



# FILL *Me*

A NOVELLA

SEX, LOVE, AND ROCK & ROLL SERIES

**MICHELLE HAZEN**

# **Fill Me**

Book 0.5 of the Sex, Love, and Rock & Roll Series

~

By  
Michelle Hazen

# Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Dedicated to my husband](#)

[Chapter 1: Almost Perfect](#)

[Chapter 2: Appetizer](#)

[Chapter 3: Can't Get No...](#)

[Chapter 4: All for Show](#)

[Chapter 5: Invisible](#)

[Chapter 6: Intimacy](#)

[Chapter 7: Fill Me](#)

[Sneak Preview: A Cruel Kind of Beautiful](#)

[Dear Reader](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Sign up for Michelle Hazen's Mailing List](#)

[Also By Michelle Hazen](#)



## **Dedicated to my husband**



Because it hurts my heart to think of all the years I spent missing you before we  
ever met.



# Chapter 1: Almost Perfect



## Jera

**L**aughing at your neurotic lead singer is wrong.

I know it, everybody with a heart knows it, so I clamp my twitching lips closed and try like hell to be a good person.

“Do you think anybody saw me?” Jax hunches his shoulders, his back to the busy bar room as he whips off his shirt, balling the UPS logo to the inside.

“Uh, yeah, dipshit,” Danny says. “They did.”

“Shut up, or I’m not getting your underage ass any drinks,” Jax growls at our bassist. “Now where’s my shirt?”

“Don’t worry, Jax, I’ll shield you while you change so nobody notices.” I step squarely in front of him, giving a smile and a wink to a guy whose eyes drift toward us. Danny reaches over and tugs down the already-low V-neck of my Ramones babydoll tee, doubling the amount of cleavage I’m offering. I slap his hand. “Hey, jerk!”

“Just protecting our chances of getting drinks,” Danny says. “The only way something as tiny as you makes a decent shield is if you show some skin.”

“I thought big brother types were supposed to be protective.” I put on a scowl, but my eyes slip away to check the front door before I can stop myself.

Nothing.

“Not your brother.” He crosses his arms, hazel eyes gleaming with mischief even though his face, as always, is relaxed. “As your bandmate, it benefits me to get some eyes headed your way. Longer they’re staring at you, the longer they’ll watch us play.”

“Then I guess you should have built me a drum riser, because nobody’s going to be able to see me behind my cymbals.”

Both men ignore me. Jax smacks Danny, knocking his black beanie askew. “Dude. Shirt.”

“What shirt?” Danny pulls off his knit hat, black hair in wild chaos before he tugs the cap back on.

“It was on the list I gave you when I left you my truck so you could load while I was at work.”

Danny wrinkles his nose. “List?”

Jax pales, his blue eyes flaring brighter as he stares down our bassist. “The list with *all our equipment* on it. Including my good shirt.” He flaps the offending uniform top at Danny, while I stifle a laugh into my fist.

He shrugs. “Play in what you’ve got.”

Jax chucks it in Danny’s face instead. “Nobody sees a brown UPS polo shirt and thinks, ‘Step aside, panties, there’s a rock star in the house.’”

“If you need a shirt to drop panties, man, you better hightail it back to that gym you’re always trying to drag me to,” Danny drawls.

Jax’s jaw twitches and he straightens to his full height, carefully cultivated muscles bunching.

Danny looks bored, his lean body looking just plain skinny beneath the black hoodie and old jeans he threw on before we loaded Jax’s truck.

I step between them, because they like a friendly fight a little too much, and last time Jax’s mouth ended up so swollen and bloody he couldn’t sing. No matter how many times I explain it to him, Danny doesn’t get the concept of pulling his punches.

“He’s screwing with you, Jax,” I say. “We have everything on the list, and your shirt is on the front seat. I’ll get it for you, if you want to make a little refreshments run.” I nod toward the bar, my eyes flickering past it to the entrance.

Still nothing.

Jax’s hand lands on my arm, squeezing gently. “Was Andy supposed to be here?”

“Nope.” I force a smile, though I can’t wrench my gaze higher than the tribal swirls of the electric guitar tattoo on Jax’s forearm. Somehow, seeing Danny’s artwork settles some of the fizzing in my stomach. “He couldn’t make it.”

“Oh, was Douchefest 2012 *tonight*?” Danny asks. “Too bad. I know he couldn’t possibly miss that.”

Jax throws him a warning look, then turns his attention back to me. Not long ago, having this much focus from him—plus his hand, his actual *hand* touching me!—would have sent me into a blushing, stuttering mess. Our band had its first anniversary and I graduated high school before the sheer beauty of our lead guitarist became commonplace enough that I could do more than pant in his presence.

Thank God he never noticed. If we had ever ended up between the sheets, he’d probably strain something making sure I was fully inducted into the local chapter of the Jax Is A Sex God Club. I’d be exhausted before we got past the making out part of the scheduled programming. And considering how *I* get in bed? Jax and I would be each other’s own private hell.

I smile up at him, his model-perfect jaw and the chin-length strands of his wavy blond hair nothing more than pretty packaging on the concerned face of a friend. “Andy had to study.” I shrug. “He’s got a lot of big tests coming up this week. It’s no big deal.” Over Jax’s shoulder, a lanky blond guy passes his two bucks to the bouncer, and I push up on my toes to see better, but no, it’s not my boyfriend.

Jax lets me go, his brow furrowed. “He’d seriously rather do *homework* than see his hot girlfriend wail the shit out of her drum kit?”

“He’s stupid,” Danny says. “What else did you expect?”

I ignore my best friend, because arguing with him will just egg him on, and I don’t want to risk him dropping something too revealing right now. He insists my issues are all Andy’s fault, because Danny is terminally loyal.

I point at Jax. “Don’t think I don’t notice your sneaky little compliments to cheer me up. And it’s fine, seriously. His grades have been slipping because we’ve been spending too much time together and I don’t want to be the reason he loses his scholarship.”

My heart squeezes at the thought. I’ve been waiting my whole life for somebody like Andy. Somebody who yanks the breath out of my chest. Somebody who can distract me from anything, even music. But instead of filling me to overflowing, the way music does, he makes every part of me echo with the need for something that’s not quite within reach.

I give Jax a little push toward the bar, his muscles even firmer under my fingertips than I remember. Has he been killing himself at the gym again? I make a mental note to ask Danny if Jax’s mom has called recently. His socialite bitch of a parent never fails to set off one of his self-improvement tailspins. “Go!” I tell him, backing away. “Or you’re not going to have time to triple-check our set up and Danny’s tuning of your guitar.”

His eyes narrow. “Talk about sneaky, Jera. That was seriously below the belt.”

“Oh, I can’t look below your belt,” I say, my hand poised on the push bar of the side exit to the parking lot. “Because if I do, I’ll see your hideous work khakis and my libido will start cashing in its social security benefits.”

I shove the door open before he can come after me, Danny’s chuckle sounding low from inside the bar. No way am I telling our singer I packed jeans for him in the truck.

I blink away the glare of the inside lights and take the long way through the parking lot. Who knows? Maybe “homework” is just an excuse for Andy to surprise me and he’ll be waiting out here. He likes to do cute stuff like that, and



his presence would be the only thing that could make tonight's—actually paid—gig even better.

Besides, if he really isn't coming, then I have a sinking feeling I know why. And it has a whole lot to do with last Saturday.



## Chapter 2: Appetizer



### Danny

“Drink up, kiddies,” Jax crows, though he keeps his voice down as he passes me a drink. It’s just a tall soda glass filled with brown liquid and ice, and I quirk an eyebrow.

“Coke?” I don’t care that much. Where I’m going later tonight, nobody who knows my face would dare card me.

And everybody there knows my face.

“Our good friend Jack might have snuck into your Coke,” Jax says with a grin. “The bartender’s ah...well, let’s just say he’s not sad Andy’s not coming, and as long as he sells to me, his conscience and his license are clear.”

“And as long as he gives it to you in a soda glass, the owner’s happy, too. I’ll drink to that.” I clink my glass to Jera’s, though she glances away even as she laughs. She’s embarrassed about having to get our booze through our bandmate, though I don’t see why. Age is a number, a fact. It’s not a thing embarrassment should apply to.

I toss back a drink, ignoring the straw and letting the ice collide cold and hard with my lips as I swallow down the familiar burn of whiskey and carbonation. I love to play with the hint of a buzz softening my stomach, the lights hot on my skin and the strings of my bass thick beneath my fingers. The stage I’ll be on after this will have lights, too, but the energy’s not the same. Here, I’m cushioned by our music; my band. There, it’ll be just me with none of my sharp edges dulled. I’m thirsty for it, but I know I need this first, to keep me centered.

Jax takes new jeans and a shirt from Jera, and heads to the bathroom to change.

I throw an arm around my friend and hug her into my side, though I’m careful not to meet her eyes. Not now, when I can feel the wildness licking up the inside of me, white hot and begging for a release. “Doesn’t matter,” I murmur, low enough that only she will hear.

Jera snorts. “Yeah, it totally isn’t humiliating at all that we couldn’t even get this gig without him promising to ‘supervise’ us like we’re twenty-year-old babies.”

The crowd isn't too thick tonight, but female eyes follow Jax as he walks away. Some are for the muscles rippling above his belt line, but almost as many are on the ink I've tattooed into his skin. Something shifts in me at the sight, deep and proud. I don't blame them for watching, though. That body, that voice. The cocky smile paired with the worried way he tugs at his hair, always trying to make it a little better, a little brighter. I'd fuck him if he'd let me.

If I gave him music loud enough, dancing sweaty enough, the right amount of drinks? He'd let me. Boy's not as straight as he thinks he is, but he doesn't have the balls to go bi.

One of the girls looks away from Jax, her eyes catching on me instead. I tick my chin upward at her. I don't smile, but I don't have to. All I do is fail to disguise the part of me that's hungry and a little bit out of control. The only part of me I hide from Jera, because she has enough problems in that area. She doesn't need to know what I do, what I want. What I feed on.

The girl has dark eyes, dark skin. Her smile is brilliant in the multicolored lights of the bar, and she doesn't even glance at Jera, who's still held tightly under my arm. Funny, normally strangers assume we're together. This girl either knows better or is hoping for a package deal.

My dick flexes against the cage of my zipper. If that trio included anybody but my best friend, I'd be in like fucking crazy.

Jera pokes me in the ribs. "Did you even hear what I said?"

"No."

She steps away and turns to face me. "Do you think we should get the fake IDs after all?"

One of the reasons Jera is better than all other girls is she doesn't get pissed about stupid shit like me saying I didn't hear her when I didn't. Very unlike my last girlfriend.

"You said we'd still be playing these same venues in a year when we're twenty-one, so we can't risk getting fake IDs and then switching," I remind her.

In my peripheral vision, I see Package Deal girl moving closer to us. Jera flicks her hair impatiently out of her face. It's streaked with a bunch of shades of yellow and gold, the springtime sun starting to bleach out her dark brown already. She curled it for the show and put on makeup that makes the amber-green of her hazel eyes almost as attention-grabbing as her breasts stretching the front of her Ramones shirt. She's filled out a lot since we met in eighth grade, and all of it in places that make it hard for people to keep their gaze on her face.

I take a half-step to the side to block Package Deal girl's view. If I have time after the show, I might see if she's up for a ride, but she needs to keep her eyes right fucking off my best friend. Jera usually laughs it off when girls try to get

her in bed, but she's raw on that topic right now. On a night when her boyfriend ditched her for his textbooks, I won't allow anybody else to accidentally hit her hot buttons.

She bites her lip. "Yeah, but—"

I drop my chin and stare her down, concern beating back the beast in me—enough that I can look like the Danny she knows again. "The Red Letters are as good today as we were last week. Better than we were last month." I flick her glass. "Drink your Coke. In a year, we'll be on this stage or a bigger one, and we'll order our own fucking drinks."

She purses her lips and half-glares at me. "How do you always know exactly the right thing to say?"

"Truth ain't that hard to come by." I take another gulp of my drink and glance away.

Jax comes back, all his Office Boy washed off in favor of dark, sexy rock star. He's got a little mousse in the waves of his hair, a hint of eyeliner in his bottom lashes that he'd hit me for pointing out. When he grins at me, it's sharp and cocky as shit.

Wonder if he got a little help changing out of his clothes?

The bar owner stares at me from the doorway of his office, tapping his left wrist. I gulp down the last of my whiskey, leaving the ice to rattle in the glass. "Showtime."

"What?" Jax's jaw clamps down and lines of stress appear at the corners of his eyes.

Jera groans. "Jax, it's fine, you don't need time to check. Seriously, we've probably been putting together equipment for more years than you have. I was setting up for my dad's band before I bought my first training bra." She scowls at him, but it doesn't quite cover the hurt in her eyes.

I clap him on the shoulder. "I got it." I leave my glass on a table and head for the stage. Jera hurries after me, sucking whiskey and Coke as fast as she can through her straw.

Jax bounds forward until he catches up with me. "You tuned it?"

"Yup."

He lets out a breath, and steps the six inches up onto this bar's poorly-painted-plywood excuse for a stage.

It's not that Jera can't tune a guitar. It's not even that he doesn't trust her to tune *his* expensive-as-God's-balls guitar. Fuck, when we brought him into the band, she could match him on the guitar, and outplay all of us on the drums, piano and violin. The only thing she can't play is the bass, and that's just because

it was already my instrument on the day she met me, when I was slumped over the toilet in the girl's bathroom of our junior high school.

Jax picks up his Pete Townshend-edition Les Paul, shrugging the strap over his head and testing the strings, though his shoulders have already relaxed. Actually, it was Jera who tuned it. But her exasperation feeds his neurosis, and then she gets upset that he doesn't trust her, whereas if I step in, the cycle stops and everybody calms the fuck down.

I walk back to my black Fender bass guitar, in a fancy-ass stand because Jax insists it builds anticipation to display the instruments onstage before we get up there.

"How are we all feeling tonight, Portland?" Jax growls into the microphone. Something about the way he pitches his voice makes people hoot and scream like this is a stadium show with seats stretching all the way to the horizon. Maybe it's the way he names the city—the only one we've ever played in—like we're on a tour full of pussy and private planes. Instead of performing after a full day of college classes for Jera, UPS warehousing for Jax, and the buzz of a tattoo machine for me.

Our lead singer stomps his boot once on the stage, and the echo of it becomes silence, stillness.

I drink it in, and though my face doesn't smile, something in me does.

I work a stage like this, too. But not here. Not yet.

Tonight.

Jax stomps again, and then his hands swing up over his head and he claps once.

Stomp. Clap.

Stomp. Stomp. Clap.

He builds the rhythm until even the bartenders can't look away. He doesn't fidget, doesn't glance away.

Up here, Jax *exists*.

By the time he leans into the microphone and rips into the Queen cover, he owns every soul in the building.

My microphone waits on a stand and when the chorus comes around, my voice comes in along with Jera's and I fucking grin, her drums holding the space at my back. "We will, we will...rock you!"

We break the song again here, owning the cover because The Red Letters doesn't play anything unless we can make it ours.

Jax's hands come together, the slap like a palm against the plump curve of a naked ass. When his boot stomps the stage, I hear the hit at the end of a thrust, my cock wet and buried deep in a woman.

I'm hungry.

And the music is just an appetizer.





## Chapter 3: Can't Get No...



### Jera

People don't just applaud when we come off stage this time—there are actual hoots and screams. I get up from behind my drums and take a little bow, brushing when some male voices lift in the crowd because I know they're not just for Jax. We exit by the side of the tiny stage, even though we could just as easily step off the front. It's the closest we can get to pretending there's a backstage.

Jax heads straight to the bar to get him a shot and us a couple more “sodas.” We hang back and I wrap my arms around Danny's waist, squeezing tightly because I want to scream and dance with joy, but the crowd I was just playing to is all around me and I want to look cool, unaffected. Like a real musician.

He hugs me back, his arms lean and so strong it squishes the breath out of my lungs, but I don't care.

I push up onto my toes so nobody will hear me, whispering in his ear, “Holy shit, did you see them, D? They were really into us, and not just on the covers either—they were clapping for the songs I wrote! And so many people showed up, even with the two-dollar cover charge!”

Strands of his hair stick to my damp cheek before I pull away. He lost his beanie somewhere during the show—maybe when that black girl came up on stage and he sort of half-jammed, half-danced with her for most of a song.

“Fuck yes,” he says, smiling down at me. “They did.”

A hand touches my arm and I whirl, already beaming at whoever it is. I blink, then squeal with excitement, abandoning Danny to catapult into the arms of my boyfriend. Andy catches me, laughing. “You happy to see me, or is that a spider monkey who just attacked me?”

I bounce back. “I didn't see you! Were you here for the entire show? That stage is so low I can't see over the first row, and then behind the drums I might as well be underground and—” I make myself shut up so he can answer, drinking in his high cheekbones and sky-blue eyes. He's so freaking cute, it just kills me. Especially when he gives that half-embarrassed little smile.

“Yeah, I was here for most of it,” he says. “Wanted to surprise you.”

“Or, you know, a song and a half,” Danny says.

His voice is so flat, I glance back to see if he's okay. His hazel eyes are intense, which isn't unusual. What's unusual is the dark light to them; that unhinged flare of energy I've only glimpsed once or twice, right before he glances away. Every hair on my arms stands up, and I shift my weight uneasily. I wish he and Andy got along better, but I'm not letting that spoil this moment for me.

I look back to Andy. "I'm so glad you were able to come! Did you hear us? The crowd was great tonight, huh?" I force my heels to come to rest on the ground as soon as I realize I'm bouncing on my toes. Yeah, great crowd. No biggie. They fucking *loved* us, and Andy got to see all of it.

"Yeah, you guys were great! You looked painfully hot on the drums, babe," Andy says.

I grab the front of his shirt and pull him in for a kiss, breaking it off as soon as I realize how sweaty I am. "You made it just in time for the after-party, though."

Jax returns with two soda glasses and a beer, and I offer my glass to Andy. "Look who came to join us, Jax." I turn pleading eyes on him, shaking my hair forward to disguise the expression from my boyfriend. "Any chance we could get one more of those um, 'Cokes'?"

Jax swaps a glance with Danny—what is that about? "Uh, Jera, the bartender might um...he was kind of only helping me out because he uh..."

"Thought she was hot?" Andy fills in, smiling down at me. "Oh come on, just tell him I'm a friend. Like this one." He jerks his chin toward Danny, and drops his hand from the small of my back. It immediately feels cold, but maybe that's just the air drying the sweat in my shirt.

Danny stares at Andy. Hard and motionless; the way you do only if you're completely socially unaware or you want to start a fight.

I shift my weight. I probably should not have told him about the problems Andy and I have been running into. I mean, some things are too personal. But Danny didn't get all weird when I brought it up, and God, even Andy can't talk to me about it without getting all twitchy and defensive. Is it so wrong to just want *one* person to be able to really confide in?

"Uh, yeah, the bartender tonight is Sam," Jax says. "He's met you, dude. With Jera. And he knows you're dating because he asked me last time we were all in."

Which means he knows I'm taken, but he was hoping because Andy wasn't here, I'd let my inner skank take over or something.

I take the Coke from Andy and set it on the floor, where somebody will surely kick it over within a minute or two. I ignore the twinge of guilt at how

sticky it will be to mop up—that bartender deserves it for trolling girls who are already taken. I paste a smile on for Andy, because he doesn't need to know how quickly my temper can flare.

“Hey, that's free whiskey. Who cares about the bartender?” He looks after the glass like he might go after it, and I step into his line of sight.

“Who cares? Let's get out of here and party someplace we don't have to cover good booze with gross mixers.” I turn to Jax. “Your apartment?”

Our lead singer's family is old money, which means his pad is way slicker than my room at Granna's house, or the crappy old apartment Danny shares with three roommates.

Jax looks longingly out at the girls on the dance floor. “I thought we might hang here for a while first...”

“I've got a key. We could meet you there, if that's cool.” I need to call Granna and check on her, but I could do that on the way if Andy drove. There was a meeting of the Finance Club tonight, but I really only joined because Mom was so excited about me participating in something non-music related, and the meetings are bullshit anyway. If I don't tell her I missed one, it'll be fine. I turn to Danny. “You're up for it, right?”

“Can't.” Danny sets his untouched drink down next to mine without looking at me.

“What?” I frown, forgetting about Andy for a second. “What do you mean? Since when can you *not* party after a show?”

He swallows, and my eyes narrow farther. “I promised a friend I'd cover for them. I could meet you there.” He stares past me to Andy. “Won't take long. An hour, maybe?” He shoves his hands in his pockets, and judging by the hard lumps beneath denim, they're in fists. “Forty-five minutes.”

Wow, this is the most embarrassing after-party ever. If we had a couple drinks here, we could probably chat up some people who saw the show, take a small crowd with us, but right now it's looking like me and Andy and Netflix on the flatscreen.

Woo-freaking-hoo.

Andy rubs a hand down my arm, his touch sending a happy tingle through me despite my embarrassment. “Hey, it's no big deal. I can't really stay, anyway. I really did have to study. I just wanted to see you so bad, and I know how much you wanted me to see you play.”

“You have to go, too?” I whirl, the glow of the show ebbing away. I no longer feel like the driving beat behind a great band. I feel like a girl who can't find anything to do on a Saturday night.

The corners of Andy's mouth turn down. "I know, it sucks. I need to get better at studying, figure out how to be more efficient or something." His thumb rubs softly over my elbow. "Walk me out? I can't go home until I get at least one moment alone with you."

Is it my imagination or did he emphasize the word "alone"? The sweat on my skin turns clammy. Is he annoyed that Danny and Jax are always around? Does he want to be *alone* alone? Does that mean we're okay again?

My stomach knots and I glance away. Jax shifts his beer to his other hand and reaches out to steady me. "Hey, you feeling okay?"

I nod, but somewhere in the movement, my eyes land on Danny's. They're dark and still. I wait for him to quirk his eyebrow in our patented, did-you-drink-too-much look, but he doesn't.

I break eye contact and take Andy's arm. "I'll catch you guys later, okay? I'm gonna walk him out."

"Yeah, uh, see you later, dude," Jax says, taking too big of a drink of his beer, then glancing at Danny again.

He's got no reason to be so awkward around me and my boyfriend. And Danny has no reason to be such a dick. Why the hell couldn't I have been in a band with other girls? They'd understand. An all-girls rock band would be badass. Though there's no one, man or woman, who could play the bass like Danny.

I'm caught up in trying to remember if there are any girls at school who play drums or keyboard, and we're outside the bar before I know it, cool spring air crisp against my skin. I shiver.

"Did you not bring a jacket?" Andy wraps an arm around my shoulders. "Here, we'll be at the car in a second and I'll turn on the heater for you."

Wait, I thought I was walking him out. Does he want me to come over to his dorm room? My heart jumps with hope. Last Saturday, his roommate was out of town, and he surprised me with a picnic in his dorm—mostly food he swiped from the caf, but arranged like a five-star restaurant on borrowed platters and plates, on a picnic blanket he spread in the middle of his floor. He even got me the sugared ginger candy that I'm addicted to, and made sure my favorite Moody Blues album was playing in the background.

And after all his efforts to make me comfortable, when our make out session moved to the bed, I still managed to fumble everything.

At the memory of our spoiled picnic, my hand flutters up to my stomach, nausea twisting ruthlessly. Cold air chills my legs, creeps under the hem of my skirt, which suddenly seems way too short.

“If we’re heading somewhere, I should go back and help Jax take down real quick...” I hitch a thumb back toward the bar, biting my lip. I don’t want Andy to change his mind about hanging out, but I’ll feel guilty all night if I leave Jax to disassemble all our equipment and load it into the truck himself.

“No, I told you, I’ve got homework to get back to.” Andy tugs me into his side and ducks his head to nuzzle into my neck. “But I want a minute alone with my rock star girlfriend first.”

I laugh and blush a little. “I think real stars get to charge more than two bucks a ticket. Sorry to burst your bubble.”

He unlocks the passenger side of his car. “Oh, you didn’t. Don’t worry.” I go to get in, but he nudges me out of the way and sits down himself. I’m confused for a second until he pulls me into his lap, leaning to the side so he can close the door behind us. One of his knees jabs me in the butt as he closes his arms around me.

“Better? Warmer, I mean?” he asks.

“Uh-huh.” My head is bent at a weird angle, crammed up into the sun visor. Which is not helping the hair situation, already desperate from a whole show of head-banging behind my drums. My shirt clings to my skin, and I take a deep sniff, trying to decide if my deodorant is still hanging in the game.

“C’mere,” Andy murmurs, his hands tightening on my hips.

A little zing of pleasure flushes through me. He came. He actually showed up to see our band even though he was busy. I lean in and press my lips to his. It could always be like this: him dancing with the crowd, being there to start up the party after the show.

Noise from outside the car catches my attention. I pull away, glancing out to see people walking between the cars, just outside our window. The bar is starting to empty now that we’re done playing, and the un-tinted windows of Andy’s car form a fragile fishbowl around us.

“Hey, there are people out there.” My voice is distorted because he’s still sucking on my bottom lip.

“You were so hot tonight, babe,” he murmurs. “Up there on the stage, all those people watching you. And it was like...” His mouth moves to my neck, wet and a little careless, like he’s lost in the moment. My pulse kicks up at that. How long has it been since he’s been spontaneous like this, instead of checking in with me about every little move? “It was like you didn’t even see them,” he finishes, his voice an octave closer to a growl than usual.

My arms tighten around him. “Andy...” His hips push up under my bottom, and I turn my head away when a guy in a Baltimore Ravens jersey passes the window. “Can we go to your place? Is Zach home?”

Andy takes my mouth, harder and more completely than he's done it since our first time. Something pulses in me, way down low, and a trill of hope shoots up through my heart. I kiss him back, but he's already pulling away, whispering, "I want to do it here. God, babe, that *stage*..."

His hands yank my skirt out of the way, and I remember to lift up so he can get my panties off. It's what I've been telling him, all these months when I bug him to come see our gigs...there's something in the air after a show. It's something that doesn't exist in everyday life. Maybe it's the answer.

I twist, bruising my hip on the automatic shifter as I try to kick my panties off over my Chuck Taylor's. Maybe the after-show chemistry is the ingredient Andy and I have been missing. How perfect would that be? I'm a musician, as addicted to performing as anyone has ever been to drugs.

His zipper zzz's open and my eyes pop wide. Oh, wow, he really is in a hurry. I glance out the window and accidentally lock eyes with a girl wearing gold glittery eye shadow and a slashed black tee shirt. I glance at the band name on the front without thinking, then cringe as Andy's knuckles knock my inner thigh when he tries to wrestle his boxers out of the way.

"Andy, people can see us," I whisper.

He stops for an instant, then his tongue is against my throat. "God, babe, I know," he groans. "I bet they recognize you, don't they?"

Okay, as flattering as that is... "Um, except for the maybe-arrested part?" I venture. This lot is not that poorly lit. In fact, I think it might be better lit than the stage was. A terrible comparison considering I was wearing panties then and now I'm... "Ow!" I suck the protest back almost as soon as it reaches my lips and Andy pulls the head of his condom-covered penis away.

"Hey, are you..." He brushes my hair back from my face, but I can't meet his gaze right now because I'm too busy watching for more passersby. Thank God Danny already left for wherever the hell he had to go, because if he walked through the parking lot right now, I'd never live it down. Or he'd get in another fight with Andy, and heaven knows how I'd get them to stop it a second time without fists flying. "Are you into this?" he whispers, and I feel his cock listing a little, softening against my leg.

"Of course I am." I kiss him so fast that our teeth clash together. Shit, what am I, stupid? This is the best it's gone between us in ages and I'm ruining it.

Big, fat surprise there.

I reach between us. I know he doesn't keep lube in his car, because he thinks it's embarrassing—like a loser's crutch for someone who can't get his girlfriend excited. Not that it matters. I was wet as hell during the show, I just need to...I

swipe his tip between my folds, pressing determinately deeper until it starts to slide a bit, then shoving my hips forward.

I keep my face pressed into his neck to hide the way my jaw clenches, and it's all worth it when he lets out a slow breath, his arms tightening.

"Babe, oh God..."

I start to move my hips, telling myself no one can see anything beneath my skirt, that they'll just think we're making out. Maybe everybody's left already anyway. I keep my head hidden in Andy's neck, where I can soak in his warmth, letting my pride soar as his pulse picks up speed and his breath stirs the hair at the nape of my neck.

Even then, I don't raise my head. I have no idea what time it is and if Danny comes back...he can't see the look on my face right now.

He'd never understand.





## Chapter 4: All for Show



### Danny

I stop just off-stage, the leather strings of the whip brushing the black leather pants I just changed into. I'm vividly sober. For our band's shows, I love to ride the music and a buzz at the same time, but for this, it would be unforgivable to be anything less than in perfect control of myself. Of my senses. Of my judgment.

I need all of it to create this performance; to best serve her.

The staff at this BDSM club have prepared her perfectly for me. A single scrap of panties is her only clothing. Straps wrap each bare ankle, firm but not biting her flesh, with a few extra inches of space so she can writhe for me, her legs spread wide by the shape of the table. Strawberry-blond hair pools beneath her head and pours off the edge of the black leather padding.

This particular device has a crosspiece, more of a T than a St. Andrew's Cross. It keeps her arms stretched straight out to each side, her breasts vulnerable and waiting for whatever I choose to impose upon them.

The lights of the stage lay golden on her skin and I can tell from the clenching of her thigh muscles that she's already dampening from the gaze of the crowd. The stage is only three feet tall, and any one of the audience could climb up and take advantage of her position. She knows it, feeds on it. If I don't go out there, someone might.

Arousal rides the air in this place like a bass beat. I allow the anticipation to wind tighter, in me and all my fellow club-goers. When it's time to mount the stage, I'll know, because this is exactly my place.

That is what Jera is missing.

Not the whips, or the ropes. My friend is made for gentleness and adoration, not domination. But I wish with a fervency that tightens my throat that she could feel the freedom I've found in this room. There's safety here, in the arms and eyes of everyone who came here seeking others like them. In the understanding that sexuality isn't always pretty, but it's always beautiful.

I've never taken Jera to bed, but I could tell her exactly what she needs. It would only take one word.

Trust.

It's the faith that your partner will know what you need. It's the comfort to let go and not worry about what you look like in your moment of ultimate pleasure. It's the affirmation that you've been there together before. An orgasm—a good one—is something you learn.

I swallow, sweat already slicking my skin from knowing that eyes are about to be watching me, from the familiar weight of the whip in my palm. My world is dark and lovely, and walled firmly off from Jera's. I don't know how to help her find a club of her own people the way I found mine.

The wood floor creaks beneath my boots as I shift my weight, lashing the whip restlessly against my thigh.

On stage, Sabrina arches a little, her breasts shifting as her breaths go short. Needy.

Now.

I step up and pause so she can hear the creak of the first stair. She gulps down air, and I stride across the stage and into the lights. Music starts, deep and thumping, but not loud enough to spoil the sounds of her cries. Of her begging, if I choose.

Without looking at my audience, I extend an arm, my tattoos stark in the spotlight as I drag the strands of the whip up her leg, letting them slip between her forcibly spread thighs. The ink on my back is a gnarled, ancient tree, and the audience of the underground club gasps when they see it.

Maybe they didn't recognize me until then. Everything above my cheekbones is concealed behind a simple black mask, the kind Jax's mom would probably wear to some fundraising masquerade ball. But here, no one's looking to support a charity. They're looking to witness the pleasure my unimpeded lips and tongue are about to donate to Sabrina.

For the best of causes, of course.

Her pretty green eyes widen when I turn my attention to her. Maybe she didn't realize it would be me, though Kigh said he'd talk to her when I agreed to fill in for him tonight. Her whole body clenches, hands huddling into fists above the leather cuffs that immobilize her wrists.

"What are you going to do to me?" she whispers.

I move so fast she flinches, locking the handle of the whip across her throat. She doesn't like breathplay, so I press it up against her jaw, leaving her windpipe unimpeded.

Bending until she can feel my breath on her face, I murmur in her ear, "Safe word, Sabrina?"

"Red," she says, so only I can hear.

“Okay?” I add, because normally we’d talk about the scene beforehand, reiterate her hard and soft boundaries. Not that we haven’t done that before, but if this wasn’t a last-minute fill in, we’d have done it tonight before the staff restrained her on this stage.

She nods vigorously, the movement quick and almost scared, though that’s probably for the benefit of the crowd. I release her and turn. Tightening my body, I can practically feel the thorny bite of the sharp designs clawing at the edges of my abs. My name is flowing through the room on dozens of sets of lips, the awed whispers the BDSM club equivalent of a standing ovation.

The stage here isn’t my domain. It’s seen my cock before, and I’ve worked every whip in the place under these lights, but I’m a private room Dom. I joined this club because this is where the girls come to find me when they can’t find satisfaction anywhere else. When they’re afraid to ask for what they really want. When they need it harder than any other man has given it to them, but they need it delivered so they can still walk out of this place and back into their sensible pumps and picture-laden office walls without a visit to the hospital in between.

But that doesn’t mean I don’t know how to work a crowd.

I flick my eyes over them once. Cold and dismissive, as if they displease me.

They don’t aim the lights to blind here, because audience/stage participation is key to some of the shows we offer behind our members-only locked doors. So I can see all the couples arrayed on couches in the upward-sloping room. Down in front, there’s a broad-shouldered Dom with ebony skin and a gorgeous brunette on a leash. He’s watching Sabrina hungrily despite the sub curled on the couch beside him.

Turning, I hover the whip above Sabrina, the straps tickling her nipples as they sway back and forth through the air.

“You’d better let me go,” she says, fear shaky behind the thin bravado in her tone. “If my husband finds out what you’re doing to me, he’ll kill you.”

I don’t speak. The absent husband is always part of her role, though I don’t know if he’s real or just part of her fantasy. I snap the whip across her ribs.

Harsh and fast, red swells immediately in its path and Sabrina gasps. I flatten one hand between her hip bones, the edge of my palm brushing the fragile black lace of her thong: the only clothing I allowed her to keep. Bearing down, I let her feel how my hand controls her as I slap the whip over the top of one thigh, then the other. I pull my hand away and snap the skin beneath before it has a chance to cool, dangerously close to her panty line.

She shrieks and struggles against her bonds. “Don’t!” she cries out breathlessly. “If you mark me, my husband will know someone else has touched me.”

I raise an eyebrow and shift back a little so the audience can watch as I curl a finger and run my knuckle down the front of her tiny panties. The heat of her flushes through the fabric and though the audience can't see how wet it is, they know.

*I know. My dick surges.*

Sabrina blushes and turns her face away as I rub my knuckle back and forth, teasing her clit in clear view of the rest of the room.

I surge upward and catch her chin in my hand. She struggles fiercely this time, her arms and legs all tied down but her teeth clenched against me as I bruise her lips with mine. I fight my way into her mouth, forcing her to accept my tongue. As soon as I do, she melts, worshipping my lips and tongue as sweetly as I've ever been serviced. I harden further as she gives in.

Usually, I don't talk on stage, but the triumph of possession heats my blood and I growl, "Your husband doesn't fuck you the way I do."

I snap the whip just below her breast. Lightly, just enough to make her arch up for more. She does, whimpering, and I give her what she needs with a slash across both nipples. They flush rosy with the attention and I settle into a rhythm, flogging her breasts and then her belly, licking all around the edges of her tiny panties.

Sabrina moans and whimpers, pleads with me, cries out. She drinks in the attention, every part of her alive and crying for more.

The slap of skin against skin breaks the breathless silence between lashes of my whip. Someone is getting a spanking. Maybe a sub got caught eying me too closely, or maybe a master just got too wound up by the show and needed a little release. I stalk around the table so I can watch. My cock feels heavy, and I adjust it, stroking a palm slowly over the bulge in my pants. A girl in the crowd sighs breathily.

The spanking is happening deep in the shadows at the back of the room, the girl bent over the back of the couch. There's a mistress on the same couch, her sub's head resting on her lap as they both watch me. I slow my rhythm, letting the whip fall with the same beat as the bare hand at the back of the room. Heartbeats speed with each impact and heat shimmers through the room. Sabrina twists toward an orgasm, gritting her teeth in frustration as I hold back just enough to leave her dangling on the edge.

My dick flexes, and I have to grit my teeth, counting my heartbeats to keep myself from moving until the right moment. One. Two. Now. Yes.

I slip my fingers inside Sabrina's panties and she half-screams with the relief, soaking my fingers with her response even as I push inside her, being rough so I can enjoy her walls squeezing down on me. I fuck her with two

fingers as I tease her with the very ends of the flogger, kissing her shoulders and ribs and the sensitive place below her belly button. Then I change my grip on the handle to give her what she needs.

Sabrina doesn't like pain. She likes bondage and exhibitionism and submission and the sound of the whip whistling through the air. All of that, she told me. The reason she seeks me out in my private dungeon—even when I won't meet her on stage—is because I know how to sneak behind what she likes, into what she craves.

I slash the whip down across the tender lower curves of her breasts. She jumps and bites her lip. The first letter of her safe word is forming on her lips as I pull out of her and cup my hand softly between her legs. Dampness kisses my palm and the lace of her panties stretches tight over my knuckles. I whip her once, hard, then again before she can recover. She cries out, and on the third strike she tenses beneath my touch and I bear down with my palm, helping her ride out her orgasm. Letting her grind against me and pull against the ropes, screaming once when it's all too much to take silently.

In the front row, the leashed sub hits her knees, her big Dom wrestling open his zipper and feeding her his cock. Her lips part to receive him and my pulse roars.

Stalking a circle around Sabrina's head, I yank open the buckle on her right cuff, then her left. She flexes her fingers woozily, and before she catches up with what's happening, I push her arms to her sides. Vaulting onto the table, I land astride her to the gasps of the crowd.

I could tie her, but as deliciously relentless as ropes feel, sometimes Domination requires muscle to feed the hunger deep inside me. I clamp Sabrina between my legs, her elbows grinding into my shins, my knees punishingly tight against her biceps. She wriggles, eyes going wide as she registers the unplanned turn our little show has taken. I rear back, taking my time flicking open the button on my pants and slowly drawing down my zipper. She can say her safe word now if she wants out.

But nothing else will save her from what I'm about to do.

My cock springs free as soon as the zipper releases, the tip glistening with moisture that heats under the lights. I rub my thumb over the sensitive slit in the end, squeezing just below the head so the ladies in the crowd can watch me thicken.

The sounds of the spanking get harder. I glance over, and in the front row, a brunette head bobs between the spread thighs of her wide-shouldered Master. He tugs on the leash, demanding that she take him deeper.

I pin Sabrina between my legs and lean forward, bracing one hand on the edge of the table just beyond the loose pool of her tangled strawberry-blond hair.

I fist myself in one hand and push my dick into her mouth. Her lips stretch around me and her tongue rubs softly beneath my tip in welcome. I draw my hips back and thrust deeper. In this club, I see guys use girl's mouths like sex toys: made for their pleasure. But I fuck Sabrina's mouth like it's for both of us. Deep and slow and sensual. Drawing out long enough to make her feel the emptiness before I give it to her again. Pressing into her throat just enough so she can thrill at being invaded, not enough to hurt her.

My shaft glistens when I retreat from her mouth, and I pulse thicker as I remember all the eyes watching me take her. My abs draw tight, that low, sweet burn telling me I only have seconds left.

That's when the panic hits. It's a slap of cold wrongness in my chest that freezes its way up my throat and into my face. My shoulders flex, vulnerable beneath the lights in a way I haven't registered until just this second. I swallow and squeeze my eyes shut. It's nothing I haven't felt before. Sabrina's not mine, and I'm not hers. There's a distance between us that has nothing to do with how many places our bodies touch.

I focus on my cock, swollen and sensitive in her mouth. My knees, shaking with the strain of pinning her to the table, her tied legs still pulled sensually open behind me. I can stand between them and fuck her after this if I want to, hard enough to make her bound body bow with pleasure while everyone watches.

This time, when I pull back, she sweeps her tongue around the head of my cock and I burst. Through the fog in my head, I remember to grab my dick in one hand and her hair in the other, tilting her head so she doesn't choke when I shoot into her mouth. Sabrina sucks on me, pulling another wave out when I thought I was done.

I let go of her hair and brace myself on the table. One second.

I'd give myself two if no one was watching, but one is all I have to lock my thought away, deep back in my head where no words exist.

I hop off the table, landing as if my knees aren't blurry with pleasure. I pull the cuffs off Sabrina's ankles and wrap an arm around her waist, hoisting her over my shoulder with a little flip. Hoots come from the crowd as I turn to display her bare ass, my arm holding her legs securely in a fireman's carry. They cut the lights, but not before I see the guy in the front row, his head thrown back and throat tight as his girl carries him through the rough edges at the end of his climax.

Once we're offstage, I bring Sabrina back to my room, where she can get dressed. She's even more talkative than usual, hugging me twice before she

leaves, and I lock the door behind her before I scrub a hand over my face.

I never know when it's going to flatten me, that crazy premonition. Or hallucination, whatever it is. These girls are all beautiful, each one in her own way, and they need me. I want them, thirst for the things we do together, but the acts I crave aren't....her.

Every time I figure out exactly what a girl needs to feel complete, there's a tiny, firm *click*. It's easiest here—these are my people. That was pretty fucking obvious the first time I came in the doors and saw a girl tied to a cross in the same way as a magazine picture I had kept since I was sixteen, stuffed deep under my mattress where my mom couldn't accidentally find it. But no one has ever made everything click for me. Not that I'm not satisfied. I am, I guess.

I push a hand through my hair and eye the door, but I don't go out. Instead, I check the clock. It's been an hour and twenty since I left Jera and Jax. Probably she went home with her boyfriend, but I oughta swing by Jax's just in case either of them are having a post-show drink.

I shuck my leather pants and grab my jeans off a chair, but for a long moment, I don't put them on, my eyes going unfocused as I stare at the floor.

At nothing.





## Chapter 5: Invisible



### Jax

“So, did you start the band?” I sort of chuckle and grin at the same time, mostly because the girl who asked the question is silky-blond-hair-and-busting-out-of-her-bra-cups gorgeous. “Ah, I’ve been in lots of bands.” I wink at her friend, a blond of a lighter shade who blushes at having the attention turned on her.

My shoulders swell a little wider, and the guy with them rubs at a reddish spot in his scraggly beard that might be a zit. I can’t tell if he’s a friend, or one of their dates, because neither of them is paying him a bit of attention and he hasn’t staked a claim. Until he does, I’m stuck with the charm dialed to an innocuous half-strength for both of them, because that’s The Code.

“I started the band.” Jera appears at my side, swiping a knuckle at the edge of her eye like it itches. “First, I played guitar, and we traded off vocals. Then our guitarist quit and I wanted to be behind the drums, so Danny and I found Jax at an open-call audition.”

I wait for the inevitable joke, that they swiped me from my strict pageant-training regiment, or “discovered” me while I was showing Pomeranians, but Jera’s face is blank of humor. She makes a quick dab at her opposite eye—maybe her eyeliner is bothering her? I glance behind her for her boyfriend, but Andy’s nowhere in sight. Fuuuck...

It’s definitely not her eyeliner that’s the problem. Jesus, I’m starting to see why Danny hates that guy so much.

I sling an arm around her shoulder. “They prayed for their musical salvation, and there I was,” I joke, hoping to prod her back into her usual sardonic carelessness.

Jera rolls her eyes, a smile tugging at the edge of her pale lips. “We got an ego with an expensive guitar. Lucky for us, he can carry a note every second Tuesday.”

The girls laugh and swap glances. “Yeah. He can definitely do that,” Second Blond purrs.

Jera drops her head into the curve of my shoulder and I chafe my hand up and down her arm, which is colder than it should be from just a quick trip to the

parking lot. Irritation climbs my throat. She's nuts for that guy but after practically every time she sees him, she seems a little...deflated. Or something. "You think there's any chance I can get a drink?" she asks hesitantly.

"Uh..." I turn toward the bar, but the bartender deliberately ignores me trying to catch his gaze. "Actually, our friend there was being pretty accommodating, but after your boyfriend showed up, I'm thinking not so much."

Jera blows out a breath. "Some Saturday night this is turning out to be."

A pang squeezes in my chest. "Fuck this bar, then. Let's get out of here and start our own party." I smile at the two blonds who have been practically glued to me ever since I came offstage. "Wanna see my place? I've got an acoustic guitar I could teach you a couple chords on." The hotter of the blonds bites her lip, her eyes darting between me and Jera. She shares another look with her friend, who makes some kind of stiff face I can't quite decode. The guy with them suddenly comes to life, glaring at both of them and pointedly not looking at me.

"We better not," the hot one says. "Maybe we'll see you the next time you play here, hmm?"

The guy herds them off before I can answer.

I frown. "Well, shit." I glance down at Jera. "Okay, activate your Secret Girl Decoder ring and tell me where I messed that up? They were super into me a minute ago."

Jera laughs, and when I scowl, she laughs even harder so that my arm slips off her shoulders. I cross both arms over my chest, a flush rising up my neck. At least I've got her laughing again, though I wouldn't have minded if it wasn't at my expense.

"She thought I was your girlfriend." Jera grins. "Come on, you still had your arm around me and you asked them both over. They probably think you're recruiting for some kind of orgy."

I perk up a little at that, shrugging super-casual like. "Rock stars do that. Guess I can't blame 'em for drawing conclusions."

Jera rolls her eyes, her smile wobbling.

"Screw 'em," I say, doing my best to sound like I don't care that I just traded in two hot girls for the bandmates I spend pretty much every Saturday night with anyway. "Let's pack up our stuff and Danny can meet us at my house."

Jera shakes her head. "You might as well go after those girls, see if you can get another chance. I should probably get home to Granna, and who knows when Danny's going to get done with whatever favor he's doing."

I glance away, pretending to size up our equipment still waiting on stage. She doesn't know about his membership at the BDSM club, and I'm bound under

strict Man Code not to tell her. Danny wouldn't blink if his own mother caught him on stage with his fingers in one girl and his dick in another, but for some reason he cares like crazy that Jera doesn't find out. "Can't you just call her and make sure she took her pills? You already divide them up in boxes for her, right?"

"By morning, afternoon and evening dose," Jera says, already checking her phone. "But she's been having more trouble getting changed for bed lately."

"I'll start packing up and you call. If we need to, we can swing by there so you can get her in her nightie or whatever, then it's back to being young and irresponsible." I wink, and head for the stage.

When Jera was packing to move across town to the dorms for college, her grandma's health took a nosedive and Jera moved in there instead, just to keep an eye on her. Her Granna's a riot, all snappy jokes you'd never expect out of a lady in a pearl-buttoned cardigan, but I feel bad sometimes that Jera never gets to cut loose the way I did when I was getting my associate's degree.

I grin at a brunette who wiggles her fingers at me, and hop up on the stage to start breaking down Jera's drum kit. I keep close to the edge in case the brunette is feeling chatty.

The dorms kicked ass the first year in college, and the second was even better, when I moved to a one bedroom a block off-campus. It was the first time I'd been able to just live without knowing my every move would reflect on my family, and that every screw up would make its way back to my mother. Manhattan is big in some ways, but it's a damn small island in others, and everybody knew the Sterlings.

Metal scrapes as I snap one of the stands flat and set it next to me, sneaking a glance out to the crowd. Everybody's ignoring me now, dancing or talking to their friends like I'm the hired help instead of the guy that owned all their eyes an hour ago.

Out west, I'm not Jackson Sterling, heir to an empire I'm not quite worthy of. Out here, I'm invisible. Sometimes I love that. And sometimes I hate it.



"DUDE, GRANNA'S ALREADY in bed, and she said she was fine." I flick on the turn signal and merge into the next lane, tossing a glance at Jera that's just long enough to ascertain that her teeth haven't stopped worrying at her bottom lip since she got in the car.

"I know."

"So why are you waiting for her to call?"

"I'm not." She flips her phone face-down in her lap.

The light's red, so I look over at my bandmate. Yeah, she's all bent up about that guy again. Maybe the dipshit didn't text her, after doing the bare minimum of a cameo at her show and then keeping her in the parking lot for half an hour. He probably talked her into giving him a blowjob for good behavior.

Thinking about that makes me twitchy, and I shift in my seat, leaning my bouncing wrist over the steering wheel. "By the way, while you were gone, I had to punch two guys for talking dirty about our sexy drummer."

Jera crosses her arms and looks out the window, trying to hide her smile. "Guys are animals. Girl in skirt, good. Girl in skirt hitting things with sticks, grunt grunt even better." The light turns green. "Hey, do you mind making a stop for beer?" Jera asks, like we don't do this every time a show closes, because she and Danny aren't old enough to stay at the clubs and party with me.

"Yeah, sure." I make the turn into the parking lot of a convenience store. I shut off the truck and pull the door handle at the same time, but then I catch Jera checking her phone again. The dome light goes back off as I close the door without getting out, leaving my bandmate's face drawn in stark lines of shadow and fluorescent glow from the gas station's signs. "Is something up with you and Andy?"

She tucks the phone away between her leg and the door. "Nothing. It was cool that he stopped by tonight, don't you think?"

"Uh, I guess." My eyebrow twitches dubiously. "So, anything you want to talk about?"

She ducks her head, her hair curtaining her face. "Nah, I'm cool. Maybe get a wheat beer this time, will you? I'm sick of IPAs."

"Right." I pop open the door, leaving her the keys so she can listen to music while I'm gone, because that's what I always do. I'm sort of the band chauffeur, because Jera's VW bug is too small to hold her kit, and Danny's POS almost never runs. I pat my pocket, to check for my wallet and the all-important ID. Usually, Danny and Jera stay in the car together when I do beer runs, talking about stuff that cuts off abruptly when I come back.

I still party with a lot of my old college friends, shoot hoops with some of the guys from work, go dancing on the weekend with girls I meet at the bars we play, but my band are my best friends. The ones who know I keep my spatula in the cabinet for efficiency, instead of losing it in an overcrowded drawer. But I don't know what they're always talking about when I'm out of the room, or why Danny sleeps at Granna's house almost as often as Jera does, even though I'm ninety percent sure they're not banging.

Then again, they never invite *me* to stay over there.

I stop in front of the door to the gas station, my jaw clenching. Why would they? When they want to party, they have my apartment to do it at. Maybe they stay at Granna's when they want to hang out without me. I glance back at the truck, but Jera's not looking after where I went. She's already on her phone again, maybe inviting over more people because I'm not enough entertainment to even keep her off Facebook for five minutes.

I spin around, striding back to my truck and pulling open the door. "You know what? This is bullshit. I'm sick of being a truck to haul your gear, an ID to buy your beer, a voice behind the microphone to sell the songs you write."

Jera looks up from her phone, her lips parting slightly with shock. "What? Is this about buying beer? Because you don't have to, we can just get some Mountain Dew or whatever."

Heat claws up my throat. She's so oblivious, she didn't even bother to listen to a word I said. "I'm fucking through with being your back up friend, and the runner up goddamn band member, even though I'm the lead singer."

"Who ever said that?"

"You did, tonight, when you reminded everyone that *you and Danny* started the band. And don't bother denying it, because we both know if he were here right now, you'd be spilling your guts to him, rushing the words to get them all out before I came back out of the store." I grind my teeth together, wishing I wouldn't have said the last part. It's so true it sounds pitiful for both of us, hanging out there in the open air.

The car parked next to us starts up, but I make no move to get my open door out of their way. Jera looks down at her lap.

"Shit," she whispers, her voice quavering just a little bit before she bites her lip. I clench my jaw. I'm right, or she'd be laughing in my face right now. I'm not going to be swayed by her damn girl tears. She swallows. "I'm so sorry, Jax. I had no idea we made you feel like that. I—" She reaches across the seat, not looking at me as she tugs my sleeve. "Get in, would you?"

I do it, slamming the door behind me and staring at the convenience store. "But it's still true, isn't it?" And why wouldn't it be? I've always been *almost* good enough. Good enough for my mom to brag to her friends about me—as long as she twists the truth a little to make it look better. Good enough to get gigs at clubs, but not good enough to headline even the local venues. Good enough to make acquaintances everywhere I go, but not friends.

"No, not at all," Jera says, squeezing my arm now that I'm closer. "It's just...easier to talk to Danny about some things. That's just me being a chicken, not anything to do with you."

I turn my head to stare at her. “A chicken?” I scoff. “Why would you be afraid to tell *me* what you guys talk about when I’m not around?”

Jera has the kind of natural confidence that only ever visits me on stage. Her hair is always a beautiful tumble of highlights she didn’t need dye for, her music a glorious wash of notes she didn’t have to train for, didn’t even really have to practice. She just *knows*. How to sing, how to write. How to play anything from the accordion to the grand piano, while I pour everything I have into the common guitar, the instrument every stoner at a party can pull out to impress the ladies. When I met her, she was seventeen, and you could tell she was already exactly who she was meant to be: quirky, quick to laugh or skip or dance, and the sound of God himself on a stage.

“Because you’re...” She blushes.

I pause, my head drawing back a fraction. I know that look. “Wait, I’m what?”

She blushes harder.

“A jerk?” I press, because I’m not above guilting her into spilling whatever is behind that blush. “Not smart enough to follow the conversation? Not all dark and mysterious like Mr. Tattoo Artsy Boy?”

“Pretty,” Jera blurts. “You’re pretty, okay?”

My eyebrows shoot up. *Jera* thinks I’m hot? My brain takes a slow minute to crank that thought over, and then I start to laugh, shoving her shoulder. “Ooh, you’ve got a thing for me, don’t you?”

“No!” she snaps, punching me back, a lot harder than I shoved her. I rub the sore spot and grin. “I *did*, a long time ago. Back when we first started the band. A little one, just because you were—”

“Pretty,” I supply readily, waggling my eyebrows. “And you were hot for my body.”

“I hate you,” she mutters.

I lean back against my seat, my muscles feeling as big as my smile. When she was seventeen in pixie-sized ripped jeans, barking orders at me to replay every song, she was actually crushing on me. Hard.

“Now that you’ve humiliated me, can you at least get me drunk?” She scowls at me.

“That, I can do.” I hop out and cruise into the gas station, shelling out for the good microbrew we all love instead of the cheap stuff that we usually have to make do with. It’s a good night, and we’ve got a little extra from splitting the cover charges. When I return to the truck, I load the beer into the back before vaulting into the driver’s seat. “You know,” I say, stretching an arm across her seat as I twist to watch behind us while I back out. “Just because I’m

devastatingly handsome doesn't mean you can't talk to me about your boyfriend. I bitch to you about girls all the time."

"Yeah, that they want you to go on more than one date with them." She snorts. "Not the same thing."

I glance at her and say nothing, my mood fading a little at the realization she still doesn't want to confide in me. She must see it because she sighs and picks at a loose thread on her skirt, giving in.

"Andy's just—I love him, but I know I'm not quite...enough for him." She swallows. "You know?"

"Yeah." I glance away. "I know the feeling."

She doesn't look at me, and I don't look at her. I point the truck toward my apartment, not sure if I feel a little bit worse or a whole lot better.





## Chapter 6: Intimacy



### Jera

Danny blows in the front door and through to the kitchen with a little two-finger wave, not really looking at me or Jax sitting on the floor in front of the TV.

Worn plastic slips smoothly under my thumb as I pause the game. “Gonna hit the bathroom,” I mutter.

My mood was cruising high after two beers and doubling Jax’s high score, then tripling it. But as soon as I see Danny, it all comes rushing back. Even if I fooled Andy for once, I know Danny’s going to see it all over me, and I’m not ready to face my failure again.

Jax bumps my shoulder with his, flicking me a look from under his ridiculously long eyelashes. I give him a smile to reassure him, and transfer my beer from between my knees to the coffee table. He’s been so sweet tonight, even though I sincerely doubt *he’s* ever disappointed one of his girlfriends.

As Danny runs the tap in the kitchen, I pad down the short hall on bare feet, closing the bathroom door behind me. I put the toilet seat down with a click and hook my thumbs in my panties, pushing them down before I hike up my skirt and sit. I’ve barely started when the door opens and my eyes pop.

“Danny! Jesus, get out!”

He rolls his dark hazel eyes. “Like I’ve never seen you pee before? It’s not the most interesting thing girls do with their pants off, I promise.”

He turns his back and I grab the roll of toilet paper—loose on top of the spool because Jax is convinced that’s more efficient than taking it on and off all the time—and throw it at him. It rebounds off his shoulder and lands in the sink, and I feel a tiny bit vindicated, even though he’s right. He’s peed next to me at camp-out keggers, and in more than one tiny bathroom with both of us gigglingly drunk. God, he was the one who helped me clean up Granna last week when she had her first accident.

Still, I hate him for being here, for standing so quietly with his back to me in this tiny room, both of us knowing exactly what happened tonight. One more tally mark toward the inevitable conclusion Danny keeps insisting isn’t inevitable.

Math has never been his strong suit.

"Did it happen again?" he asks.

I clamp my teeth together until they grind, but I don't answer. "Give me the goddamn toilet paper back," I mutter instead, holding out my hand. He grabs it and passes it back without turning around.

I wipe and the scrape of cheap tissue against sore skin makes me wince.

Of course I'm sore. If I were a normal girl, I'd have been wet and ready to get wild with her beloved boyfriend in the parking lot after a kick-ass show. If I were the party girl rocker I pretend to be, the people passing the car windows would have turned me on even more.

I grab a new wad of tissue and press it against my face to stifle the sob that's locked inside my throat. Only a thin whimper gets out, but it's enough.

Danny turns and lifts me to my feet, flushing the toilet for me as my arms lock with the force of my next sob. I hide my face in the puff of tissue paper, as if keeping my tears utterly silent will make them disappear. Gently, Danny tugs my panties back up my legs and brushes my skirt down over them before he folds me against his chest.

His fists dig into my shoulders, his chin biting the top of my head because he always hugs *hard*, but it makes me feel safe.

The bathroom is so small around us, the tile counter blurring in the edges of my vision. The force of my grief sears it into my brain, like this might be the moment I remember where I finally gave up.

"It's not getting any better." My words are muffled by his shirt, his chest bony and lean beneath the fabric.

"Fuck him," Danny says, and I pull away from him, dropping my tissues and grabbing the edge of the sink, my head sagging on my neck as I laugh bitterly, my nose clogged.

"That's the problem, isn't it? I can't fuck anybody the way I ought to be able to."

"Not your fault, Jimi."

"He's trying!" I turn enough to glare at him. "I know you think he's a jerk, but it's not like he's not trying to help, Danny. He loves me, but he doesn't know what's wrong with me any more than I do." I wash my hands, splashing water on my face. Jax's going to know I was crying and he'll feel left out again, like I couldn't confide in him. God, is there anything I can't screw up tonight?

Danny reaches out, just barely touching my shoulder. It's more tentative than he normally is, with me or anyone, and that only brings the tears to brimming again. I squeeze my eyes closed and he turns me into him, lifting my hand and flattening it over his heart.

His heartbeat is slow and steady, and eventually, my breaths lengthen to match, my fingers curling slightly as they relax.

“Sex is supposed to feel like this,” he says, his palm warm against the back of my hand.

I open my eyes, my eyebrow quirking. “Sex is supposed to feel like me and you, hugging in a bathroom? Because I think I’m closer to a nap than an orgasm right now.”

His eyes smile, just a little. “Shut up, Jimi. I’m trying to explain shit.” He takes a breath. “It’s like us, but it’s also like that moment on stage tonight, when Jax stopped trying so hard to sing and just *sang*, you know? During ‘Disturbed.’”

I laugh, letting my forehead fall until it rests on his collarbone, his heartbeat a steady bass beneath my palm. “Are you sure you’re not a virgin? Sex should be like a nap and Jax’s loudest rock solos. Sure thing.”

His lips touch my hair, almost like a kiss, but not. “You’re going to be okay, Jera. There’s nothing wrong with you.”

I choke on my next laugh, taking a step back. “Of course *you* would say that. But that’s my whole point. The two people I love most in the world are you and Andy, and I don’t really want to go to bed with either of you. What if that’s all I’m capable of?”

Annoyingly, he smirks, crossing his arms. “I thought you said it was that I was a terrible kisser.”

“You were!” I shudder at the memory. “Or not bad, but just...gross. But you’re my best friend, so that would be fine—if I didn’t feel exactly the same way about Andy once our clothes come off.”

Danny shrugs, utterly unconcerned. “Guess I’m not The One for you. And Boyfriend Douche-panties isn’t either.”

“But then why do I...” I bite my lip.

“Maybe you girls have it all backward.” His eyes are smiling at me again as he tilts his head. “Go for somebody that gives you ten, twelve screaming orgasms and *then* get to know them.”

I smack him. “Great advice, Dr. Ruth.” I elbow past him to get to the door. “And after that rousing pep talk, I need a beer.”

Apparently Danny isn’t done yet, because he catches me from behind and pulls me back against his chest, hugging me with iron-hard arms locked around my ribs. After a second, when he’s still holding me, I stop squirming.

“You okay, D?” He lets me go, and I turn to face him. His hazel eyes are perfectly blank, which makes me all the more suspicious. “What was that favor you had to do for a friend?”

“Had to star in a porno. Guess I’m not a virgin after all.”

I roll my eyes and turn to yank the door open. “You’re such a dick. Seriously, I don’t know why I even hang out with you.”

“’Cause I’m your favorite,” he drawls, flipping out the lights.

“Fat chance.” I flounce down the hall. “Anyways, you kiss like a trout.”



## Chapter 7: Fill Me



### Jax

Jera comes out of the bathroom and flops down at my side, her eyes red. My stomach drops, but not because she was spilling her guts to Danny again. Now that I know what she's crying about, I know better than to open my mouth and think I have a damn thing to say that could help.

She drops her head on my shoulder and I blink once, then smile. I tip my head so my cheek rests on top of her hair, just for a second.

"You okay?"

Jera pouts. "Danny's a dick. Next time he follows me into a bathroom, kick him or something. Jeez."

I look at Danny and he shrugs. "I'm a pervert. What do you expect?" He snatches my controller out of my lap and slumps onto the couch, kicking his legs out to prop his unlaced boots on the edge of my coffee table.

I punch him in the thigh, jostling Jera's head on my shoulder.

"Feet off my fucking furniture, dickhole."

"Sure enough, Martha." His feet don't budge as he grabs the beer he dropped on the coffee table before he followed Jera down the hall. Hooking his middle finger around the neck, he tips it to his lips. Cool and casual like nothing has ever bothered him for a second in his life.

His Adam's apple bobs, and as he lowers the bottle, he puckers a kiss at me without looking away from the screen. I glance away, annoyed at having been caught staring.

Jera crawls up and grabs another controller from the drawer under the TV. We add a player, and for a while, the only sound is the mechanical soundtrack from the TV, the clink of beer bottles against my coffee table. Still, all I hear is my own guitar, that one perfect solo pouring from my throat during "Disturbed."

"Can I tell you guys something?" My voice sounds odd interrupting the video game: too quiet, or something.

"Don't worry, you'll get your period soon enough," Danny says.

Jera reaches across me and gives him a deadleg punch in the perfect center of where I smacked him a minute ago. He actually flinches a little from that one, frowning at her, and I smirk.

She high-fives me, dropping back to her butt and grabbing her beer. “You can tell us anything you want, Jax. And Daniel is going to keep his trap shut unless he has a masochistic streak, because he knows I’ll beat him like a red-headed stepchild.”

Danny pauses the game and links his hands behind his head. “I think I’m a little closer to a sadist, actually.”

I twitch and nearly sprain an eyelid trying not to look up at him. Is he stupid, hinting at his club life like that? Or does he sort of want her to guess? I always thought it was weird, him keeping that one thing secret when they know every other tiny detail about each other.

Also, I may not be a BDSM Jedi knight or whatever the fuck like he is, but I understand enough to know Danny doesn’t get off on anyone’s pain. What he gets out of that shit is way deeper. Maybe darker.

“Subjecting us to your sense of humor is pretty fucking sadistic.” She flicks a loose penny at the bassist, squinting her hazel eyes at him as she makes a “zip it” motion across her own mouth before she turns her full attention to me.

I scrub a hand through my hair, feeling stupid now that everybody’s looking at me. “It’s just...my day job, right?”

“UPS?” Jera shrugs. “What about it?”

“I kind of...” I glance away. “Like it.”

Danny opens his mouth and Jera hurls the TV’s remote control at him without looking away from me. The crack of plastic on bone tells me her aim was its usual bullseye, but he doesn’t make a sound.

“That’s cool, though, right? What do you like about it?” she asks, obviously still on her best behavior since our fight earlier.

I pull my knees up, propping my arms over them and grabbing one wrist. “I don’t know, like today. I—it would take me a long time to explain it all, but I solved a problem. A big one, that’s been screwing everybody up for a while. I saved a lot of money and a shitload of time and...” I take a breath. “It felt good. When I got out of work, it didn’t even matter if I did anything else today because I was happy, you know? Chilled out.”

Jera nods, her face a little too smooth as she fights not to look confused. “Uh huh?”

“That’s a damn good day job, man.” Danny tips up his beer and takes a drink.

I glance up at him, because I’ve seen him work, and I think that might be how he feels about tattooing. A nice, quiet kind of peaceful. Which makes me all the more curious about what he’ll think about what I have to say next.

“But then I got all stoked about the show, and once I got up on that stage...” I suck in a breath through my teeth, shaking my head. “It was so much better. Better than *everything*, this wild crazy rush in every part of my body.”

Jera grins, nodding now that I’ve finally said something she can connect with. “God, yes. It’s just like that.”

“Afterward, though, I didn’t feel all calm and perfect. I was still raging, kind of dizzy and off-balance because I wasn’t ready for it to be over.”

“Who could ever be ready for that to be over?” Jera’s eyes go unfocused for a second, and then she shakes her head quickly, as if to clear it. She picks up her beer. “It was a good show, you guys.”

“I know, it was. It really was.” I fumble, hesitating. I haven’t quite said what I wanted to say yet, but I’m not sure I have the words. “I just got to thinking, I mean...maybe this band thing shouldn’t just be for fun. Maybe we could be big, famous even.” I stop for a second. “Maybe we’re *supposed* to be famous and that’s why everything else feels so—”

Not enough. I don’t say it, but the room all but echoes the emptiness back to me, and I know I’m not the only one feeling it. Even Danny, I think, because he keeps shifting his weight when Jera’s not looking, like he can’t quite get comfortable.

Jera snorts, her voice forced a little too loud when she says, “Or you could man up and learn how to attract girls without warming them up on our subwoofers. I’m pretty sure we’re not the only garage rock band to wish we were the next big thing. But yeah...” She laughs. “A platinum record would pretty much fix everything that’s ever been wrong in my life.”

She un-pauses the game, as if that’s the end of it.

“Maybe it would, right?” I say softly, still staring at the screen and seeing the lights of a much bigger space. “Maybe it could.”



THANK YOU FOR READING Fill Me! Want to read how Jera found love? You can [one-click](#) A Cruel Kind of Beautiful to start reading now!



### **A Cruel Kind of Beautiful**

**IF YOU CAN’T GET TO the Big O, can you get to the happily ever after?**

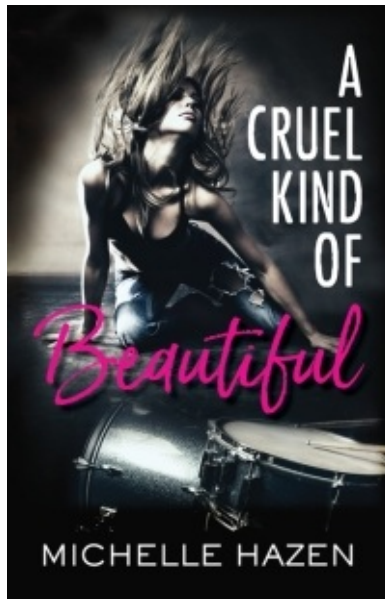
Jera McKnight loves music, swoons for hot guys, but sucks at sex. Jacob Tate is her perfect storm: a pun-loving nude model with a heart as big as his record collection.



When a newspaper-delivery accident lands him in her living room, he's almost tempting enough to make her forget she's never been able to please a man—in bed or out of it. Sure, he laughs at her obscure jokes, and he'll even accept a PG-rating if it means he gets time with her, but he's also hiding something. And it has everything to do with the off-limits room in his apartment.

Jera pours all her confusion and longing into her drum kit, which pays off when her band lands the record deal of their dreams. Except just like Jacob, it might be too good to come without a catch.

She doesn't know if her music is good enough to attract a better contract, or if she's enough to tempt a man like Jacob to give up his secrets—even if they could fix her problems between the sheets. But if this rocker girl is too afraid to bet on herself, she might just end up playing to an empty house.



AVAILABLE NOW!

[Click here to instantly escape into the world of Jera & Jacob's romance...](#)

Keep reading for a sneak preview of  
Book 1 of the Sex, Love, and Rock & Roll Series



## Sneak Preview: A Cruel Kind of Beautiful



### Jera

When the newspaper broke my window at four in the morning, I didn't stop to think about the fact that I was wearing sweats. Not thin, make-your-butt-look-cute yoga pants but old school sweats: cuffs cinched tight around my wrists and ankles like rib-knit shackles, plus deflated airbags of material sagging at my crotch and knees.

This is definitely something I would have considered if I'd known I was going to open the door to biceps like his.

Turns out my renegade paperboy isn't a boy at all; more like six feet two inches of pure man-candy. With his fist raised to knock, all his muscles stand out in exquisitely stark lines, and I'm definitely not staring. Or maybe I am, because he takes a step back and drops his hand, brow furrowing.

"Shit," he says. "*Shit.*"

I quirk a brow. I'm five foot flat on a good posture day, so it must be the atrociousness of my sweats that's putting the fear into him.

"Don't tell me this was a revenge window-breaking and you got the wrong house." I nod toward my neighbor's place. "Did Mr. Schmelzly steal your girl or something?"

His eyes dip below my collarbone for a second, but I'm not exactly worried about my lack of a bra. This sweatshirt is so baggy I could be packing the curves of Santa Claus or Kim Kardashian under here and he wouldn't be able to tell the difference.

"I wish I could claim it was revenge. More like a total failure of motor skills." He grimaces. "I'm so sorry about your window. They give us a half day of training, which felt like four hours more than anybody should need, but right now, it's looking like I could have used five." His shoulders hunch as he gives me a sheepish look.

My annoyance melts, and I offer, "In your defense, it was the Thrifty Tuesdays paper. Tuesday has some serious heft in tampon coupons."

“Plus, the supplemental entertainment section.” His face relaxes into a smile. “If it’d been a Wednesday, you might have been safe. Here, can I at least help you clean up the glass?” He steps forward.

“Uh...” I hesitate, surprised that he’s offering to do housework. Not to mention he probably has another twenty miles to pedal to finish his route, because who the hell gets newspapers delivered these days? Though I guess if anybody did, it would be this neighborhood, where I’m the youngest by four or five decades. Not exactly the iPad generation.

“I’m sorry, you probably don’t want a strange guy in your house who just broke your window. Trust me, I’m not a serial killer or anything. If I were going to kidnap you, I’d like to think I’d be a lot smoother about the whole thing.”

“Good to know. There’s nothing I hate more than an inept kidnapper.”

His eyes lighten at my response. “That doesn’t seem fair. Shouldn’t you hate successful kidnappers more? There’s the ride in the trunk and the whole ransom debate...it’s probably a real pain.”

“Nah, people love successful kidnappers. Because Stockholm Syndrome.” A smirk tugs at the edge of my mouth. “Shouldn’t you be convincing me to trust you, not defending kidnapping fails?”

“Right. I’m batting a thousand this morning, aren’t I? Sorry again.” He blushes, actually *blushes*.

He’s like a walking sex dream with close-shaved hair and a cologne-commercial jawline, and I have no idea how a guy can be this hot without a trace of cocky to go along with it. Abruptly, I realize I’ve been holding those delicious dark-chocolate eyes for longer than I have any right to when I’m dressed like somebody’s Aunt Melba. I step back to let him inside.

“No problem. I promise by the time we work the glass out of my shag carpeting, you’ll have worked off every debt you’ve ever owed.”

He glances down as he steps over the threshold, then sucks in a sharp breath. “Your feet!”

I follow his line of sight. There’s some chipped green polish on my toenails, but nothing that requires an exclamation point. Though now that I look closely, there are a couple of tiny blond hairs growing on top of my big toe. Gross. Do people tweeze toe hairs? Is that a thing?

“You don’t have shoes—are your feet cut?”

I prop one hand against the wall and lift my foot to check for blood. “Nah, I’m set.” I don’t bother to check my other foot. He’s close enough now to weigh in on my toe-tweezing dilemma and frankly, his was not an opinion I had hoped to poll.

“Here.” He hops to keep his balance as he pulls off one of his sneakers and hands it to me.

I consider this trophy, tipping my head. “Um, thanks?”

“Put it on.” He flushes, though this time I’m not sure why. “If you tell me where the dustpan is, I can start picking up the big pieces while you go get your shoes.”

Bouncing on one foot, he removes his other shoe, wobbling for a second so his shoulder bumps into mine. He blushes again at his clumsiness but earnestly pushes the other one of his Cadillac-sized Vans at me, waiting until I put them on.

Now I have clown feet.

I peek up at him, my lips losing a battle with a smile that’s pure are-you-for-real-right-now?

His eyes fly from his Vans up to my face, his gaze snagging on my lips. “Uh...”

A year ago, a look that hot from a guy like him would have been the Holy Grail of my dating existence. But now, he’s more like the picture of Ian Somerhalder that Granna once taped to our vacuum: something pretty to look at while you clean, and nothing more.

I shrug, wishing the movement could shake off my goosebumps. “Give me a second to grab my own shoes and I’ll be right back.”

“Um, yup. I’ll just be here, then.” He folds his hands in front of him, but the corner of his mouth twitches irrepressibly upward. “Researching successful kidnapping techniques on my phone, so you’ll trust me.”

I choke on a laugh. “Yeah, because that’s not creepy at all.”

Except as the smile spreads across his face, lighting his eyes, it really isn’t. I’ve known the guy for five minutes and if a real criminal burst through the door, I’d probably jump behind him.

Besides, we already know he can do some real damage armed with a newspaper.

“If you hit expert level before I get back, I want my cut of the ransom,” I call as I slide-waddle my borrowed shoes across the crunch of outdated carpet and splintered glass. Each one of his puffy skater shoes is as long as both my feet put together, and I have to shuffle along like an old lady or risk them falling off. If my bandmates could see me now, I’d never hear the end of it.

When I get to my room, I shove a dark strand of hair back into my messy bun, ignoring the small, hopelessly female part of me that wants to search for a hairbrush. I kick off his shoes in favor of a pair of pretty ballet flats, then glare

down at my feet. I peel them off and stuff my feet into a heel-squashed pair of slippers. My subconscious definitely cannot be trusted.

After Andy and I broke up, I set my Facebook status permanently to Single and dropped my makeup into a bottom drawer. I'm done putting my ass on the line—or into a set of Spanx—to impress a man. So instead of primping, I hook two fingers into the back of the stranger's Vans and carry them into the living room.

"The trash can is in the kitchen," I call out, "but if you want to do some heavy lifting, my behemoth of a vacuum cleaner is in the hall closet. We call her Bessie. Well, and a few other names I probably shouldn't mention if you happen to be religious. You'll see why once you—" I break off as I round the doorway and realize I'm talking to myself.

I glance at the huge sneakers in my hand, then up at the rest of the room. My guitar still sits in its stand, my crate of semi-collectible records resting next to my antique turntable. Everything that might interest a thief is still here, but of my walking sex dream, there's not a trace.

He's just gone.



AVAILABLE NOW!

[Click here to start reading Jera & Jacob's story today!](#)

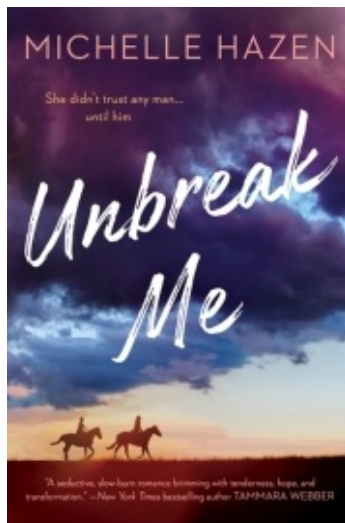


Curious about Michelle Hazen's other books?

[Click here](#) to read *Unbreak Me*, a contemporary romance about a troubled horse trainer and the cowboy who bakes his way into her heart.

An Amazon Best Book of the Month

A Booklist Best Books of 2019



**WHAT COULD TWO TROUBLED souls from different walks of life have in common? Maybe everything.**

Andra Lawler lives isolated at her family's horse ranch, imprisoned by the memories of an assault in college. When she needs help training her foals, she hires a Haitian-Creole cowboy from New Orleans with a laugh as big as the Montana sky.

LJ Delisle can't stand the idea that Andra might be lonely—or eating frozen TV dinners. He bakes his way into her kitchen with a lemon velvet cake, and offers her cooking lessons that set them on the road to romance. But even their love can't escape the shadow of what they've been through. Despite their growing friendship and his gentle rapport with the horses, LJ is still an outsider facing small-town suspicions.

Before they can work through their issues, LJ is called home by a family emergency. In the centuries-old, raggedly rebuilt streets of New Orleans, he must confront memories of Hurricane Katrina and familiar discrimination. And Andra must decide if she's brave enough to leave the shelter of the ranch for an uncertain future with LJ.

**AVAILABLE NOW!**

[Click here to start reading LJ & Andra's story today!](#)



Love the band and want to read all their love stories?

[One-click](#) the Sex, Love and Rock & Roll boxed set and save **42% off** the price of buying each book individually!

**The Sex, Love and Rock and Roll Boxed Set**

**Hilarious  
Heartwarming  
Addictive as dark chocolate**

THIS AWARD-WINNING series follows a rock band on the rise from bar rooms to the big time. From spit-out-your-coffee funny to so heart-wrenching you'll be snatching up a napkin to dab at your eyes, these books will give you ALL the feels.

*\*\*Brand new bonus content! Exclusive interviews between the author and each of the three band member characters to catch you up on all the gossip of what's been going on since the series ended! These hilarious and heart-tugging interviews are available in this boxed set only.\*\**



6-piece boxed set includes:

**BOOK 0.5 - FILL ME**

Meet the band...before they got famous, or found love.

**Book 1 - A Cruel Kind of Beautiful**

Gentle guy with a huge secret. Girl with a drum kit and a dream.

If you can't get to the Big O, can you get to the happily ever after?

**Book 2 – Playing the Pauses**

She's a globe-trotting tour manager who can't be tied down. He's a Dominant rock star and tattoo artist who needs her help to explore his true kinks.

**Book 2.5 – Tie Me Down**

A wild-spirited tour manager & an inked-up bassist found love on a tour bus, but now their jet-setting jobs are tearing them apart.

**Book 3 – Insatiable**

He's a star

She's a hard rock legend

He's ruined by his past

But she can't stay away...

It's hard to resist a bad boy who's a good man

**Book 3.5 – Christmas with the Band**

Tattoos, house fires, and house arrest: It's Christmas with the Band! This comic romp of a holiday story wraps up the world of the Sex, Love and Rock and Roll series in a red lacy bow.



Click here to grab your boxed set from any major retailer:

<https://www.books2read.com/b/bpWNLX>





## Dear Reader



**H**ello! Thanks so much for reading. I hope you had a good time reading about Jera and her beloved bandmates, before they got famous or found love.

If you can, please consider leaving me a review on the retailer site of your choice. It doesn't have to be long, and it doesn't have to be Shakespeare—even a sentence will do. Good, bad, or ugly, it's all valid. It just means so much to me to know you took the time to read my work.

If you'd like to find out more about the rest of the series or what I'm up to, hop on over to my website at <http://michellehazenbooks.com/>

I got my start as a fanfiction writer, so there's nothing I love more than to write little unseen moments from the books, or secret peeks into the character's lives, character interviews or bonus stories. If you're the type with a hankering for extras and deleted scenes, my newsletter is the place for you. I usually announce new releases a little early on my newsletter, along with exclusive peeks at whatever I've got coming next. I also like to chat a bit about my travels and what continent I'm currently writing from. Come on over and join the fun! <http://michellehazenbooks.com/newsletter/>

You can keep up with me on Twitter @michellehazen where I dish about writing, drool over Norman Reedus, and shamelessly post pictures of abs or puppies (or abs AND puppies), because the world needs more of that. <https://twitter.com/michellehazen>

If Facebook is more your jam, find me at <https://www.facebook.com/MichelleHazenAuthor/>

Or Instagram at @MichelleHazenAuthor <https://www.instagram.com/michellehazenauthor/>

You can follow me on Goodreads and ask any questions you have at my Ask the Author page: [https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/6559289.Michelle\\_Hazen](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/6559289.Michelle_Hazen)

If you do visit any of those places, let me know what you're looking forward to for the rest of the series, share pics of your dream cast that you pictured for each character, or just say hello! Chatting with my readers is my most favorite thing so don't be shy.

Thanks for being here,  
Michelle

---



## About the Author

---



MICHELLE HAZEN IS A nomad with a writing problem. Years ago, she and her husband ducked out of the 9 to 5 world and moved into their truck. She found her voice with the support of the online fanfiction community, and once she started typing, she never looked back. She has written most of her books in odd places, including a bus in Thailand, an off-the-grid cabin in the Sawtooth Mountains, a golf cart in a sandstorm, a rental car during a heat wave in the Mohave Desert and a beach in Honduras. Even when she's climbing rocks, riding horses, or getting lost someplace wild and beautiful, there are stories spooling out inside her head, until she finally heeds their call and returns to her laptop and solar panels.

Find out more at <http://michellehazenbooks.com/>

## Don't miss out!

Click the button below and you can sign up to receive emails whenever Michelle Hazen publishes a new book. There's no charge and no obligation.

**Sign Me Up!**

<https://books2read.com/r/B-A-WQEF-VIYP>

BOOKS  READ

Connecting independent readers to independent writers.

## Also by Michelle Hazen

**Friends Make the Best Lovers**

[So You Think You're A Match?](#) (Coming Soon)

**Sex, Love, and Rock & Roll**

[Fill Me](#)

[A Cruel Kind of Beautiful](#)

[Tie Me Down](#)

[Insatiable](#)

[Christmas With The Band](#)

[Playing the Pauses](#)

[Sex, Love, and Rock & Roll 6-Book Boxed Set](#)

Watch for more at [Michelle Hazen's site](#).