wanted something, you needed to face it head-on. He was once called out a faggot in public because his hair was too long, his clothes too loud. The only thing he remembered was hitting the guy so hard he broke his nose but what came quite a surprise was that he didn't feel much better afterwards, the pain on the inside more acute than bruises when he eventually felt the punch back to his face.

He wasn't gay. He wasn't anything they thought of him. An enigmatic figure wearing dark glasses all the time, not particularly good at sports, doing even worse at school; always buried deep in his own thoughts, he didn't care if he was popular or not as long as they didn't attack him personally. His wild nature wouldn't take an insult without fighting back. So he did.

The memory of his past lovers started flooding his mind in a series of flashbacks and soon he felt hot and sweaty. It was a boozy, embarrassing danse macabre of women much older than him. Like bad dreams he couldn't forget, those moments would still haunt him once in a while, even though he tried to erase them with having a casual sex with girls he thought he actually fancied. None of them would capture his attention for more than a few weeks before he started feeling that suffocating emptiness again, his insatiable desire never satisfied.

He'd met this one girl at school who was unlike any other, wild and fascinating, and thought that maybe this time it would be different but he still couldn't fully commit to her; not that she demanded any declarations, either. She was understanding and giving him a lot of space he needed but he was sure as hell that nothing came for free and he would have to pay the price sooner or later. Pushing those uneasy feelings to the back of his head, he decided to focus all his efforts on his dream of playing rock music, and kept writing songs like crazy, covering pages and walls with lyrics of heartbreak, unnamed longing and desire for freedom. He didn't even know when it all started for real, how his mother's wishes became his own, but he felt the stage was where he belonged. His church where he commanded the audience and drank from them, high on their energy. Yes, it felt like making love. And yes, he loved seducing them, even if was a small crowd of drunk, sweaty guys.

Drunk, sweaty guys.

The passing moment of realization hit him in the gut and caused him to come back to the present with an almost physical wrench. He was already sick of it but couldn't stop breaking it down, stripping it away, as if his life depended on it. Like he had something to prove. Or deny.

Weirdly agitated, he pushed himself away from the table and crossed the room to the window facing the street. He watched people swarming in all directions, rushing somewhere, so self-absorbed they almost crashed into one another. Nobody cared about what he was going through because they were busy fighting their own personal battles, living their own lives. Living in their own sins.

What are you afraid of?

Richie's question echoed in his head and he chuckled humorlessly to himself. The questions were always easier, even if there was only one answer. The Answer. Like the title of that little poem he gave him.

Jon looked outside again, the small crowd of strangers still bustling about in uncontrolled chaos, unaware of his inner conflicts. He clenched his fists, took a deep breath, and slowly unclenched them.

“And what if I told you I wanted you, too?”

The words broke out of his body in a strangled whisper that ignited a fire within him, spreading a wonderful pain through his veins. And like that, he knew he was gone.

Chapter 13

Jon was observing his bandmates setting up their equipment in the dusty hall, so caught up in the excitement of being able to explore his craft with such fine musicians that he flinched upon hearing his name.

“Jon!”

He turned abruptly and saw Alec approaching him in long strides.

“Sorry, I’m late. You didn’t start without me?” The small man gasped out and doubled over, trying to catch his breath. “There were some problems with my car and had to look for help. I’m telling you, I should have got rid of that fucking shitbox long ago!”

“It’s OK, man. We’re still getting things fixed here,” Jon said and patted his arm. “You see...,” he paused. “I’ve been thinking, um, of getting in touch with Richie. Do you have his number, maybe?” He asked, trying to sound casually, but somehow couldn’t get over the awkwardness. Alec looked up at him, suddenly interested, and studied his face for a brief moment. Jon felt his cheeks grew weirdly hot under his close scrutiny. “What?”

Alec’s lips curled up in a wide grin. “Nothing. Just took you forever, dude! Let’s phone him right away! Or do you want to make a call in private?”

He laughed when his sarcastic response earned him nothing but a scowl and obediently scribbled down the number. Jon was damn sure he never wanted to strangle that little clown as much as at this very moment.

"Thank God there’s no traffic!" Jon mumbled to himself as he was driving down the almost empty street and looking at his watch nervously. He was late to the rehearsal but he knew he’d make up some excuse for it. He’d finally called Richie the night before and asked him to come and play. He still remembered how he clutched the receiver like a lifeline, dizzy with anticipation. It was more than just arranging a meeting or casual hanging out. They had this dirty little secret between them that made everything so much complicated but oh, so much more exciting. Richie agreed to a writing session at his house afterwards and they both knew it also meant picking up where they left off. Waves of tingle hit him in all the right places and he needed to laugh out loud to relieve the tension. Gripping the wheel a little tighter, he pulled into the parking lot behind the club and turned off the engine.

When he entered the place, he could see from afar that the guys were playing some obscure song, clearly having a lot of fun. Richie was in his element, rocking the stage and doing impossible stuff on his guitar, in the middle of improvising an unusually melodic solo; the whole band sounded incredibly tight. Jon smiled to himself. He wasn’t a poor guitarist, could play some tunes, but he knew his skills were limited; he prayed for his instrument to speak to him, to carry the unsung melodies in his head, and there it was, right in front of his eyes. It was like a revelation, he realized. Amazed, he stood by the door until the last sounds faded

and it got quiet again; slowly, he came closer and started nodding his head and clapping his hands.

“Well, well, what can I say? You’re hired.”

Jon met Richie’s eyes, shining like two black diamonds, and seeing that wide, gum showing grin, he couldn’t help it but smile back.

“Thanks, man!” The brunette reached over and high-fived the outstretched hand, lacing his fingers for a brief moment. Jon felt a ridiculous flutter in his chest and quickly let go, breaking the gaze.

The rest of the guys were cheering and patting each other’s backs, causing quite a commotion.

“So that means the history is being made right here!” Alec cried excitedly. “My idea is simple. Let’s go for a beer and celebrate. Jonny?”

Jon hesitated but the feeling of expectation and excitement was too thick in the air to hope for going back to work anyway. “Why not?” He finally replied with a shrug. “Gotta tell Mick we’re done for today so he can open the bar earlier.” His words were met with a round of more cheers, half hugs and high fives. Even though he avoided looking at his new guitarist, he felt his stare burning holes in the back of his head.

They were leaving the room one after another, everybody in high spirits, nudging and pushing each other playfully, when Jon felt his and Richie’s hands casually brush; he could swear there were sparks of electricity flickering on and off just beneath the surface of the skin where their fingers met. And he decided he didn’t want to fight it anymore.

Chapter 14

“Thank you for dinner, Mrs. Bongiovi. It was absolutely delicious.”

Jon was standing by the window and observing Richie and his mother exchanging pleasantries. It was interesting to see their interaction; he had to admit with a certain sense of relief that their first meeting went surprisingly well. Eventually, the door closed behind her and it got quiet again.

“Beer?” Jon suggested casually and seeing the other man nod, he grabbed two bottles from the fridge.

“The spaghetti was something,” Richie said appreciatively once he and Jon left the kitchen and were heading towards Jon’s room. “My mom’s a great cook but that sauce, man,” he threw up his hands and shook his head. Jon laughed.

“Must be the Italian thing but it’s kind of my dad’s specialty. I can’t cook to save my life.”

Richie put on a fake pout. “Aww man, another thing I’m better at. I make awesome omelets, among other things.”

Jon sized him up with a frown. “I’ve never heard there was anything more.”

Richie beamed smugly. “It’s one of my many gifts.”

“A man of hidden talents. Who would have thought?” Jon snorted incredulously.

“Want to find out?” Richie asked challengingly, serious all of a sudden. Jon felt he started to feel hot under his intense stare as the charged question was hanging in the air between them.

“Umm, you’ve been full of yourself lately, don’t you think?” Jon rasped out nervously and pressed the handle to open the door. He was trying to keep his composure, even though his heart was beating wildly in his chest. He really wanted to get down to writing and see whether they’re on the same page, so to speak. The problem was, the already familiar tingle just refused to go.

Richie put his guitar down and looked about the room, the many posters and song lyrics on the walls instantly catching his interest. He walked up and studied the verses carefully with his face scrunched up in concentration.

“You know, normally I write songs down in a writing pad.”

“Huh?” Richie asked absent-mindedly and turned back to Jon. “Well, either way is okay,” he cleared his throat and pointed to the wall. “They are pretty good. I have some on me somewhere, too.” He grabbed his handbag and took his notebook out. “Thought you’d like to have a look,” he smiled sheepishly and put it on the desk.

“Sure,” Jon replied with a shrug. “And I really liked the song you gave me last time. Must say it did make me think, even though I don’t really get along with God and all that religious stuff. Guess I haven’t found all the answers yet.”

Richie’s face creased into a soft smile. “Would you like to listen to it?”

“Oh, now?” Jon blinked. “Yeah, sure. You can sit here,” he waved his hand awkwardly to the bed and sort of stood over him as there wasn’t much space to sit down. He watched the brunette take his guitar out of the case and tune it, before those long fingers began strumming a sweet melody that fitted the lyrics perfectly. Richie closed his eyes and focused on the song, so lost in it he only opened them as soon as he’d finished to meet Jon’s intense gaze. The man didn’t say a word, just looked at him with an odd expression on his face and Richie wondered whether his song made the right impression. He was about to ask when Jon finally spoke up.

“Title.”

Richie’s eyes widened in obvious confusion and Jon had to smile. He himself was in a strange place now; the song sparked something in him that he hadn’t been able to let go, so he knew he needed to act fast before that feeling consumed him entirely.

“I always start with a title.”

“Uh huh,” Richie smiled back tentatively. “That means it wasn’t bad?”

Jon’s smile grew wider.

“No, not bad at all. But before we start...,” he paused and reached out for the beer. “Let’s get it flowing.”

The cold beverage felt nice at the back of his throat after he swallowed it with a big gulp; soon, he got his beer buzz on, warmth spreading through his body, bringing a welcome distraction to the emotional chaos of thoughts thronging in his soul. He knew he’d need to deal with them, but not just yet. That could wait.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Fate has its strange ways when it comes to love. The true and crazy love...

“So what do you want to write about?”

Richie asked and scooted a little closer to Jon, who was sitting on the bed with the pad spread open in his lap. A couple of beers in, and Jon started to feel a little more mellow. Judging from Richie’s flushed face and his lopsided grin, he wasn’t the only one.

“Dunno. Girls?”

“Fine by me.” Richie wiggled his eyebrows suggestively and they both laughed.

“Just no love poems, okay?” Jon squinted his eyes and rubbed his forehead. “I’m not in a mood for romantic shit and agonizing over broken hearts today.”

Richie peered at him intently. “Why? Is it something personal?”

Jon frowned and tightened his lips, clearly upset. “Maybe.”

“Okay, no problem. We can spice things up,” Richie suggested lightheartedly. “Let’s say, when you meet a gorgeous girl in a bar and she’s wearing that tight little dress of hers and all you can think of is if she lets you take her home.”

A little smirk was playing in the corners of his mouth and Jon thought that he’d rather do something else right now. Or somebody else.

“Jon?”

He flinched and saw Richie looking at him questioningly. The consumed alcohol apparently slowed down his reactions because he didn’t even realize he was caught blatantly staring. Promptly, he averted his gaze, thick strands of auburn hair conveniently hiding his face.

“What are you thinking about?” Richie asked and gently touched his arm.

Why you?

“Do you believe in God?”

Richie seemed taken aback. “I believe there’s a higher force who controls everything. And who loves us. I believe it’s a personal relationship,” he said carefully.

Jon smiled to himself, his face still obscured by his hair. “Does he talk to you?”

After a while, Richie replied slowly. “I guess it’s okay between us. He’s pretty understanding.”

Jon turned his head and looked up at him, his eyes sparkling with genuine interest.

“What do you mean? That he doesn’t make you a pile of ash when you break another commandment? Oh, especially when you’re kneeling at nights but not with your hands up to pray.”

Richie frowned, still clearly stunned. “I’ve had my lapses. I’m only human.”

Jon’s face darkened. “He makes unbaptized children go to hell. Hope you know same-sex attraction is a mortal sin,” his mouth twisted mockingly. “You’re damned either way. Catholic faith makes it all so much more difficult. ”

He saw Richie study him with an odd smile for a while and then heard him speak up again. “So it’s all about your religious guilt now? Funny how fast we switched from hot girls to hell fires.” Jon’s mouth twitched as if he wanted to say something but Richie kept talking. “Let me tell you something. If you fall for somebody and it comes from a pure place, it can’t be wrong. You can’t be wrong. When you meet someone and your heartbeat changes - and the other person feels the same - then you fucking go for it because there’s too much pain in this fucking world to let it slip away. Do you think this is so much different with us? Just because you and me -“ He got closer to his face, so close that Jon could smell alcohol on his breath, “happen to be two dudes? Does it make you sick?”

Jon flinched at his bold approach but did not back away. Richie’s words reminded him of everything that he wanted to forget ,and yet something he brought up himself. He realized the passive aggression in him had to be some self-defense mechanism he couldn’t fully understand or control.

A moment of clarity cut through the muddle in his mind and almost knocked him out. No matter how hard he tried to explain it to himself, to make sense of it all, the feeling was unmistakable. He’d felt it before but never like that, never towards another man. The weird tingling sensation was spreading in a warm wave throughout his body and down his groin now, his ache morphing into pure physical need. He found himself in an unknown territory with blind desire as his only guide and that both excited and terrified him.

Chapter 16

“I’m not gay.”

Jon held Richie’s stare challengingly, although their proximity made him feel weirdly self-conscious. He wasn’t sure why he even brought it up, it was such a lame response but he just knew he had to react somehow. He was painfully aware he couldn’t quite get his emotions or desires under control so at least he could decide what was said out loud and what was better left unsaid. At the same time, the high walls he’d built around himself to repress the unwanted, sometimes disturbing memories and images, started crumbling, causing a strange mixture of pain and pleasure slip through the cracks.

“Jon, seriously? I thought we’ve already cleared that up,” Richie straightened up and ran his fingers through his hair, letting out a long, irritated sigh. “As you well know, neither am I. A funny thing, though. It seems I have to be reminded of that every time we meet. Let me jog your memory - it’s not like I was hitting on you; hell, you couldn’t be more obvious that night. I just decided right then to go ahead and play along.”

Richie drew closer again and Jon noticed the intensity on his face, his brown eyes so dilated they went almost completely black. “Damn it, all I know I’m attracted to you. You fascinate me but not as a woman would do. It’s hard to explain. It’s just there and won’t go away,” he stopped talking to swallow hard, the forced confessions clearly giving him hell. “I had my doubts too, but I’m done with agonizing over it, like you’d said before. I know what I want, what’s on my fucking mind every single day now. I just need you to tell me what you fucking want. You’d just let me join your band, invited me over to your house, and now you’re getting defensive all over again. Man, you’re making it all so complicated I’m already sick and tired of playing cat and mouse. You’re fighting me... like you hated me but not quite,” Richie croaked and Jon could tell it was more hurt than anger in his voice.

A tense atmosphere build between them as they continued to sit there in awkward silence. Richie’s words were like a slap in the face because they were so true; Jon had to blink away the blurriness that was distorting the room around him, then suddenly found himself speaking up in a strangled whisper that sounded so strange to his ears.

“We were fucking drunk.”

“So what? We’re fucking drunk now,” Richie managed a forced laugh as if he’d just heard a stupid joke. “Seriously, who are you kidding, man? We fucking made out in that dive! If you didn’t want to see me again, you wouldn’t have made the fucking phone call. But you did!” He shook his head and then looked up with a cheeky twinkle in his eye. “This time I won’t make any moves on you, though. I’m not going to risk another angry bite. This one took long enough to heal.”

“Huh?” Jon gasped, clearly taken off-guard. No, he couldn’t deny there was a sexual attraction between them it because that was all he was thinking about since they met in that smoky club the other day. Now, however, he felt a wave of anger run through him, setting his

blood on fire and flushing his face. He didn't know whether it was the tone of Richie's voice, his smugness or both, but he needed to finally let it out.

"You have no fucking idea," he drawled with a clear edge in his voice. "Fuck, I'm trying to figure things out and I'm so very sorry it takes me so bloody long. Guess I must be more careful next time so that I won't send the wrong signals too quickly. Maybe I know it already, maybe I don't. It makes me wonder if it's really something so new to you because you seem so fucking comfortable?" He snarled, narrowing his eyes.

"Turning tables now, Jon?" Richie replied wearily and looked down at his hands. "Listen, it isn't easy for me, either. I wanted you from the start and thought you wanted me, too. Now I'm not so sure anymore. I'm sorry, maybe I've been wrong all along."

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

I can't believe it took me almost a year to update this little story *shakes her head*

Jon frowned and pressed his lips in a thin line. Things were going in the wrong direction to the point of absurdity; they were speaking to each other but at the same time miscommunicating totally, and he knew he was partly responsible for this mess. No, *entirely* responsible, he realized, even if it came from a place he couldn't fully understand. Richie was just trying to keep up with him and maintain a fairly steady course through the stormy waters of their strange relationship, while he himself kept taking one step forward, then two steps back. Richie had never made it a secret that he was more than ready to go with his instincts, but right now, with his head down and sagged shoulders, all his cockiness seemed to have faded away.

Jon was looking at that big mop of black hair in front of him and wondering why it hurt so much all of a sudden, why that gripping pain was spreading slowly across his chest. It wasn't his fault. It wasn't anybody's fault. Richie couldn't be more open about what he really wanted, what he felt towards him, and that was enough of a confession. Jon didn't have to ask questions because he already knew the answer. And that was, in fact, what terrified him the most. He wasn't sure if he was ready for all that what was going to happen if he actually acted on it – but then, if he wasn't, they wouldn't have gone that far.

Here they were, drunk and confused, holding onto something that was apparently new to both of them, and what couldn't be compared to those exciting one-night stands or short-term flings with no strings attached. It wasn't love but the agony of lust and fear was real. Even if it didn't mean they were committed in any way, just going with the flow, it carried a great risk of failure, a real danger of complete disaster. And just because they both felt it, did it mean it was true? Or right?

Because he couldn't deny he was aroused, even now, in the middle of their slightly drunken tug-of-war conversation. And it felt nothing like the thrill when he stole his good pal's girlfriend and all that sneaking around made the forbidden fruit even sweeter -- the wonderful promise of her letting him inside with stars being the only witnesses to their lovemaking, two outlaws in love against the whole world. No, it was nothing like that now but as intoxicating, a hard drug he'd barely tried but already got hooked on.

I'd like to jump, but I'm afraid to hit the ground.

Jon stirred slightly in his seat but that was enough to have those dark eyes on him again. Without looking back he focused his attention on the half-written pages in his lap but could

swear his accelerated heartbeat would betray him as he was about to speak up. It was his turn now, he knew.

"You came there that night..." Jon heard himself say hoarsely, "Because I wanted you to," he cleared his throat, absentmindedly flattening some invisible creases in the paper spread out in front of him. "And I did want to see you again."

The words are out loud.

There was silence for a while, so Jon slowly glanced up to meet Richie's piercing gaze. Richie was listening to him, clearly intrigued, but said nothing, waiting for him to continue. Jon clenched his jaw to hide his irritation, fighting the urge to stop explaining himself even further. He absolutely hated it; somehow he would always find a way to apologize or thank others without saying too much, relying more on actions than words. Now, however, he couldn't really maneuver his way out of this conversation. He felt like he owed it to his new guitarist to be honest. So he did.

Chapter 18

“It’s just I’ve been thinking a lot and realized having afterthoughts doesn’t really help at all,” Jon paused, frowning in deep concentration. “Suddenly, I have little control on what’s happening and it fucking pisses me off. You know, I read once a great quote that I’m trying to follow. ‘Fortune favors a man with purpose.’ See, I always have a plan, a goal I fucking make sure I ‘m going to reach each day. But this... this situation is like walking around in the dark. I...”

“Not bad,” Richie cut him off and nodded slowly, pushing out his lower lip in full understanding. “I’m not a slob, either. Got my bands signed up, wrote a few songs, founded my own record label, I could go on and on. I know I fit your band, I can see myself doing a good job there,” he nodded again to confirm his words. “And speaking about darkness. Well, I’ve read a great one too. I can’t remember who said that, but I liked it. ‘Clarity of purpose is like a lighthouse in darkness.’ Life isn’t about being safe and secure and always two steps forward. It’s about not knowing but still believing you can make it through. Call it faith, call it love, whatever. When I can’t see with my own eyes, I let my heart guide me. It never let me down.”

“I think we’ve had this conversation before,” Jon observed semi-sarcastically but couldn’t ignore this warm swelling spreading across his chest. He took to the man faster he wanted to admit but all those mixed feelings ultimately made the journey longer.

“That’s fine. Life is sometimes having the same convo over and over,” Richie shrugged but Jon could see the smirk playing at his lips and genuinely smiled back, wordlessly confirming the mutual understanding.

And just then, the front door cracked open and Matt’s joyous laughter pealed in the house. Jon and Richie shot a quick look just before the doorknob turned and the little boy barged into the room. Stopped in his tracks, he glanced suspiciously at Richie.

“Do you remember I told you about my band? It’s Richie, my guitarist.”

The boy looked at Richie under the brow, frowning, and hesitantly moved forward.

“Hi, Matt. Nice to meet you.”

Matt sized him up.

“Hi.” Richie shook his little hand.

Jon smiled at the scene.

“Hey, Mattie. I got you something.”

The eight-year-old squealed in excitement but Jon put his hand on his shoulder.

“Go to the kitchen and wait for me there, OK? It’s a surprise.”

Matt nodded his head eagerly and ran out of the room.

“Having younger siblings surely looks like a lot of fun,” Richie smirked and started to get up. “I think I should go now. If you wanna write some more, we could meet up at my place. Empty house, my folks are out till six p.m. so...”

“Yeah, sounds like a better idea,” Jon agreed. “I’ll give you a call.”

They were facing each other awkwardly for a while before they went into a half-hug.

“Thanks,” Richie said softly and smiled at him. “I think I already have an idea for a song.”

Jon looked at him questioningly.

“It’s a surprise.”

They both broke into laughter.

“You weren’t kidding when you said you were a quick study,” Jon chuckled appreciatively.

“I’m a natural. Self-taught genius. Those fingers are magic,” Richie said jokingly in his favourite fake accent and wiggled his hand in the air. “The things you’re yet to discover ‘bout me,” he grinned broadly.

Jon could feel the heat rising to his face and wondered how those seemingly innocent words could turn into something so dirty in his mind.

Or maybe they were meant to be this way.

He was thinking about it long time after Richie had left, lying awake in his bed as sleep would not come.

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Fate has its strange ways when it comes to love. The true and crazy love...

Jon was standing in front of a modest house in the middle of nowhere and wondering what the hell Richie was doing. He was about to ring the bell for the tenth time when the door finally opened and he saw a tangled mess of dark hair. Richie grinned and gestured for him to come in.

“Hey, man. You’re early.”

“Wake up sleepy head,” Jon said and looked suggestively at his watch. “Do you call one in the afternoon early? You surely don’t look ready to take on the world today,” he chuckled as he brushed past Richie to enter the house.

“I’ve been wide awake for hours, couldn’t sleep much.”

Jon decided to ignore the obvious in Richie’s words but couldn’t help feeling nervous, the ridiculous butterflies in his stomach again. He followed Richie to the small room on the left, which turned out to be his bedroom. It was a bit stuffy and dark blinds effectively blocked too much sunshine entering the window.

He cast a quick glance around. A few KISS posters and cute pin-up girls in their sexy swimming costumes on the wall, a messy heap of clothes in the corner, countless records on the shelves and two guitars on a wooden stand next to a small desk. There was no sign of a possible female intruder and Jon felt weirdly relieved.

“Sorry for the mess. Tried to tidy it up a bit but it’s a losing battle, man,” Richie let out a nervous laugh and made a vague gesture. “There’s not much space in the room but you can leave your guitar here.”

“it’s OK, I’m not here for inspection,” Jon chuckled and leaned his guitar against the bed. “And you said we’re gonna write songs in your basement, anyway.”

“Well, the acoustics are so much better downstairs. Luckily, there’s been no rain lately so it shouldn’t be too cold there. And I have a few beers to get us warm,” Richie grinned. “I have something stronger than that if you want, too. My grandpa makes some really good moonshine.”

Jon raised his eyebrows. “Hmm, that’s some good shit, man. I don’t think I’ve ever tasted the real thing. My family is more into wine. And pasta. Very Italian,” he laughed when he saw

Richie waving his hands in some weird kind of a sign language. “Come on, I was born in America, my folks speak English. My Spanish classes were bad enough.”

“Muy mal, muy mal, amigo” Richie said in this weird accent of his and Jon had to roll his eyes.

“You said you’re from an immigrant family too. I’ll bet you can’t say shit in that language, either.”

Richie pretended to be offended. “Well, my grandparents are from Poland and they do speak Polish at home. By no means am I fluent in it but I know a few words.”

“Like what? I’d say ‘fuck’ is high on the list. And maybe ‘cheers’.”

They both laughed.

“You’re close,” Richie observed sarcastically. “Try this. ‘Daj buzi.’ “

“Daj buzi?” Jon asked incredulously. “It sounds like absolutely nothing.”

This time it was Richie who rolled his eyes. “Come on, just have a guess.”

Jon held his chin thoughtfully. “Do I get a prize if I guess correctly?”

Richie laughed out loud. “Let’s say you will.”

Jon rubbed his chin again. “Is it something you’d tell your mom when she catches you masturbating?”

He couldn’t help grinning when Richie threw back his head and roared with laughter.

“No!” He yelled and rubbed his eyes, amazed at how much it amused him. “Try again, you dork. It’s a term of endearment, something your grandma would say.”

“So it’s not ‘Are you hungry?’ then,” Jon grinned. “Dunno, ‘I love you’ maybe?”

“That would be too easy,” Richie shook his head. “But you’re close. Like really close.”

Jon saw Richie take a few steps towards him until they were both just inches apart. Subconsciously, he held his breath, staring into those burning dark eyes.

“It means ‘gimmie a kiss.’ It means ‘kiss me.’”

“Oh, OK. I was close,” Jon said lamely, his throat going dry. They just looked at each other like that for a while and he could feel his skin tingle, the familiar restlessness taking over him again. He somehow snapped out of this weird daze and swallowing hard, he rasped a soft ‘OK’ before turning away his head.

Richie seemed to regain his composure too because he got that forced smile on his face again.

“Well, you hungry? I was about to have lunch. My mom knew you were coming over so she cooked her signature dish,” he smiled almost bashfully.

Jon was never more thankful for this unexpected break. And although his stomach was in knots, Richie’s offer came as a relief. Before he made his way to the kitchen, he noticed a big picture above the door. It was Richie’s First Communion, a boy dressed in white surrounded by his family, that big smile on his face. Jon felt a twinge of regret for the old days when innocence was all he knew. All that made sense.

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Fate has its strange ways when it comes to love. The true and crazy love...

The kitchen was small and old-fashioned. It had to be around the size of the kitchen in his family house. He noticed the tiny windows overlooking the marsh as far as the eye could see, the avocado green wall phone, the porcelain salt and pepper shakers.

“So today’s special is spaghetti Bolognese. Only the original Italian ingredients,” Richie recited in an exaggerated accent. “Sir, may I take your order?”

Jon grinned. “Well, I guess I have no choice. I mean, yes, I’d like to make an order.”

Richie grinned back and stirred the sauce, the meat flavour filling Jon’s nostrils with wonderful smell.

“Tell your mom she’s the best cook,” he said appreciatively as Richie handed him a plate of steaming dish.

“You’ll have a chance to do it yourself, they should be here around 6,” Richie answered as he spooned himself another portion of pasta.

“Buon appetito!”

Jon only smiled before taking a mouthful of pasta into his mouth.

It wasn’t long before Richie showed him downstairs. In the dim light he noticed a small Formica table, a little electronic keyboard and some amps, a space heater buzzing, comfortably seated between the washing machine and the dryer. When he turned his head, he saw an old, ugly couch that sat in the corner, with a thick brown blanket draped on the back.

“So this is your personal space,” he mused as he moved towards the slightly teetering table.

“My own private down under. One day I’ll see the real thing,” Richie laughed and gestured around the room. “But seriously, it feels best when you smoke herb, play the guitar and let your fingers lead you somewhere you’ve never been. I sometimes light up some candles, too. You know, just create the right atmosphere.”

It wasn’t until Richie had finished talking that Jon caught sight of some them sitting on the shelf.

“Good lord, you're not actually buying scented candles, are you?” Jon let out a guffaw and watched, amused, how Richie’s face turned red.

“Yes, and what's wrong with that? I like them,” Richie’s voice trailed off as he ruffled his fingers through his hair, clearly annoyed. “My girlfriends never complained, either.”

Jon’s smile faded a little but he tried not to show how much he disliked the direction the things were going. “OK, fine, as long as they don’t smell like bubble gum they can’t do much harm,” he shrugged, hoping a little joke would clear the air. To his relief, he noticed Richie’s features softened a bit but he looked at him so suspiciously that Jon had to bite the insides of his cheeks not to laugh out loud.

“Douche,” Richie muttered, failing to stifle a smile. “ Wearing your mother’s earrings is OK but then making a fuss about a few candles? So, who’s into girly stuff now?”

“Come on, it’s fashion,” Jon shrugged again. “Hey, you need one, too! It’s so silly it would make you a little less uptight about things.”

They both roared with laughter at the absurdity of their argument.

“Fuck it! I actually have a better idea how to loosen up,” Richie wiggled his eyebrows and reached over to grab something that looked like a bottle filled with caramel liquid. He shook it almost in a victorious gesture.

“Ta-dah! Here is the magic potion I’ve told you about.”

Jon didn’t look convinced. “You sure it won’t kill me?”

“Do I look like a ghost to you?”

“OK, but then we’re back to work. We didn’t write anything last time and I don’t want to bum around.”

“Easy there, my notebook is ready. One generous swig and you’re a fucking poet, I’m telling you.”

Jon did as advised and almost choked to death. The vodka was burning his pipes like a fiery water but soon enough he felt a wonderful warmth spreading across his body.

“Told ya,” Richie laughed at Jon having another shot in one swift motion and choking again.

“It’s so fucking strong,” he burped. “Sorry.” He then frowned for a moment. “If we don’t write a single song today, you’re fired.”

“Haven’t even started out yet and already awfully bossy. Guess a lot of booze will come in handy.”

Jon giggled and slapped Richie’s arm, feeling the hard liquor already went to his head. “Stop talking shit man, and get ready. I’ll start. My title is ‘Burning’ because this vodka is burning like hell.”

“Burning for love sounds much better.”

“Hey, I like it! What rhymes with fire?”

“Desire?”

“Let’s have a twist here. No real love, just I dunno, sexual tension? No strings attached, just passion?”

“Like the girl is the victim, maybe a fantasy? She wants love but he can’t wait that long.”

“Make it a conversation between the two. I’ve been lied to, you been cheated…”

“I’ve been cried to, you been mistreated…”

The song was finished in no time and they looked at each other, amazed at how they communicated almost without words. Jon couldn’t really grasp what had just happened but he knew it was something special. He knew Richie felt it, too. He stretched out his hand as if he was in trance, squeezed Richie’s fingers and got a reassuring smile in return. It was the beginning.

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Fate has its strange ways when it comes to love. The true and crazy love...

Jon was looking down at the song lyrics in front of him, with a pen still poised above the pad of paper. They'd just finished another song and most of the bottle, a mixture of alcohol and strange excitement making him giddy for a moment. He glanced up and noticed Richie's flushed face, his dark eyes shining as he grinned broadly.

"Two songs, man. I think it deserves a celebration!" Richie raised his half-full glass.

Jon held up his drink and the glasses clinked loudly.

"Not bad for the first day," Jon affirmed and took a swig. The tippie didn't taste so strong anymore, going down smoothly as he swallowed. He did feel rather drunk but definitely not wasted, the blissful moment of not giving a shit suddenly enwrapping him. His dream of having a band wasn't a dream anymore. He had a solid team of talented musicians who wanted to follow his lead. And now he had a songwriting partner who understood him perfectly. The thought alone gave him an inexplicable sense of relief. He knew he wasn't alone in his fight anymore.

As if on cue, Richie strummed his guitar in a quick motion, smoothly changing the chords and a wonderful melody filled the room. Jon already knew Richie's fingers were capable of playing out the notes that dwelled in his head, delivering the message he wanted in their songs.

Their songs.

"Hey, I like this," Jon said casually as soon as Richie stopped playing. "The verses are short so the flow on this song is just perfect."

When it earned him a big grin in response, Jon couldn't help but mirror the smile.

"Umm, thanks. I do believe that the poetry of the chord progression should intertwine with the poetry of the lyrics," Richie agreed and put the guitar aside before he faced Jon again. "Unless, you know, want to show off, kinda masturbate on stage."

"Yeah, right," Jon rolled his eyes. "I thought you said you picked up the guitar to get the girls, not to jerk off in public."

Richie raised a brow. "Well, I don't think the two are mutually exclusive," he smirked. "And it only happens when you play that insane, face-melting guitar solo, which means I usually

get there at least once or twice a night.” The smug look on his face was clear evidence of that but before Jon was able to come up with a sassy remark, Richie cut him off.

“But honestly, you do a great job on the guitar, too. And you’re absolutely the best frontman I’ve ever seen. Totally owning the stage, having the audience in the palm of your hand. I...”

Richie’s voice trailed off, as though he just realized what he’d said. He pursed his lips and broke the eye contact but Jon observed him closely. Even in the dim interior of the basement he noted a burning shadow of blush creeping up those dimpled cheeks. And at that very moment it clicked to him.

Of course.

“You mean I’m good at seducing the audience?” Jon asked with an odd little smile on his face and waited until Richie looked back at him, astonished, his flirty comment apparently having caught him off guard.

They were staring at each other for a while, the former silliness giving way to something more serious all of a sudden. But since the question hung in the air so blatantly calling out to be answered, Jon found it difficult to pull himself out of this strange, sexually charged atmosphere. The consumed alcohol lowered his inhibitions so their physical proximity didn’t make him feel self-conscious anymore. The sense of newness didn’t wear off much but since they got to know each other better, the awkwardness of being two strangers turned into a surprisingly effective working relationship. Yet, he couldn’t deny the familiar undercurrent of tension that wouldn’t go away but was bubbling just under his skin. A silent but constant reminder of what happened at the very beginning. And what could happen just now.

Jon knew the next move was up to him. He could feel how his pulse quickened, how his throat got annoyingly dry. He swallowed and slowly stretched out his hand to touch Richie’s forearm resting on the table.

What happened next resembled a movie played frame by frame. Jon saw the gleam in Richie’s eyes and a little smile on his slightly parted lips but couldn’t tell who was the first to close the distance between them, he was so out of it. All he knew was the labyrinth of confusing thoughts was gone now and replaced with a warm hand that cupped his face and gently brushed the warm skin there. In fact, it was almost a burning sensation, it suddenly got so hot in the room. Or maybe his heightened senses picked up everything around him, not that it mattered anyway. Without breaking their eye contact, he felt the calloused fingers slowly find their way further until they were splayed gently on the back of his head, buried in his hair, their faces inches apart.

“Fucking born to do it,” Richie whispered. And then he kissed him.

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Fate has its strange ways when it comes to love. The true and crazy love...

It was unmistakable. Just when Jon felt those soft lips move against his in a short but sensual kiss, their first encounter flashed before his eyes. He didn't expect that bold move back then, even if he was fully aware that his dirty show was probably the most daring thing he'd ever done. Right now, as the physical pleasure was taking him over, powerful and overwhelming, he savoured a thought that something more real than life itself was about to begin. The world spun around him and nothing was the same anymore. It probably didn't mean it was better or worse, not that he could judge it at that moment. All he knew he wanted that, the need too strong to ignore it anymore, permeating him in a way he'd never experienced with another human being.

When they finally pulled away for air and Jon looked back at Richie, he thought he saw a shadow of a smile on his face. Or maybe the dim light softened his features, he couldn't tell. Richie seemed to be waiting for some reaction, and he wasn't sure if he should say something, tempted to make a snarky remark to stop that ridiculous warmth spreading across his body and pooling down his pelvis, his semi-hard cock already straining against his jeans.

It was a noble idea but also a futile one, he realized, as all he could do was to stare dumbly at those wet, slightly parted lips in front of him. Damn, it sure felt good to touch him like that. So good he simply gave in to the desire, suddenly feeling emboldened. He leaned forward to kiss Richie hard on the mouth, eliciting a loud moan in response. Strong hands sneaked around to embrace him and made their way up and down his back in such a slow and tortuous manner that made him light-headed. Mindlessly, he reached out, pushing his chair forward a bit, but in his drunken state it was so clumsy the old table wobbled noisily.

They both froze but Jon could feel Richie smile against his mouth. "Gotta find a more comfortable place," he said coyly and nodded towards the sofa in the corner.

Jon blinked as if he couldn't understand it at first. It wasn't only vodka that made him that painfully slow that night. In fact, he walked through each day like a man in a trance since the moment they'd met. Even now, as he stumbled a little trying to stand up and then followed Richie taking a few unstable steps forward, it was like a strange power was guiding him through the whole thing.

They landed on the sofa with a loud thump, stripping off their T-shirts in the process and tossing them to the floor. Jon found himself pinned underneath Richie, his bare chest on top of his and his hard erection nudging his thigh, and all coherent thoughts evaporated from his head like fog in the sun, lust taking over. Because he couldn't ignore the heat that passed

between them, the burning sensation of a large palm slide up his rib cage and rough fingertips stroke his oversensitive nipples, while soft lips were nuzzling his neck.

He couldn't tell what was more distracting. With all his senses tangled with one another and well aware of the growing discomfort of his cock still trapped in his jeans, Jon couldn't help but seek more contact, more friction. Instead of just running his hands down Richie's back, he dug his fingers into the slick skin and bucked his hips against him. When their cocks touched, the same familiar jolt of electricity ran through his body.

Soon, they fell into an intuitive rhythm, slow and steady, that overpowered him with such intensity Jon only dimly registered a hiss of pain that left Richie's mouth. Instinctively, he eased his grip. As he was about to apologize, Richie claimed his mouth forcefully with a kiss that tasted of vodka and cigarettes they'd shared but also something uniquely his own.

The physical sensations were so strong and distinct, he was swimming in them. Tastes, sounds and the raw pleasure of being that close, jeans-clad groins grinding and rubbing against each other, drawing another throaty moan and shuddering breath with each move.

Jon felt intense fluttering inside like his whole body was on fire, immediately followed by the fleeting guilt about enjoying it so much; he just wasn't supposed to feel that good. Perhaps it'd all been leading to this from the very first day, Jon thought dimly.

He couldn't dwell on it much longer, though. The sweet pressure building up inside of him became unbearable and he knew he needed release. Richie must have been on the edge, too, as his thrusts got more erratic.

And before he knew, Richie was looking down at him, staring into his eyes, his hand gently resting somewhere between his hip and his thigh.

And he didn't even blink when it moved downwards to cup his crotch, giving Richie a wordless confirmation that he was ok with what was about to happen. Because they were way past the point of no return. He lost all his rules but the answer was right in front of him.

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Fate has its strange ways when it comes to love. The true and crazy love...

Chapter Notes

I know, I know. It's been too long >.< Plenty of smut to make up for it.

Candles burned in the semi-darkness and the air felt thick around him. Their time as if got suspended and Jon suddenly found himself still again, detached, lost in another world, much like a third person looking in from the outside. He was staring at Richie's face but not really seeing him, being acutely aware of that sinful hand on him, pressing over the bulge and then rubbing him back and forth through his jeans. The more his mind tried to wrap around it, the more surreal it felt, fantastically dreamlike; yet an air of excited anticipation was so tangible he could feel it creeping along his skin.

So when Richie finally yanked his zipper down and pulled it out, the surprisingly firm grip made him draw his breath in at once. This wasn't the time to play coy so he thrust his dick shamelessly into Richie's palm, looking for more contact, but Richie was in no hurry. Long fingers curled around the base, leisurely stroking his shaft up and down, up and down.

"Fuck," he hissed and closed his eyes as Richie encircled the head and gently twisted his hand in another direction on his way back down. The sweet pressure had just started building up deep in his core, the sensation bordering on pleasure and pain, when the rhythmic stroking suddenly halted. He opened his eyes and looked up to see Richie hover above him, taking in his face. Slightly confused, he frowned and was about to ask, when Richie bent forward to brush a brief kiss against his mouth, gradually deepening it, his hungry lips insistent and firm and fucking delicious. Without meaning to, Jon let out a moan, which would be embarrassingly loud if Richie's tongue didn't stifle it. He could feel that tongue run along his teeth now, filling his mouth, taking his breath away.

Hot and flushed, they finally broke the kiss and Richie continued kissing his jaw, licking and nibbling on his neck, his throat, the short, warm breaths giving him a ticklish sensation. Instinctively, he tilted his head to give Richie a better access to the hollows of his neck and collarbone. The texture of his skin was so different, not as soft as a woman's would be, Jon thought to himself, the faint burn of stubble rubbing against his own; yet his body didn't discriminate, physically responding to arousal in the most obvious of ways. And judging from the hardness against his hip, he wasn't the only one.

Jon's hands were as busy, roaming Richie's lower back and the curve of his ass. At one point, he dared to sneak his hand down the front of Richie's body and cupped him through his jeans, which elicited a low, deep moan in response. Once again, he couldn't believe how good it felt to finally give in to carnal pleasure and pent-up desire; how the heightened senses were his only guides now, muting the many voices in his head, the warning signs that he'd probably just made a fatal mistake.

Drops of sweat were dripping down his body, damp hair was sticking to his face and the remaining layer of fabric separating them simply had to go, even if it meant they were about to cross that last line.

Because he didn't want to stop what they'd started.

And even if he took a little comfort seeing Richie struggling to undo his fly, Jon couldn't ignore the way his own fingers trembled as he touched the hot, naked flesh. Richie held an entranced, blank sort of stare, never breaking the eye contact, when he started to lightly glide his hand along the length of the underside of his penis and then encircled him in a slow, squeezing stroke, rubbing his finger over the head and spreading the little bead of precum around it.

The hard and solid weight under his palm felt foreign, yet familiar. He'd touched himself so many times before but this was new, and it made him weirdly excited and nervous at the same time. He had to remind himself nothing was as it seemed. But nothing could have prepared him for what happened next.

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Fate has its strange ways when it comes to love. The true and crazy love...

Because he couldn't stop the groan that tore from his chest when Richie's hand landed on his dick again and his mouth followed, taking him so deep his tip touched the soft roof of his mouth.

"God, Rich," he breathed and sunk his head deeper into the pillow.

The obscene scene he couldn't see when Richie sped up his movements, sucking and stroking, until a great shudder went through him like a warm wave, a second, a third, and he came. It made him only vaguely aware of Richie's weight on him as he rested his head on his stomach.

The afterglow felt fucking great, mixture of smells and tastes lingering in the air and it was like new blood burned in his veins. He was lying there, coming back to himself – staring at the ceiling, chest heaving, trying to control his breath.

As his mind started to clear, the mattress next to him dipped. He looked sideways and noticed Richie shifted closer, so he was right beside him now, keeping his distance, but he still would feel the radiating warmth of his body.

Neither of them said a word but there was something in Richie's gaze that made Jon uneasy and had almost a sobering effect on him. Physical attraction, adrenaline rush, the forbidden fruit so sweet and intoxicating – hell, he'd been there before. Not with another man, obviously, but he knew how it worked. And now he saw another feeling, the one he wasn't even ready to acknowledge at this point.

Richie must have sensed that inner struggle because his smile was gone and replaced with a frown. He reached out his hand, tentatively, and Jon immediately tensed under this gentle touch.

"Jon... you didn't like it?"

If there was a crack in this voice, Jon decided to ignore it. He turned his head, letting out an impatient sigh.

Talking about 'it' was the last thing he wanted right now. He couldn't tell him the truth. That he liked it more than he'd ever admit, that he hadn't felt so good in a long time. It was that part that came afterwards that overwhelmed him. The aftermath of the game they played he

thought he was prepared for. Because maybe it wasn't just a game, the usual mating ritual between a man and a woman. The subtlety of the moment was driving him insane.

"No, it's just... it's late. Gotta go," he said casually, getting up and gathering his clothes from the floor. It was awkward as hell but feigning indifference was the only option; he almost couldn't resist the urge to bolt out the door. Somehow with his back turned it seemed less pathetic.

When they were upstairs again, he finally met Richie's parents. If anything that happened that day was stranger than strange, it was it. Him shaking Richie's dad's hand while he was smiling broadly, talking with great pride about his son in this funny accent he had. Mrs. Sambora hugging him like his own mother would, saying she was happy he enjoyed the lunch and that Richie had told her so much about him. When she half-jokingly asked Richie if he took a good care of him, Jon didn't dare to look in his direction for fear of what he might see. There was an ache in him that would not go away for a while now, so when she did, the ache in his heart just spread.

And he didn't even remember how he got home, opened the door, and found himself in his own rumpled bed again. All he knew his heart hammered in his chest so loudly he was sure he died a little that night.

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Yeah, I know. It's been two years. I'm baffled myself. Gonna update it more regularly now, hopefully.

The band got together for a rehearsal two days later, gearing up in the final weeks of the recording, and Jon felt kind of relieved that Richie hadn't tried to contact him in the meantime. When they finally met, he expected him to react in some awkward, uncomfortable way, but Richie was right there, next to him, pretending nothing ever happened between them.

Obviously. This is what friends do anyway, right?

Despite the appearance of calm, the underlying mood remained rather tense; he couldn't prevent the memories flashing back and it made him weirdly agitated. His whole body tingled, as if brought to life by this man's presence, whether he liked it or not.

So when they were alone again, in Richie's basement, the stark décor of the room now strangely familiar, Jon decided to play along. "I'm not sure about the lyrics here," he grumbled, pointing his finger to the second verse. "The sequence that follows is jumbled in my mind, even now."

"OK, what's your idea of 'better'? We've already changed it twice," Richie snapped back, clearly running out of patience.

Jon laughed under his breath. It was taking bloody ages to work it out, maybe because he wasn't happy with anything they'd written so far. "Look here. If she's cheating, the guy is losing. What about playing the game you can't win because she's making her own rules?"

Richie took a quick gulp from his glass and studied the notebook for a while. "I'd replace it with 'Cheating hearts don't think twice'. His hand moved wearily across the page. "It rhymes with 'pay the price' here." He fell silent as if not sure what to say next. "That sometimes happens to me with girls."

"That's because you have a tendency to fall in love," Jon chuckled, trying to guise it as a joke. He could swear he felt how those brown eyes bore into him.

"What do you mean?"

There was something unsettling in the way he asked this question and that moment Jon knew he probably took it too far. Or maybe Richie just seemed a little more serious that day, which

was rather unusual for a happy-go-lucky guy like him. He decided to ignore the qualm of unease, smoking weed and working long hours didn't make a good mix after all.

"There isn't anything wrong with that," he shrugged and scribbled something down, feigning further interest in the song. Suddenly it got so quiet he could hear traffic from far away. "I guess we have a different concept of love," he said dismissively.

There was a short, baffled pause on the other end. "Uh huh, you presume to know a great deal about me. I should feel flattered."

Jon immediately recognized that slightly irritated undertone in his voice. Before he figured out his response, Richie spoke up again.

"Is it a bad thing, though?" He turned in his seat, avoiding Jon's gaze. "I mean falling in love, not cheating. At least you're trying."

The simple question made Jon look up, straight into his face. His first reaction was to argue, to tell him it's bullshit, but he suppressed that urge. Instead, he just set his jaw. "Whatever, just forget it. We're arguing about a stupid song again."

Richie's laugh seemed forced and awkward. "As you can now tell, this conversation is getting old. We can't write the damn song from start to finish because it's not what's really on the plate, right?"

"You mean you want to talk about something else right now?"

"Maybe."

That was the moment Jon dreaded the most. He felt almost physically sick.

"Listen, if you mean that...umm...", he couldn't help feeling ridiculous, a slight flush creeping into his face. He shook his head, amazed at how the right words couldn't leave his mouth.

Richie grunted softly, but even in his peripheral vision, Jon could see a small grin on his lips.

"Though I'd already half expected you to freak out, it still came as a bit of a shock, y'know?" He let out a nervous giggle. After a short pause, he smiled rather shyly. "I'm sorry. I got fucking carried away."

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Saturday was a good day. It seems like I've actually finished this little story. Or maybe not, I don't know.

“Jon?”

Jon blinked, as if stirred from a trance. He realized his mind went vacant for a moment; he was clearly taken aback by the confession, not expecting the man to be that blunt. Richie went on, though, babbling anything to fill up the space, almost like he was afraid to stop even for a second.

“I didn’t mean to...umm, scare you. I’m a kinda spontaneous guy but this must have been the most impulsive thing I've ever done,” he laughed awkwardly. “I don’t usually go down on anybody just like that. I mean, when we’re strangers.”

Jon furrowed his brow for a moment, wondering what to do. He was supposed to say something, apparently, but got weirdly mesmerized by Richie’s fingers, constantly fidgeting with a pen. He could feel his nervous energy and, all of a sudden, he had a vague, fluttery sensation spreading deep inside of him as well.

With Richie’s eyes on him, under that somehow expectant gaze, he just started getting weirdly intimidated. That was Richie’s way of communicating with others, he’d already noticed that the man gives them all his attention, but he wasn’t used to it. He wished he had shades on or anything that could secure him a safe place where he could control the situation.

It was obvious Richie was the brave one, the anticipation so strong that left no room for fear, and that made Jon realize why Richie would get involved in one romantic relationship after another. It was genuine and he went all out for that.

“Erm, yeah, it was kinda unexpected,” he finally replied, still focused on the silver, guitar-shaped ring on Richie’s finger, hoping the stupid butterflies in his stomach would just die. Richie’s little laugh made him look up.

“Next time I will be more of a gentleman.”

“Sure. And treat me like a lady,” Jon coughed. “You mean, will I do it again?”

Richie nodded slightly, and the dimples appeared in his cheeks as his smile grew.

“I mean, do you want to do it again?”

Jon rolled his eyes and shook his head incredulously. "You're an idiot," he proclaimed and pursed his lips in a futile attempt to suppress a smile. "I'm going home."

Richie was openly grinning back. "Leaving early again?"

At that the tension building up in the room diffused. Jon threw his head back and laughed like an idiot himself. Whether it was the absurdity of their conversation or the fact he actually liked the guy, he couldn't shake off the feeling they began to reluctantly fall in love with each other. Though the very idea was still crazy as fuck, and the mood was dangerously changing into something he knew was probably leading to making another mistake, he decided to keep his guitarist in the band. But what is life if you cannot taunt a friend a little?

"Well, the lyrics are almost finished anyway. You've kindly supplied me with the only line that is going to get you a writing credit on it. Good job!"

Richie gave him a look of mock disapproval. "Tsk ts, do not underestimate somebody who's trying to help this little garage band get really big," he mused. " Besides, one-liners are definitely my forte. That's how I've picked you up."

"Fuck you. Next time trust me to take better care of myself," Jon bit back, with a look of smug victory in their little war of words, but he couldn't help mirroring Richie's grin.

"Aw, you won't get rid of me that easily."

Jon knew Richie was just half-mocking him but there was something in his words that carried a promise too. And he didn't want to let it go.

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