

# **Walk With You**

by Anna Heal

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## Prologue

### ***Present Day***

*This. This can't be happening.*

I knew I felt that familiar warm fluttering feeling in my stomach and I ignored it.

*Stupid.*

I would face palm myself if it wouldn't make me look absolutely crazy in front of all these people I'm pretending to know.

I can do this.

Or I could just send myself sprawling across the floor and hide underneath one of the beautifully laid out dining tables until the charity gala is over. *No, no I can do this.*

He doesn't look that good, does he?

*Yup, sure does!*

I really have tried to forget about him. It doesn't help when you've dreamt of the person almost every night for a few months.

So what if I've googled him over and over to see what he's been up to... with her.

*I'm. So. Screwed.*

As much as I've tried to convince myself in the last 6 months that that night meant nothing, that he has a girlfriend forgetting him has been the bane of my existence. I've felt like such a lovesick ass, that after I told my closest friends about that night a few months ago, I've avoided the subject ever since. I don't think my best friend Ella is convinced. She sucks like that, always knowing what I'm thinking before I realize I'm thinking it. She's too perceptive when it comes to my useless love life but damn I love that girl.

Now here he is, charming the panties off all of the women in the room and making the men think twice about their nonexistent gym memberships.

My stomach does another flip when I see a small hand in his bent elbow and then another being placed on his broad chest. Her melodic laugh sounding like nails on a chalkboard to my ears. That's her. The reason I cut that night off. The reason I ran with my tail between my legs even before I knew the truth. The reason we could never be.

## Chapter 1

### **6 months ago**

"Seriously Ella, I'm going to be fine. It'll be good for me to do something other than work for a change." I sighed into the phone, knowing that my best friend is just worried about me being in the big city all by myself. I feel like all I've done lately is wake up, go to work, come home and sleep. Maybe even eat, if I can remind myself. I love my job, but working as a nurse in the NICCU at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles is definitely not boring or laid back.

They've sent myself and a few of my coworkers to New York City for a week for long conference on the further development of our Critical Care unit. So, technically I'm not completely alone. However, with our free time tonight and tomorrow I've decided to indulge in my usual solitary tendencies and venture out alone to see the sites.

"I'm not worried; I just want you to have fun in a safe way." Ella has been my best friend since we were 12 years old. She knows me better than I know myself. Which is annoying but I can't say that it hasn't worked in my favor a time or two in the past. She, along with my roommate Shannon and her boyfriend Jon, are the closest thing I've ever had to family. They hate it when I travel for work but it gives me a chance for complete anonymity in a new place to just relax and be free. Perk of an otherwise sometimes stressful career choice.

"I promise I will phone you tonight when I get back and text you a couple of times tomorrow so you know I'm not dead in a ditch somewhere." I laugh in her silence because I know the look she's giving me through the phone.

"Don't joke like that Izzy!"

There are only three people in this world that can call me Izzy, to everyone else I'm Isabelle and that's the way it'll stay unless someone wants to feel my wrath.

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry. Listen, I'm not going to go super far. Tonight I promised to have a drink with my coworkers then tomorrow I'm going to do a bit of sightseeing. It'll be fun and I'll be careful, Ellebell."

I knew I had her smiling with that one so all I got in response was "Love you, Izz! Text me tomorrow!"

"Love you too!"

I put my phone down on the hotel coffee table and go to the bathroom mirror to fix my makeup for the night.

Quick drink, then I'm coming back here and putting on the plushest robe I've ever felt, throwing on a mud mask and going to sleep to rest up for my day tomorrow.

True to my word, one drink later and I've had enough. Not that I'm a downer or anything but my fellow nurse and manwhore extraordinaire Mike has already bagged and tagged two different women and I'm pretty much over the giggles and sucking noises coming from the opposite side of the table. With quick goodbyes and ducking motions to get away from Mike's slimy hands I make my way back to my room and begin my relaxing night as a hermit. Tomorrow is going to be my day to get lost and maybe find myself all at the same time.

## Chapter 2

One thing you can count on in New York is you'll never be bored. Central Park, Empire State, Times Square, I saw it all and I know it isn't anywhere near enough to begin to understand the ins and outs of the city that never sleeps. The hustle and bustle is completely different to that of L.A.'s but I'm definitely smitten with this city already. The other different thing is the heat, thank god I put on a casual navy short sleeve sun dress today or I'd be one of the puddles the taxis frequently drive through. Choosing my black flats over my Saint Laurent nude pumps also earns me a pat on the back, even though I wrestled with wearing them just because they cost me a small fortune. Wearing them at every occasion is my way of telling myself that the purchase was justified.

Coming back to the hotel I drop off my pile of crap which I'll have to convince myself was needed later and the touristy souvenirs I got for Ella, Shan, and Jon. I decided to go back out for some food after the sun went down and when the cooler air sets in. I wanted to enjoy more of the city but most of all I was getting hungry and that needed to be resolved. Pizza needed to happen and now. Armed with just a Wristlet and enough money for food and maybe a taxi ride I make my way through the front doors of the hotel. I'm momentarily stopped by the immense number of people still walking around on the sidewalks, this city really just never quits. I'm starting to love it here.

After walking for what seems like an entire afternoon, I'm completely entranced by the traffics, people, buildings, and random things New York has to offer. I feel like those tourists who wear the fishing hats and sunglasses with cameras around their necks, taking pictures of every single building and interesting thing they can. Except I'm not wearing a hat nor did I bring a camera because apparently it needed to stay on my kitchen table. I didn't realize I'd left it until Shannon texted me when I was already on the plane. I yelled "Damnit!" super loud while most people on the plane were asleep, they were not impressed.

I decided to stop and ask a local (I assumed he was local by his accent and passionate hand gestures when he talked) where to go for pizza. Three people stopped and simultaneously said "Di Fara" so guess where I'm going! I hop in cab, a little nervous from hearing stories about how New York cab drivers drive, and tell him my destination. Just like that he knows, no need for a direction or address. Damnit New York, you're making it really easy to love you right now.

Pulling up to the curb I hand the driver who didn't kill me or drive us into oncoming traffic, some cash. A warm fluttering feeling happens in my stomach. Apparently I'm hungrier than I thought. I attempt to gracefully hop out of the taxi and by gracefully hop, I mean fall in the most unladylike way I could have possibly imagined.

Except I don't hit the ground.

### Chapter 3

I love that moment when you're in a relationship and you're so comfortable with each other that you could hold each other for hours and just be. This isn't that moment.

Stepping out of the taxi instead of hitting warm concrete like I thought was going to happen, I hit a wall of warm strong chest. Two arms corded in muscle wrap around me to keep my face from hitting the ground. Realizing I've been caught mid fall I pull back and stare at said chest covered by a dark grey t-shirt. Up even further, catching dark stubble across a strong jaw, full lips with quite possibly the whitest teeth I've ever seen in my life, a straight nose and two blue eyes shaded by a dark blue baseball cap.

*Stunning.*

It's the only word I can think of at this moment. Thank god I don't mutter it to myself to make this embarrassing moment just that much worse. "Hi!" A deep soothing voice comes out of those full lips I've been staring at and I finally realize that the gorgeous face is talking to me and I should probably switch where the blood supply is flowing and turn my brain back on to say something intelligent. "Hi!"

*Smooth, Isabelle.*

Noticing he's still holding me, I begin to peel myself away and instantly notice the lack of warmth and comfort. I regret my decision immediately.

"Thank you, for catching me. I didn't mean to be such a spaz and fall on you."

"No problem, it happens. Not that I have beautiful girls fall on me every day. Not that you're beautiful, I mean you're beautiful but..."

*Did he just call me beautiful?*

I would break out in a happy dance but let's not get carried away right now.

"Are you okay?" He asks rubbing the back of his neck. Strong biceps peeking out from his t-shirt momentarily make me feel like my IQ has dropped 50 points.

Now, I am not a girl who gets speechless around guys. I've dated before, had two previous boyfriends both for a few years a piece. I've been hit on more than I can count. Mostly when I'm out with Ella because she looks like a real life Scarlett Johansson except her legs go on for days, attached to a body that belongs to a Victoria Secret model.

But that's not the point.

I can usually keep my cool pretty well but right now this guy is making me feel like a goddamn fan girl.

"Fine, really." I say, trying not to blush.

"You going to Di Fara? Should I watch you go so you don't run into anyone else?"

Smug bastard.

"No thanks, I think I can manage not to mow anyone else down on my way."

All I need is to locate my Wristlet which I probably dropped during my extremely elegant fall. Crap, where is it?

*Did he pick it up?*

I look up to find him looking at me like I've lost my mind not my money. Great, he's just getting all the best sides of me tonight isn't he?

"I think I must've dropped the wallet I was holding." I explain to him. Looking towards the ground he lets me know,

"I didn't see one when you stepped out of the cab."

*What?*

That can only mean one thing. It's still in the back of the taxi that's long gone now.

*Crap, crap, crap.*

That means I have no money for a ride home, and worst of all no money for my pizza craving. Well I'm just rounding out this night quite well if I do say so myself.

"Oh god, I left my money in the back of the taxi! Do you think I can call the taxi company and see if they could come back?"

"You're not from New York are you?" He says while looking like he's holding back a smile.

*Is he laughing at me?*

"No, I'm not, but thanks for the help." I snap back at him crossing my arms.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to laugh. Seriously though, that really sucks is there anything I can do?" At least that sounded a little more sincere.

"No I left my cell phone at the hotel because I didn't think I would come out this far and now I'm seriously regretting it." Especially now that it's getting dark out and I have no idea which direction my hotel is even in.

"Where are you staying?" he asks.

I reply before I can stop myself, "The Marriott Marquis."

"Here, let me buy you a cab ride back." He reaches into one of his pockets in his jeans as I scope out how they fit him in all the right places and pulls out a black wallet.

"Uuum no, absolutely not! There is no way I'm just going to take some strangers money. I'll just walk back."

"That's like a 3-hour walk! You're not walking alone, at night, in a city you don't even know!" Geez, he sounds like Ella. Let's face it though if he knew me, he'd know my stubborn ass won't listen anyway.

"Thanks for the advice but I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself. Besides, I'll get to see the city up close and personal."

His face flashes with a look I can't quite place and I realize he looks a little familiar to me, like we've met before.

"Have we met?" Pulling his hat down, a slow blush creeps across his cheeks while he looks almost anxious.

"No, don't think so. I guess I just have that face."

Leaving it alone because I don't want to creep him out I reply with, "Thanks again for catching me earlier, I guess this is goodbye."

I really don't want it to be but if he's right and it's that much of a walk I better get moving. Mentally fist pumping myself again for picking the flats over the pumps. Before I can even fully turn around he blurts out, "I could walk you."

*Wait, what?*

"I meant what I said about you walking alone and if you won't take the money to get a cab then I'm coming with you."

"No really, it's fine. I can go alone you really don't have to."



Not taking no for an answer he takes a step closer to me and says, "I'm coming with you, and that's final. If you don't want me to well, then I'll just walk behind you the whole way and hope to god I don't get arrested for looking like a total creep. Is that what you want? Me to get arrested after I saved you?" Flashing the cutest half smile at me, I'm pretty sure my panties just disintegrated. At this point he could do whatever the hell he wanted.

*What is wrong with me?*

"Fine, but if you turn out to be a murdering psychopath I'll come back and haunt your ass!" A beautiful triumphant smile spreads across his face and again I'm hit with the feeling we've met before. If only I knew who he was, maybe I would've avoided the evening right from the start.

## Chapter 4

Completely abandoning my poor pizza craving, we begin the long walk back to my hotel. I can't help but sideways glance at the glorious being beside me. Trying not to blush like a nervous wreck I try for small talk hoping my shaky voice doesn't give me away. "So you live in New York?"

"No, L.A. actually! I'm here for work." *What a coincidence.*

"Me too." He stares at me like I'm one of those girls who likes the same music as each person they date.

"No seriously, I'm here on business from L.A. too."

Raising his eyebrow at me he asks, "Really, what do you do?" "I'm a nurse at children's hospital there. We're here to talk about developing some of our units so that when new technology comes in we are ready for it."

"That's impressive!"

"I know!" I say with a wink, and he bursts into a laugh that I melt into. I'm about to ask what he does for a living too when he cuts me off with, "So you here all by yourself? No family? Friends? Boyfriend?"

Ah, the old fishing for information trick. Better keep him on his toes then.

"No I left my boyfriend back in the hotel room. Had to tie him up in order to go out by myself for the day." Trying desperately hard not to laugh, his face falls and a small scowl crosses his face. It's unbelievably adorable and again I find myself pondering why he seems so familiar to me. Still pouting, I decide I should let him off the hook. "I'm kidding, nobody is tied up in my room, my friends are back in L.A. Man, you should've seen your face!" I burst into laughter and watch as I see a big smile as he shakes his head at me, mixed with another unknown emotion. Relief?

"You like to think you're funny don't you?"

Why yes I do, random handsome guy who's walking me back to my hotel. Wait why *is* he walking me all the way? Is he expecting something? "This isn't some scenario where you walk me back and now you think I owe you, do you?" Looking genuinely insulted he stops walking and stares down at me. I really hadn't noticed just how tall he is until now. Of course I'm a short ass and can barely see over people in the seat in front of me at theaters so in my reality everyone is taller than me.

"No, why would you say that?"

*Uh oh, dig yourself out of the hole Isabelle and dig fast.*

"I'm sorry, I was only joking. Bad joke apparently. See not always funny, even though I think so." Looking up, I flash my best I'm-adorable-please-don't-be-mad-at-me smile and he seems to relax.

He starts walking again and I follow his step even though his long legs make me walk a lot faster than I normally would on my own. We fall into a comfortable silence while I look around the busy streets. I start to notice just how many people, mainly woman, are staring at my escort for the day. Apparently he notices too and pulls his hat down lower so his eyes are now in complete shadow. I'm not sure why he's still wearing it considering the sun has gone down, but if I was wearing a hat I'd have hat hair so maybe he's just as vain as I am and that's what he's trying to avoid. He has to know how

good looking he is, I mean how could you not with that face, that body, those arms...  
*Focus Isabelle!*

Trying to ease his weird discomfort I steer the conversation in a different direction.  
"So what about you? Are you here all alone in the big city all by yourself?"

"Not technically, everyone I'm working on this production with is here. Our days are usually really long so I just wanted to get away for the day and sink into the city for a while." *Production?*

I begin to ask "What is it you do...?" but he cuts me off with, "Hey look!"

Spinning my head to see the sign he's pointing at. "We can cut through Prospect Park." Well at least we'll have some decent scenery around us so that I won't stare at his ridiculously handsome face the whole time, like I am right now. My cheeks feel like they're glowing red as he catches my stare once again and gives me a quick wink. This is going to be one long walk.

## Chapter 5

Seeing ahead what I can now note as a huge tree line I know we're quickly coming up to the outskirts of the Park. I spot a sign to my right that says 'Parkside Donuts' and I can actually hear my stomach growl like a wolverine. I'm not the only one who notices because my walking partner turns and gives me a look of impressive awe at the sound. Apparently he decides right there that he is not taking no for an answer and buys us some food for the road. Because I'm so hungry, and can't imagine not eating for another couple of hours, I oblige and we make the quick stop before going forward.

Armed with two croissants and two hot chocolates we're ready, even though I know when it comes to my stomach and I'm assuming his, this won't be enough for long. Just the outside of the park is beautiful and big! In all honesty not what I was expecting to see in the middle of Brooklyn but amazing nonetheless. We eat quietly while enjoying life around us but I feel the need to learn more about him and resolve myself to ask him questions when I'm done.

"So there's something I need to know." He stops mid chew to look at me.

"What's that?" He says suspiciously while looking at me with a worried expression on his face. Wow, he really doesn't like the attention on him. Kind of refreshing.

"What's your name?" He looks as though he may change the subject or not answer me at all which I don't understand. I start to argue that's it the least I should know about him when he answers, "Evan, my names Evan."

"Isabelle. Nice to meet you." Smiling he waves his hand in a mock royal bow.

"Yeah, I guess you deserve to know the name of the creep following you."

"Yes, probably should know in case he gets arrested." With mock horror he grabs my hand and says, "You would let me get arrested after all I've done for you?"

My laughter turns to nervous laughter when I realize he is still holding on to my hand. Warm fluttering stirs in my lower belly and my heart rate starts to pick up. I look up to stare at his lush mouth as his carefree smile fades. As I look into his blue eyes he seems to be wrestling with something. He takes a step closer to me, so close I can feel the heat pouring off of him. Taking a deep breath in, a small v creases the middle of his eyebrows as he closes his eyes. Just like that he lets go of my hand and begins to back away. Swallowing and looking anywhere but at me he says, "We better keep moving." Feeling completely confused and not going to lie, a little rejected, the only answer I can give is a small nod. Turning for him to lead the way I peer into the upcoming dark forest. At least it'll match the current mood.

## Chapter 6

*What in the actual hell just happened?*

Silence has fallen upon the two of us as we avoid eye contact and stare at the sites. Turning on Flatbush Ave. I see a sign for the Zoo and Botanic Gardens. If only I had known about this place earlier I would have come here instead of going shopping for more clothes I don't need. I guess when you're stranded without any means of paying for anything and nothing to identify yourself with you realize just how materialistic life can be sometimes. Sinking deep into thought, I fail to notice Evans voice right away.

“Listen Izzy, I'm really sorry. I shouldn't have done that back there.” Only problem is, he didn't actually do anything.

*Is that what's bugging me?*

“My life is... Complicated. I'm not going to bore you with the details but just so you know I'm really enjoying the randomness of tonight with you. It's definitely been an interesting one so far.”

Interesting indeed. I've always had my friends around for most of my life adventures. We've travelled together, partied together, been in trouble together and all of life's moments in between. This is one of the first times I've ever really been alone with someone I don't know much about in a strange city. So far it hasn't been all bad except for the embarrassing rejection moment. But hey, I'm independent and strong and will not let the rest of my adventure be ruined.

Nearing the end of Prospect Park, I can see a large monument in the distance. A little sign on the side of the road reads ‘Grand Army Plaza’. “Hey there's a fountain over there, is it cool with you if we stopped for a bit?” I ask him.

“Yeah sure let's do it.” Crossing the street carefully to avoid being hit by anything on the still crowded roads we come up to the fountain. Placed in the middle of the road shrouded in trees its lovely and I can't help but close my eyes to the rushing sound of the water. I open my eyes to see Evan sitting on the edge staring up at the sky. His blue eyes sparkling from the lamp lights. More questions run through my head, damn my curiosity. If I were a cat, I'd be dead nine times by now.

Caught staring yet again, Evan looks at me with a small lopsided grin. “What are you smiling at?” I asked and of course I can feel myself blushing now.

*Damn.*

“You. You do this thing where you retreat into yourself. Where do you go?”

*Do I still do that?*

I guess I don't realize I do it much anymore. I used to do it a lot when I was younger, after my parents passed away. I was sent to live with my Aunt. She wasn't home very often and worked a lot so I was left to myself most of the time. I preferred it back then, it let me be alone with my thoughts and confused at how much my life changed in such a little amount of time. Two years later I met Ella, then a few years after that Shannon and

Jon. They brought me out of my world and into a one of fun, love and adventure. I really do miss them right about now.

“Sorry, I didn't realize I was doing it. Just lost in thought I guess.”

A small tick in his jaw catches my attention before he replies, “You know you can change your mind anytime right?”

“About what?”

He waves his hand in the air “About all this, you can stop being stubborn and just accept a cab ride from me and you can be back to your hotel.”

“Why? You want to get rid of me that bad?” I start to smile at my comment but realize he's not smiling back. *Okay.* “Did I miss something? I thought you said you were having fun.” Standing up he starts to shuffle his feet back and forth, “I am, this is... It's just... Never mind. I was just checking if you wanted it all to be over.”

*Over?* “This is the last time I'm going to say this; I'm not taking your money. If you want to go then go. I'm not stopping you. If this is all getting tedious and boring well I didn't ask you to come with me, you offered. You can leave anytime you want.”

We are at a standstill, rushing water, car engines, and the city moving around us all in the background while we are so still that neither of us know if the other is even breathing. I can see him thinking, mulling it over. If he didn't want to walk me why was he so adamant about it in the first place? I realize my palms are sweating, that my breathing has gone shallow and there is a lump in my throat and stinging behind my eyes. *Oh hell no, don't you dare cry woman!* I will myself not to lose my temper or my control. Then I realize it's not my temper or control I have to keep in check. It's my fear. Fear that he'll walk away and I'll never see him again. Fear that he'll actually leave me here. Alone.

## Chapter 7

Well this is not the way I thought this day would end up going when I left my hotel this morning. Exploring New York with a complete stranger I can't seem to let go of and now with complete irrationality I am in fear of never seeing again. Wrapped in our tense standoff, he breaks eye contact first and starts toward the exit of the fountain and towards the street. This is it, he's going to leave and that will be the end of whatever this has been. I contemplate running after him but I know that'll just make me look crazy and I don't feel like making this situation anymore crazy than it already has been. He stops halfway up the path and turns to me, his stunning face shrouded in darkness. "You coming? Or am I going to have to wait for you all night?" Relief mixed with a sudden onset of nausea, I am stunned. Paralyzed to my spot I don't register what's happening right away and just stare back at the dark angel in front of me.

He makes his way back over to where I am and stops just inches from me. "I don't want to leave. I am having fun. I'm also confused as hell right now and don't know how to figure it out." Before my mind can stop me, I fling my body against his and wrap my arms around his neck. He catches me in a huge hug which leaves my legs dangling in mid-air due to his height and my lack thereof. "Sorry." I say into his neck. *God he smells good.* He rewards my apology with a low chuckle and squeezes me tighter to his body. I feel like I could stay here all night if he'd let me. Setting me down on solid ground, he stares down at me with a sarcastic smile.

"You got to stop being such an ass Izz." I mock insult and smack him across his chest.

Evan backs away laughing and I come back with, "Excuse me, my ass is awesome and don't you forget it." Walking backwards he shoves his hands in his pockets.

"I know I've been staring at it for the last hour and trust me, I won't."

*I didn't mean it like that. But yeah, alright.* Another mental fist pump for me.

This place really is a concrete jungle. Shops upon shops line the street as well as huge buildings, restaurants and staples like the Barclays Center which we just passed not too long ago. We've fallen into a comfortable rhythm now and it gives me a chance to reflect on the events of the day. How has this all happened? *C'est La Vie* when it comes to mine. I feel like I've never had the time to adapt to anything long enough without it changing drastically on me. That's why I've always been quick on my feet. Ready to roll with the punches, and there have been a lot of punches. I've always tried to not let life get me down and focus on the bright side, the future and everything it holds for me. Pity eyes are something I've become accustom too especially when it comes to my parent's death. I've always hated the looks on people's faces when I tell them. Probably why I don't tell very many people unless absolutely necessary anymore.

Signs up ahead for Manhattan Bridge pull me out of my reverie. "Do we have to cross a bridge?"

Evans gives me a sideways glance. "Yeah, of course. Don't you remember driving over one on the way to Di Fara's?"

*Do I?* So much has happened since then I feel like that was a week ago. “Yes, I just forgot. Is it safe to walk across?”

“I guess we’re going to find out.”



## Chapter 8

Walking up the pedestrian path of the bridge the lights of Manhattan come into view. Beautiful twinkling, the city that never sleeps at her finest. Evan tells me about a spot on Washington Ave. where you can take a great photo of the bridge but of course my camera is still in my condo, so that's not happening. How does he know so much about this city even though he's not from here?

I have to ask, "Do you come to New York often?"

"Why do you ask?" Always suspicious this one is.

"You know so much about what's around here and you seem to have a pretty good idea where you're going most of the time." Relaxing a fraction, he says, "I've been here a few times. Mostly for work and I'm usually here for a few months at a time so I guess that's how I've become so familiar with it. This place has a way of growing on you and you don't even know it."

If that's not the truth I don't know what is. This city has been capturing my heart ever since I landed. The need to know Evan better is starting to get on my nerves so I try to stick with questions that won't make him uncomfortable.

"Where are you from originally?" His face lights up with mischief and he looks like a little boy when he answers, "Boston. I miss it. Wish I could live there full time with my family but my work calls for me to be in L.A. most of the time."

You can tell he's pretty close to his family by the way his mouth twitches upward when he mentions them. "Do you get to go back home a lot?"

"Not as often as I would like, but yeah I go back as much as possible. Especially since my niece and nephew are there. I miss their faces." A huge white smile spans his face and I think my heart just flipped.

We slow our pace a little bit on the bridge to take in the view of the East River and Lower Manhattan. A slight cool breeze stirs the still warm air and I close my eyes taking it in. I can feel Evan walking beside me, feel him like I've known him for years and we've walked beside each other our whole lives. It's a weird feeling, I've only ever had that feeling with one other person and that's Ella. I instantly hit it off with Shannon and Jon when I first met them but with Ella it felt like she had been around since the day I was born. That same feeling has been around ever since I fell onto the tall, lean muscle of a man walking next to me. Opening my eyes, I find him staring at me with a smug grin on his face.

"I did it again, didn't I?"

"Yep! Off in never Neverland once again." I barely hear him say "Where do you go Wendy?" ever so softly as he means to say it to himself mostly. I'm not usually this comfortable with strangers where I let my guard down entirely. It's starting to make me just that -uncomfortable.

Noticing my shields going up he jogs ahead and over to the edge of the pedestrian walkway climbing up the chain-link so his head barely sees over the top. Of course I

would never be able to see over it so my view is permanently obscured by fence. He calls me over to where he is.

“Come see this Izzy!”

Walking up to see, really see, the view of what’s ahead I can’t help but whisper “it’s breathtaking.”

Feeling his eyes on me he replies “Sure is.”

I turn my head to look at him and he is staring off into the view. *I could have sworn...* Looking back at the city I again replay the events of the past couple of hours. So much has happened already; what else could possibly transpire?

## Chapter 9

As we make our exit off the bridge and into Lower Manhattan, there are upcoming signs for Chinatown and Little Italy. We still have a way to go, and a small part of me wishes it could last a lot longer. We come across what looks like a karaoke bar on Bowery and numerous groups outside including a group of girls stumbling towards us. A statuesque blonde points at Evan and whispers to her group of equally gorgeous friends.

*I know ladies, I know.*

They continue to point and giggle at him when Barbie yells, “xcuse me? Hey! Hey you, guy in the hat.”

*Here we go.*

I’m actually surprised he hasn’t been hit on more on our trip to be honest but I was also secretly hoping it never happened, especially coming from someone as stunning albeit drunk as this girl. Evan glances over at them, his face neutral like a well-used mask of emotions. With a sway and squint of her eyes she points one of her perfectly manicured fingers at him.

“I think I know you. You’re that guy.”

Color draining from his face he grabs my elbow to steer me in the opposite direction while telling the girl politely

“No, don’t think so, sorry. Come on Izzy, let’s walk on the other side of the street. There’s too many people here.”

I can hear the girls still shouting at him but I can’t quite make it out due to the noise from the bar, her slurring and the fact that Evan has a hold of my arm so tight I hear rushing in my ears, while a blush creeps on my cheeks.

“What was that about?” I ask curiously.

“Nothing just a bunch of drunken girls trying to find a man, I guess.”

Not convinced I add “She seemed pretty sure she knew you.”

“I told you, I just have that face. You said you thought you knew me when we first met too remember?”

Yeah I did, kind of still do at times, especially when he laughs. Like I’ve heard it many times before.

Leaving it for now, we walk on the opposite side of the street passing a few hotels. My mind thinks how I would love to just check in and lay down, get off my aching feet and go to sleep. My heart on the other hand disagrees and just wants this night to keep going.

Pulling me from my thoughts Evan asks me, “So, you mentioned friends back in L.A.?”

Oh god I miss them so much. “Yes! Ella, my best friend. Shannon who is also my roommate and Jon her boyfriend. They’ve been together since we were kids.”

“You don’t live with Ella?”

“No, she lives on campus at UCLA. She’s earning her Master of Arts in Architecture right now. When she’s done she’ll move in with me and Shannon will move out with Jon. She’s pretty much the most impressive person you’d ever meet.”

Impressive, beautiful, funny, intelligent, the girls a damn Hawking Supermodel. When I first met her she intimidated the crap out of me, but then I got to know her and she just became Ella. A sister more than a friend nowadays.

“I beg to differ on that one, you’re pretty damn impressive yourself.”

*Really? He thinks I’m impressive? God I’m such a girl, get it together Isabelle!*

“Well thanks, but really the girl is gorgeous and smart, she’s a 10 out of 10.”

“What about the other two? You said they’ve been together since you were younger?”

“I met Ella when I was 12. Shannon and Jon when I was 15. They were together already when I first met them. Their moms were best friends and neighbors so I guess it was just meant to be.”

Never in my life did I meet a couple like them. Perfect in every way for each other including their differences. They just worked, without any effort at all at times it seems. The only other couple I remember like that were my parents, high school sweethearts together till death. As if reading my mind “What about your parents, do they live in L.A. too?”

*Okay, let’s get this over with.*

## Chapter 10

*“Get a move on honey! We’re going to be late!” My dad shouts up the stairs after my Mom. They’re going to a function for my Dad’s work again, some sort of formal dinner where they dress up like dolls.*

*“Alright, alright. I’m done, what do you think?” Beautiful would be too casual of a word to describe my Mom, she is flawless. Tall, leggy, with dark hair, dark eyes and beautiful porcelain skin. My Dad on the other hand complete opposite, light hair, light eyes and medium skin but just as flawless. People say I’m the perfect mix of both, I personally don’t think I could ever compare to them though.*

*My Mom twirls in her long red dress as my dad claps his hand to his chest like he just saw the most breathtaking sunset. I’ve never met any parents quite like them. All my friends’ parents are always fighting, or not talking at all. I’m the lucky one, loving parents in a loving home. A concept you don’t see very often anymore.*

*“You look perfect Mom.”*

*She beams at me “Thanks honey!”*

*The doorbell rings and I know it’s my Aunt Nadine. A little older than my Mom she definitely has a completely different personality. Likes to keep to her own mostly, but always there if you need her. Not as outgoing at all but nice nonetheless.*

*“Hi Isabelle. How are you tonight?”*

*“Great, don’t Mom and dad look awesome?”*

*Aunt Nadine gives them a onceover and offers them a small smile, “Yes they do. You look lovely the both of you, but you better get going or you’re going to be late. I’ll take it from here.”*

*My dad grabs his keys and wallet and turns to me to say goodbye. “Come here, give me a big hug!”*

*He wraps me in a big bear hug, he’s so good at them I make sure I get one daily just to remind myself how good they are.*

*“I love you Izzy! Have a good night with your Aunt and we’ll see you in the morning.”*

*I let him go only to get swept up in another huge hug from my Mom. “Oooh how I love you baby girl. Get to bed at a decent hour tonight and have fun.”*

*“I will, and I love you guys too. Have a lot of fun and dance a bunch together.”*

*They give each other the most love filled gaze and grab each other’s hand as they exit the door. I leave the door open and watch them walk to the car hand and hand. They both pause to wave and blow kisses in my directions.*

*“Dream sweet dreams baby girl and know that we love you.”*

If I could pause that moment in time and relive it over and over, I would. I would dream it and hold on to it and never wake up again. But I can’t. I wished for a long time that I could’ve stopped them. Made them stay at home that night with me. Made them tuck me into bed like they always do and have my dad read me a story. My mom telling us to stop because we were supposed to be done ‘one more chapter’ three chapters ago. Instead I woke up to my Aunts trembling voice telling me to come downstairs and two police officers with a look of pity in their eyes. Same look I get every time someone asks

me about my parents. I loathe it. I wish I could slap it off people's faces when I'm having a bad day. I don't want to be pitied.

I had them for 10 wonderful years of my life and even though they were taken from me too soon, they were taken together and that gives me some semblance of peace.

But, I miss them.

Every day. Every breath.

I miss them.

## Chapter 11

“No, actually they passed away when I was 10.” I don’t bother looking over at him, I don’t want to see it. He sucks in a sharp breath just loud enough for me to catch it.

“How did they die?” he asks carefully.

“Car accident. A drunk driver fell asleep at the wheel and crossed over the line and hit them head on.”

The officers said they died instantly which made me feel slightly better knowing they didn’t suffer at all.

“That must’ve been pretty tough for you being so young.”

“Yeah it was, I went to live with my Aunt. She was cool, did the best she could for someone who never wanted children in the first place. We stayed out of each other’s way for the most part. I respected her because she never pushed, never hovered. Two years later I met Ella and she brought back some life into me again and we’ve been best friends ever since.”

Feeling the need to look at him I turn my head bravely and look into steel blue eyes. His beautiful face completely impassive, no sadness, no tears and most of all to my complete surprise, no pity. The only thing I can make out in his eyes is a spark of curiosity. How can someone I just met say and do everything I need him to when I need him to do it? How can someone know me so well without knowing me at all? Baffled to say the least about the person in front of me he carries on with new knowledge and sensitivity.

“Sounds like you have some pretty special friends.”

That brings a small grin to my face. “They’re definitely special to me.”

“Maybe I’ll get to meet them someday. You know, at my trial after I get arrested for stalking you like a creeper.”

I burst into laughter and just like that my solemn mood and mention of my parents fade into a breezy effortless conversation of getting to know each other.

*“Maybe I’ll get to meet them someday”*

*Maybe, just maybe.*

## Chapter 12

The warm fluttering feeling is back; I don't know how else to describe it. Sometimes it feels like my stomach is doing warm somersaults and it carries on all the way up to my chest. Maybe I'm just tired, I definitely am getting hungry again which means only one thing. Evan must be starving.

"You getting hungry?"

Evan sighs in relief "I thought you'd never ask. I didn't want to say anything because we were making such good progress and your feet are starting to hurt."

*How did he know?*

I feel like I need to create a shrine to my flats after tonight. My nude pumps might be cute but at this point they would've been at the bottom of the East River and I would've been hiking it barefoot. Or Evan could've carried me fireman style, in his strong arms, maybe even lose his shirt somehow... *Focus woman!*

"Nope I'm definitely hungry. For food." Smiling nervously at where my thoughts have turned, we come up to cross the street into Union Square. Trees still green and flourishing from summer we take in the big statue in the middle and the Empire State building in the distant background.

With a cheeky grin and a mischievous laugh, I run forward toward the statue making sure no one is around. Evans footsteps right on my tail I turn and say "Ready?"

"Born ready! Wait, ready for what? What are you doing?" Tip toeing over the flowers and reaching my hands up to the base of statue I begin to climb.

"Woah, Izz, what are doing? You're going to get yourself arrested." I laugh under my breath as to not draw attention.

"Oh come on Ev! Live a little, we can share a jail cell if I'm caught."

Shaking his head and looking around the square he gives me a lopsided grin and starts forward to climb next me. Giggling like two years olds, we attempt to climb the horse's legs when my foot slips off and I start to slide down. Evans huge arm wraps around my waist turning me, as he catches me and pins my body against him and the statue while holding himself up with his other hand. Face to face, body to body. I can feel his warmth and hear his breath pick up. My heart starts doing a tap dance inside my chest as I stare at his chiseled features. The rest of the world goes black, New York in silence. The only thing I see and hear is Evan. Lowering his face down while staring at my parted lips I brace myself for impact.

A blinding white light sends us scrambling to hide our eyes. "What do you think you're doing?"

*Oh crap!*

Evan releases me and I hit the ground hard.

"Run!"

He shouts and leaps down off the statue with a huge thud in the grass and grabs my hand and pulls with such force I stumble. Righting myself using his hand we haul ass through the square. Footsteps behind us and the flashlight bouncing off the trees.



Everything becomes a blur as we rush past some wandering pedestrians and break through the trees and into the street. My lungs start to burn as the footsteps behind us start to die away and the flashlight turns back to streetlamps.

Crossing E 17<sup>th</sup> Street, we make our way back onto Broadway where we finally slow to a stop to catch our breath. Coughing from my dried throat I hear Evan begin to laugh unexpectedly, at first looking at him like he's lost his mind, I then find myself uncontrollably joining in. Before I know it both us are laughing so hard we're silent, only our shoulders shrugging up and down giving us away.

"I can't believe we just tried to do that."

Still laughing he says, "I know, my assistant would've just had a heart attack if he knew I did that."

*Assistant?* I think before he continues,

"You are a bad influence on me!"

"Me? Screw you, I'm perfect!" We continue laughing till it hurts until Evan reminds me of my earlier hunger.

"Holy crap, I'm hungry! How do you feel about stopping for fuel?"

"Considering I'm debating whether or not to break into that Mexican place right now, I'd say I'm down with that."

Thank god, I really didn't want to have to choose between Evan and food. I would need to make a pros and cons list for that one. "Come on, I know a place." Not wanting to over analyze what just happened near the statue I follow Evan without word. I just need to get food in me then I can act like a complete girl.

## Chapter 13

Walking for what seems like ages and all I can hear over the traffic is my stomach yelling at me, I ask. "Where are we going?"

"Just someplace I've been to a few times before, it's laid back and has really good food."

Entering the Flatiron District and walking past the famous Flatiron building I'm reminded of the breathtaking structures New York has to offer. Ella has always wanted to come here, so much that as a graduation present I've planned a trip for the four of us to come here for a vacation near Christmas time. She's going to pass out when she opens those tickets. I can't forget to take a picture of her face when she reads them. Of course I can't get a photo right now as I don't have my damn camera. *Ugh!*

We walk up the street and near a crowded entrance to what looks like a bar, numbers reading 40/40 club on a beige awning above them. Evan grabs my hand and pulls me towards the front of the crowd. He leans forward to talk to the hostess while I admire him from afar. A spark of recognition lights up her face and a small blush spreads across her cheeks as she bites her lower lip and nods her head for us to follow.

*Apparently he has been here before.*

Walking through the dimly lit lounge, huge TV screens adorn most of the walls while small white tables are surrounded by comfy looking sectionals. A hug bar in the middle lit up from floor to ceiling draws my attention while Evan tugs my hand gently to follow him and little-miss-blush-a-lot. We climb stairs past cascading tables to what looks like a more private area. *Lucky us!*

Sitting across from one another on two of the plushest chairs I've ever sat on at a restaurant. The hostess asks if we want anything to drink. Evan orders a Stella while I'm still looking around to see if I'm dressed okay for this place, it's so upscale. I start to feel incredibly out of place when I notice the hostess staring at me impatiently. *Really starting to not like her.*

"What he said."

With a slight roll of her eyes at me and seductive glance towards Evan that goes unnoticed because his eyes are pinned on me, she saunters away swaying her hips unnecessarily.

"This place is nice, like really nice. How did we get seated so fast?"

With a shrug of his shoulders he nods towards the menu.

"Take a look at what they have, I'm starving so I'm thinking one of everything."

Staring down and feeling my stomach rumble I start to agree when, "How's everyone doing tonight?"

Looking up I see a cheerful tall drink of water standing next to our table.

"You guys get your drink orders in? Decided what you want yet?"

Smiling down at me I feel my cheeks heat slightly and bury my face into my menu.

"We need a minute."

Evans clipped voice cuts through my embarrassment. I look up to see him scowling at the poor waiter as he turns to carry on at his job. Realizing neither of us were kidding

about ordering the entire menu of food, we both order appetizers, a main course as well as jumbo onion rings to share.

“A girl that can eat, that’s refreshing.”

“Oh and I do, unless I’m working a four-day stretch than I basically have to set an alarm to remind myself to eat. Oh how I love food though.”

The waiter arrives with our finger food and we dig in but not before he graces me with a small wink and smile before leaving our table.

“What’s with that guy?” Evan growls while I smash an onion ring in my face in an unladylike fashion and roll my eyes at him.

“He’s just trying to get a good tip. He’s harmless.”

“He’s about to be something alright.”

*Is he jealous?*

No way, that can’t be right. I’m about to poke fun at the little v forming between his eyebrows when Miss-I’ve-had-my-boobs-done-wanna-see sways back towards our table. If she keeps this up, I’m pretty sure I’ll body slam her by the end of the night.

## Chapter 14

“How’s everything tasting so far? Up to your satisfaction?” Flashing her pearly whites at Evan I answer.

“Yes, thank you.”

Completely ignoring me Miss-my-skirt-is-far-too-short only has eyes for my dining partner. Oblivious, Evan looks from me to her when she doesn’t say anything back to me. Thinking she didn’t hear me he repeats what I just said and batting her lashes she replies, “Let me know if you need anything from me.” And walks away so we can be served our appetizers.

“God she’s practically throwing herself at you.”

Evans head snaps up to give me a confused look as he shoves a taco in his mouth. I swear he eats 5 bites for every bite I take. Swallowing he asks, “What do you mean, she’s just being nice.” Dropping my fork into my Mac ‘N’ Cheese I give him a look of derision followed by a big sigh.

“You really have no idea do you?”

“Idea of what?”

“How good looking you are. How everywhere we go women seem to try and throw themselves at you. How you never even notice when they ‘accidentally’ brush up against you.”

Counting on my fingers, he adds “You think I’m good looking?” with a smug smile plastered across his handsome face I can feel slight panic rising as my voice trembles slightly.

“No, I mean yes you are but...” he cuts me off.

*Thank god!*

“You are one to talk considering every man walking by with two eyes have them pinned squarely on you. I saw a guy almost run into a pole staring at you near Grand Army Izzy, a pole! Not to mention Mr. Flirts-a-lot over there.”

Caught completely off guard, I don’t really know how to respond to him especially since he is now frowning into his empty plate looking like he wished his tacos would reappear. “Did you even taste your tacos?” I say with a slight laugh trying to extinguish some of the fire. He looks up at me with an unknown look in his eyes that leaves me feeling exposed and flustered.

“Look Izzy, I need to tell you something...”

“Okay so I’ve got the braised beef short ribs and the bone-in ribeye.” The waiter leans close enough when he puts my food in front of me that I can make out his name tag ‘Ryan’. We say thank you as Ryan grabs the back of my chair and says, “If there’s anything I can get you please let me know.”

Evan takes a long swig of his beer and replies shortly, “We’re fine, thanks.”

Not taking his eyes off me Ryan lingers a while longer until realizing Evan has spoken for me and nothing further needs to be said and disappears into the crowded lounge. Turning to my meal that smells like heaven, I peer up at Evan who is attacking his short ribs with vigor.

“What were you going to tell me?”

Stopping mid chew and looking anywhere but at me he says, “Nothing, let’s just eat our meals before they get cold.”

Cold. Good analogy right now.

## Chapter 15

I feel like I can't move, I am so full. I wonder if I could roll the rest of the way to the hotel.

*Maybe it's on a downslope?*

"I think I ate too much." Evans says while leaning back in his chair and rubbing his perfectly flat stomach. I on the other hand feel like I have two food babies; thank god for stretchy sun dresses.

"It was so good though."

The lounge has become so incredibly busy around us that the staff running around just look like blurs. To Evans delight our waiter has been so swamped that some of the hostess' have been helping him clear his tables and he hasn't been back.

"I need to use the restroom; I'll be right back."

He gets up from the table and disappears into the crowd. Alone for the first time since the night began, I can't even fathom what has happened still. Now I'm out at an upscale restaurant with a gorgeous guy and it's not even a date. I wonder what Evan is like on a date? I wonder if he's old fashioned and holds doors open or pays for food.

*Holy crap! Pays for food!*

I didn't even realize that I didn't have any money. Between being chased down a dark street and Miss-would-you-like-fries-with-that-shake, I completely forgot all about it. Now Evan will have to pay for the food, that or I'm going to have to do dishes for 3 months in the kitchen to pay it off.

*Come on Isabelle, you're better than this.*

Scolding myself for being so wrapped up in tonight events I look up to see Evan talking to the hostess. If I wasn't already plotting her death, I would be now. She's leaning into him touching his bicep with her fingers and throwing her head back laughing. She pulls out what looks like a piece of paper from her apron and a pen and hands it to him.

*Is he giving her his number? Really?*

He writes something down fast and hands it back to her. *REALLY?*

She bites her lower lip again while tossing her long hair behind her and sticking out her chest.

"How was everything?" Ryan is beside me out of nowhere startling me a bit and making me realize I was digging my fingers into the table. Relaxing and making a quick glance towards where Evan is still standing, I answer in a husky voice, "Everything was great, thanks to you."

*Two can play at this game.*

I'm not normally a huge flirt. Quite frankly I don't like the attention most of the time but right now seeing Evan and the hostess standing so close my jealousy bitch meter is at max. "I'm glad, so how's your date going?" Ryan asks with a sideways glance to Evans empty chair.

"Oh, this isn't a date we're just friends."

His eyes widen with delight and he crouches down next to my chair. He really is adorable. All American good looks, blonde hair, blue eyes, perfect teeth but without

Evans ruggedness and the way his face demands attention from everyone in the room. Evan is definitely far superior in a non-human kind of way but Ryan is still a hot guy in his own right.

“Really? The way your friend looks at you I would’ve thought you guys have been together for a while.”

*How does he look at me?*

“Nope.”

Flashing my flirtiest smile at him, he says, “Well if that means your single then how about we have dinner sometime?”

“I don’t think that will work.”

Evans voice booms over us as he stands beside Ryan dwarfing him with his stature. Ryan stands up in front of him replying “And why not? Are you her brother or something?”

Got to give it to Ryan he is about 4 inches shorter than Evan and has nothing on Evans lean muscular shape but he is standing his ground.

*Idiot!*

“Because a) she’s not from here and b) I don’t think your boss would like to hear about you asking customers out during your shift.”

Noticing people starting to stare and point now, I speak up. “Okay guys, maybe we should take a step back now and stop the pissing contest.”

Getting out of my chair and moving to stand in between them. Both men making me feel like a small child, towering over me like skyscrapers. I put my hand gently on Evans chest and try to push him back slightly, knowing if he lost his cool he could pound Ryan into the ground with one punch. Of course, he doesn’t budge because he is a brick wall. Grabbing his arm, I start to turn him to get him to come with me to the exit. He starts to turn and reaches for my hand to guide me down the stairs. “Man, what’s your problem? If you like her so much why don’t you just date her then? Or did she turn you down and put you in the friend zone?”

Ryan’s cockiness is going to get him hurt.

Bad.

I can’t get Evan to leave fast enough.

“I guess with an ass like hers, you for sure wouldn’t be good enough.”

*So close!*

## Chapter 16

It happens so fast I don't react right away.

All I see is Evan fly toward Ryan and grab a hold of his shirt pushing him on our table. Glasses spilling, falling to the floor and breaking. Screams of other customers trying to get out of the way of the train wreck.

"Watch what you say about her." I hear Evan bark into Ryan's ear before letting him go and backing up toward where I'm still standing in complete shock. I've never even witnessed two guys fighting over one girl let alone that girl being me.

Before he could fully turn I hear Ryan say loudly, "I don't care who you are dude, I can say whatever I want to her. She's not yours to protect."

Ryan lunges towards Evans midsection sending the two of them tumbling down a few of the steps.

Finally, with the help of security and some good Samaritans they pull the two men off of each other. Even though it takes double the people to hold Evan back, Ryan still proceeds with the insults under his breath. Finally, what looks like the manager gets into Ryan's face while telling the others to let go of Evan. Not being able to make out what he is saying due to the constant chatter of the crowd around me I do catch "good customer" and "what if someone has a camera".

Telling security to escort Ryan out of the building, the manager turns to Evan and starts to apologize profusely.

*Why isn't he being thrown out too?*

Making my way down the stairs now that I have people staring at me and whispering I pass where Evan is standing and keep walking. Not sure if it's from the shock of what just happened or because I'm so pissed that he would feel the need to answer for me. I near the front door of the lounge where I spot Miss-my-legs-go-up-to-my-neck and watch as she steps in front of me to say, "Leaving so soon?"

*I will end you!*

"That's right, he's all yours. Guess you won't have any trouble contacting him."

Giving me a confused look, she steps aside so I can leave.

*I can't believe he gave that chick his number!*

At least I know what kind of girls he's into now. Almost running out the doors, I turn left to keep walking towards my hotel, with or without Evan. Feeling myself starting to get upset with how things went down, I hear heavy running footsteps coming up behind me. Evan grabs my upper arms to stop and spin me around to look at him.

"Where are you going?" he asks me in a near panicked voice. "I'm going back to my hotel; it was getting a little dramatic for me back there." I say crossing my arms over my chest.

"I'm sorry, but that guy. What he said about you. He was a jackass! I couldn't just do nothing."

"Oh you definitely didn't do nothing. You took him out like a boxer. Is that what you are, a fighter?"

Cocking his head to the side, he frowns at me "No, I'm not a fighter Izzy."

His hat is torn a little at the front now because of the scuffle, hope it wasn't new.



“I’m sorry! Okay, I lost my cool back there but he was egging me on and I don’t know. Clearly he knew what buttons to push.” Staring at the ground he shuffles his feet back and forth like it’s a nervous habit and continues, “Don’t leave it like this, don’t walk away. We’re so close.”

Looking back up at me I see sincerity in his eyes. Not wanting to act like a complete dick I reply, “Well thanks for dinner, and the show.”

He looks downright triumphant when I start walking with him.

Knowing we don’t have far to go as I start to recognize some of my surroundings from earlier today, I feel a pang of sadness come over me. As much as I hate to admit it, this guy has really grown on me in our short time together.

*I think I really like him.*

That’s the reason why I should be running not walking back to my hotel without him.

## Chapter 17

It's shocking just how many restaurants are located in this area of New York alone. I'll have to make sure Ella, Shannon, Jon and myself visit at least one a day while we're here this Christmas. I can't wait to come back already.

"I'm coming back here with my friends near Christmas time." Curiosity flashes in his ocean blue eyes as he asks, "Oh, really? Why?"

"I bought Ella a surprise ticket for getting her degree because I thought New York would be an awesome place with all the architecture that's around here. Shan and Jon thought it was an awesome idea too so we made it a group effort. She's going to be so surprised, I can't wait." I reply smiling at the thought. "That's pretty sweet! Just don't go running into any other creeps next time. Wouldn't want my creeper position to go to someone else." Nudging me with his elbow, I laugh.

"Don't worry, no one could ever take your place."

Looking to the side I see a shy smile plays at his lips.

"This is hands down the most interesting night of my life."

"I doubt that!"

Smiling he says, "No seriously, think of everything that has happened in such a short amount of time so far."

I think, *Oh I have*, as he continues, "I've never told some girl that I'd follow her anywhere. The only girls I really get to talk to are my sister, Mom and co-workers."

*Yeah, because I can believe that!*

"Oh come on Evan! You must get hit on every minute of the day." I scoff at him.

"I will admit I get it a lot, but it's always superficial. They're either always looking for something else from me or to catch a break. Sometimes I feel as though they are more interested in the idea of me, then me as a person."

"That's kind of sad."

Staring off into the distance he nods his head in agreement.

Deciding to maybe lighten the mood and give him some good news. Well good news to him, it kind of makes me want to murder that stop sign up ahead.

"Well maybe that hostess will give you a call and you won't be such a lonely sob anymore." Throwing him a wink, he looks at me like I've grown two heads.

"What hostess?" he asks in confusion.

"The one that sat us at the restaurant. You gave her your phone number."

Stopping in the middle of the sidewalk, I have to spin around to face him.

"I didn't give the hostess my number."

*Liar!*

"Seriously Ev, I saw her give you a pen and paper and you jotted something down on it."

The little v is back in the middle of his eyebrows and he does not look pleased with me.

"You saw me pay the bill. That's it! Is that why you left me back there? Were you jealous?"

Shock plasters my face as I reply with an incoherent sound before saying.

“No! I’m not jealous! Why would I be jealous? That’s completely ridiculous.”

I give him a nervous laugh before he pushes the subject further. “Admit it, you were jealous because you thought I’d done that and it pissed you off so much that you left me to get in trouble.” *But you didn’t get into trouble for some reason.*

I am about to say just that when I change my mind and counter with, “The only reason you were ‘in trouble’ in the first place was because you were jealous of Ryan.”

“Who the hell is Ryan?”

I can see irritation on his face now, matching my own.

“The waiter!”

Throwing his hands up in the air “Oh so now you’re on a first name basis with him? Did you give him your number? He was asking you out, did you say yes?”

I can’t even believe we’re having this conversation right now but I’m so annoyed at his latest line of questioning I keep going. “No, of course not. I didn’t give him anything and it’s none of your business if I said yes or not. We are not together.”

I want to take the words back as soon as I say them. A look of hurt passes across his face before he rights himself and his impassive mask falls into place.

“You’re right Isabelle, we’re not. Let’s just keep walking so we can get you back to your hotel as soon as possible and put this night behind us then.”

I think that’s the first time my full name has passed his lips this whole time. Has he been calling me Izzy this whole time?

Wow, I really am slipping.

## Chapter 18

Well this is not how I saw this night panning out.

Walking as far as we can from each other while still being beside one another, we walk in silence. Both probably thinking over the argument we just had. I can't believe he would accuse me of jealousy when he was doing everything out of the exact same emotion. Why are either of us jealous at all in the first place? It's not like we are boyfriend and girlfriend. Passing a small green space at the Ave of the Americas, Evan pulls me out of my own head when he says quietly, "I've never been to the Empire State building."

"What?" I ask absent mindedly.

Continuing like I never asked at all, he carries on, "I've always been driven passed it. Always wanted to go up to the top. I've never had the chance, never been in this place long enough to enjoy being here at all. Always working."

Shaking his head, I look over to see a muscle in his jaw work while again, and not without trying not to, admiring his features.

Feeling like I have nothing else to lose right now, I take a quick right on W 34<sup>th</sup> Street.

"Where are you going? The hotel is that way." Pointing north, he turns to follow me anyway.

"I know, but we have a small detour we have to take and we have to hurry because we don't have much time left."

Noting from one of the building clocks we only have 20 minutes before the observation deck closes or we're S.O.L.

"What are you talking about Izzy?"

Running to catch up to me I reach my hand out when he gets close enough and take his in mine. Trying to ignore the warm flutters and how comfortable and solid his hand is around mine I say, "I'm taking you to that damn building if it kills me."

A slow mystified smile pulls at his mouth. "Most interesting night. Ever."

Pulling him with me we head southeast on W 34<sup>th</sup>. Making a right on 5<sup>th</sup> we stare up in awe at the lit up 102 story monster before us. We go inside and look around at the beautiful marble floors and walls adorned with stainless steel and wood accents in its signature art deco style. Seeing the huge mural straight ahead of us, there is a little information desk below it.

"Wait here."

Evan lets go of my hand and walks up to the desk while I stare at the back of him confused.

*Still, him walking away, a great sight.*

Smiling to myself a little, I turn to check out the art on the walls. After a minute I feel a hand on my lower back and immediately the warm fluttering is back.

"Come on, we don't have much time."

Guiding me by the same hand on the small of my back he leads me to the elevator towards the observation deck. Skipping passed the small line of tourists still lined up in the lobby to go up, a doorman leads us to the waiting elevator. As the doors close I ask Evan, "How did we just skip to the front of the line?" With the most adorable wink he says "Because I paid off the front desk."

Laughing with him, I can't believe it. He's so unpredictable, I've never met anyone like him before. Watching the floors tick up higher and higher on the little red digital sign I can feel my ears starting to pop from the height. Evan must have the same thing because I see him open and close his mouth to dislodge the air. Reaching the 102<sup>nd</sup> floor we make our way out of the elevator to a small closed-in observation deck. The view is beautiful and I can't even begin to believe I don't have a camera to capture this moment. Instead, I don't take it for granted and just take it all in. I hear a door creak open and turn around away from the windows to find Evan standing in the doorway.

"What are you doing? You're going to get us kicked out." Smiling a delicious boyish smile, he replies "No we're not. Trust me."

*I do.*

Placing my hand in his we ascend a set of stairs to what I presume is the 103<sup>rd</sup> floor. I didn't even know one existed.

Oh but it does, and it's the most beautiful spot I've ever seen.

## Chapter 19

I am immediately hit with the warmest, most comforting breeze when the door opens. The small circular balcony before me, gives us a full 360-degree view of the city below. I've never in all my life seen so many twinkling lights. From the river below to the skyscrapers up high.

"It's magical." I whisper into the view laid out before me. If someone was afraid of heights this would be their worst nightmare but for me it's a dream come to life. I make my way forward to rest my hands on the thick cool metal railing. Evan hasn't spoken a word yet but I can feel him behind me radiating heat. I try to thank him for this opportunity but I don't even know how to express the thought right now. Instead he says "Thank you."

I turn to look at him, while the view just follows me and gives him a shining backdrop.

"For what? You were the one that set this up, I need to be thanking you. I just don't know how because I feel like thank you isn't enough for all this." Waving my hand over the city that never sleeps.

He adds, "For everything. For tonight. For the last few hours. This entire night I haven't had to think about anything but being here with you. Lost in paradise. Haven't had to think about work which seems to be consuming my entire existence over the last year especially. Haven't had to think of the terrible night I had last night. I've just been allowed to be human with you, a rarity lately."

*Wow.*

It's the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me and I'm trying desperately not to act like a complete girl and weep like a lunatic. So instead I try to add a little humor while turning to stare back at the view so that he doesn't see me sneakily wipe away tears.

"When you asked me to walk with you I thought you were going to kidnap and murder me. Which I haven't ruled out yet considering you brought me up this high."

I hear him chuckle beside me so I continue, "However, I could've never predicted the adventures this night brought me and it's all thanks to you. This is..."

I try to find the words, I really do. Usually I'm quite eloquent but right now all I can do is wave my hand in the general direction of the city and let it fall back down to the railing while shaking my head in disbelief. I feel Evans hand wrap around mine as we both stand next to each other. We fall into a comfortable silence. I turn my body into his to say something only I probably think is funny and catch him staring at me with a heated gaze. I immediately freeze at the serious look in his eyes. The muscle in his jaw ticks away as dark shadows hide his features that I still feel I know from somewhere. He opens his mouth to say something but seems to change his mind and instead stares at the ground and shuffles his feet back and forth. *He's nervous.*

I try to take his mind in a different direction as curiosity strikes me.

"What happened last night that was so bad?"

Dropping my hand immediately his head snaps up to mine almost hitting my nose with the rim of his baseball hat. He looks as though he wants to jump off the building instead of answer me.

*That can't be good.*

Taking a step back away from me he hits me with, "I had a huge fight with my girlfriend."

*Nope! Not good! Abort! Abort now!*

## Chapter 20

I don't think I'm breathing; I mean you're supposed to breathe right? I'm pretty sure I look like a ghost at the moment. I swear I actually felt the color drain from my face and my blood run cold. Am I dead? Did I just jump off the building? No, still standing. Feet planted firmly on solid concrete, gorgeous man still in front of me. Staring at me like I will indeed make the jump. Gorgeous man with a girlfriend.

*He has a girlfriend? Oh my god he has a girlfriend! Okay get it together Isabelle.*

How the hell do I get it together right now?

*Start by breathing.*

Oh right, that.

"Really? Your girlfriend? Umm, wh... what happened?"

*Now you're stuttering, way to have it together!*

I can feel my hands start to shake so I place them together behind my back so he can't see how much his last sentence is affecting me. He looks as nervous as I've ever seen him and backs away to pace around the small balcony.

"Yeah, I wanted to mention it earlier to you but I selfishly didn't want to think about it. I was having such a great time with you, you know?"

Still staring at him, I wonder idly if I'm the only one that feels the ground caving in beneath me.

*Just me? Okay great.*

Realizing I'm not going to answer verbally he continues his story, "We've been arguing for around a month now. Mostly about my work. How I'm away a lot and it bugs her. The only problem is that she has the same job, yet when it happens to her, it's not a problem. So, I finally asked her the one question that's been bugging me. If she was jealous that I was having more success right now. That's where it all kind of fell apart."

Finally finding my voice, I clear my throat before I answer just in case it comes out as a croak.

"That seems unfair of her."

He grabs the railing, almost as though he can't believe I've just said that.

"Really? You don't think I'm being an ass? I kind of felt like one after I said it, but it was something that's been nagging at me in the back of my mind for a while."

Shaking my head, I say, "No I don't think you're being an ass. You clearly love your job since every time you mention it your face lights up. I mean isn't there any compromise? Can't she come with you when you go away?"

Nodding his head enthusiastically at me like he has thought this before, he adds, "Yes! Yes, I've said that before and every time I mention it she says 'Well, what if a project comes up back home. I don't want to miss it.' It's frustrating, and I always feel like the bad guy for making her bend her schedule for mine."

Thinking this over while holding on to the railing so tight my hands start to go white, I reply with, "Maybe you both are just in two different places right now. People change, maybe you'll work it out and meet in the middle somewhere."



I can hear my voice crack slightly on the last word. Knowing I'm about to lose my strong demeanor I turn away from the breathtaking skyline and head towards the door.

"Where are you going?"

Evans asks and starts towards me to grab my hand in a gesture that's become pretty comfortable for us over the last few hours and damn if I can help it, I back away slightly. He notices the sudden change and he looks like I've just slapped him instead. Without turning my eyes toward him I say in the steadiest voice I can, "I have to go to the restroom, then I think we should start to head back to the hotel now. It's getting really late. Thanks for the view."

*In more ways than one.*

I whip open the door, leaving Evan before he can argue my point. I find the restroom and haul ass toward one of the back stalls. I sit down on the closed toilet seat and just take a moment to myself. I can't believe he has a girlfriend. Why am I so upset by this? I mean look at him, there is no way a guy who looks like that is single.

*But I thought...* I don't know what I thought. Maybe I was just too wrapped up in the adventure.

*Then why does it hurt so bad?*

I feel like I've lost a piece of myself somehow and left it up on the 103<sup>rd</sup> floor. Tears spring to my eyes and I wave my hands in my face in a desperate attempt to dry them before they spill over. Feeling defeated, I listen for a moment to make sure no one is in here with me and just let myself cry. I guess this is what happens when you let go. I guess all who wander are actually lost. I just thought for once I'd been found by him for a moment.

I guess I was wrong.

## Chapter 21

I stare at myself in the restroom mirror as the P.A. system goes off telling us it's time to leave. Luckily my eyes aren't too red and puffy. I take a deep breath, pinch my cheeks for some color, stand up straight and fluff my hair, preparing myself to face Evan again for the last leg of our journey tonight. Satisfied I nod at myself in the mirror.

*I can do this.*

We're just two friends on a walk together.

Exiting the restroom, I find Evan leaning up against the wall. His lean build positioned so gracefully, it's easy to see how comfortable he is in his own skin. We make eye contact and he springs away from the wall as if he expects me to make a run for it. He looks at me like he's trying to diffuse a bomb, and asks, "You okay?"

Plastering on my best smile I answer, "Yea fine, ready to go?" He nods looking unconvinced and saunters over to me like a tiger that's been let out of its cage.

"Ready if you are."

We walk over to the elevators to take the quick trip back down to the ground floor. Awkward silence fills the air and thank god for the doorman who starts whistling to the elevator music. We head into the lobby to make our way outside when the young woman at the information desk stops us.

"Excuse me, uum sir."

She starts to blush, of course, when Evan turns and walks back over to the desk. I stand in the middle of the lobby awkwardly as other tourists pass me to the exit. Staring in their direction I see Evan sign a piece of paper for her and hand it back.

*Probably forgot to sign for his credit card earlier.*

I wonder how much that cost him? I really don't think I want to know at this point. But I'm also feeling kind of guilty about it. I'm very used to paying my own way in this world so when others pitch in it usually makes me pretty uncomfortable. Smiling his perfect white smile and waving goodbye to her and the doorman he stops in front of me like he forgot I was there. "All paid up?" I ask him.

Seeing his body relax a bit he says, "Yeah, all done. Let's get going."

Walking back outside, I immediately miss the view from above. A moment in my life I will never forget.

"Thanks again for setting that up Evan. It was amazing, I really feel like I should pay you back somehow for it."

Looking almost insulted he stops me, "No Izzy, it was my pleasure. Don't even think twice about it okay. I would've done the same thing if you had your wallet on you. You got me up there which is what I wanted, not the other way around."

Giving him a small smirk, I make myself not argue and hatch a plan to do something small to pay him back after this is all over.

Heading back the way we came, we turn back onto Broadway and I know we're getting closer to Times Square which is where my hotel is located. I know now that we have to wrap this night up and go our separate ways, especially now I know he has a girlfriend and there is no chance in hell I'm getting in the middle of that.

I'm not that kind of girl.  
Am I?

## Chapter 22

Everything feels different now, the way we walk, the way we look at each other, the way questions and answers don't sound as sincere as before. If we could only go back, I wouldn't have asked that stupid question. Why did I have to be so curious? I just want it back the way it was, easy. That's how this whole night has felt with him, just easy. I never had to force any of my emotions, never had to put on a brave face when talking about my parents.

"Earth to Wendy." Evan nudges me with his elbow to gain my attention.

I laugh a small subdued laugh, "Sorry."

"What's going on? Something feels wrong, different. Tell me what you're thinking locked up in Neverland."

He knows me too well. I stare at all the huge buildings in front of me trying to find the words. Should I just tell him the truth? That I'm hurt he didn't tell me he had a girlfriend in the beginning. No, no I can't do that. He isn't obligated to share any information at all with me if he doesn't want to. It's not like we've made out like teenagers or anything. I would've left him on that balcony if that was the case. I decide I'll just talk about something else that's been bugging me, except I don't have to because he stops me by the arm on the sidewalk in front of Starbucks instead.

"Come back to me Izzy. Don't do the over analyze, internal thought thing. Talk to me, please. Look, I'm sorry I didn't tell you about Zoe."

*The devil has a name.*

"Like I said I didn't want to think about what happened and ruin the fun we were having."

Looking into his eyes now instead of everywhere else I sigh, "You don't owe me an apology Evan. You didn't do anything wrong. You can tell me whatever you want to tell me, I mean as long as it's not a lie."

Smiling a genuine smile for the first time since I left the restroom, I look into his face as a signature unknown look crosses his face.

*Man, he's good with masking his emotions. It's really annoying!*

I can sense him go for my hand but he thinks twice about it now and instead just gives me a wink and we keep walking. I miss his touch, miss the warm contact and ease. I wonder how much I'm going to miss him when this is over.

Signs for Times Square and the Theatre District are coming up now and I know we are only a small distance away from my hotel. I've loved the feeling of being in the moment with him. Not having my cell phone has been a pleasure and I haven't even seen him check his once, even though I have heard it buzz in his pocket a few times. It's kind of crazy how much of our lives we miss by our noses being in technology. It's a blessing and a bitch.

"So what are you going to tell your friends when you get back home?" Evan asks adjusting his hat a little lower now that we're getting into a more crowded area.

"What do you mean?"

“I mean about me. Am I going to be some stalker, creep kind of guy that won’t leave you alone? Or are you going to make it dramatic and tell them how you escaped some murdering psycho and make it a thriller?” Seeing him smiling from ear to ear I can’t help but respond playfully.

“No, I think I’m going to tell them about the knight in shining armor, who turned out to be a jester and failed at every attempt at saving me.”

Playing hurt, he grabs his chest. “Oh how you hurt me madam with your harsh words. I guess I should just walk into traffic and end it now, for I will never impress a maiden such as yourself.” Letting out a loud laugh I can’t help but play along. Loving the ease that has come back between us.

“But sir, how will I ever find humor again if my court jester pitches himself into the throws of traffic? We can’t have that! Who will entertain me with their ridiculousness? I’ll have nothing nice to look at anymore.”

Realizing what I just said I start to blush intensely.

*Damn word vomit.*

Trying to think of something to back track with before his smug grin becomes anymore victorious he counters with, “Dear madam, how you praise me so. It is I who should be sad that I will never again lay eyes on such beauty in all my life again.”

*Woah, where did that come from?*

Catching himself he clears his throat and all humor in his eyes is now lost. Tucking my hair behind my ear in a nervous gesture, I start walking again hoping he will join me and not just stand there forcing people to go around him. He follows, and his earlier comment pops into my head.

*I’ve never told some girl that I’d follow her anywhere.*

I only have one question to that.

*How far will you follow, Evan?*

## Chapter 23

Passing the Walgreens, I can't even begin to explain how a pint of Ben & Jerry's would come in handy when I got back to my hotel. After I am back up there, I am going to emotional eat the crap out of my life choices over the next few hours. Late night room service? That's happening!

Evan has gone pretty quiet since his last comment. His familiar mask has slipped back into place as he stares at the ground in front of him hiding his face when we near large groups of people, mostly women. I really don't want our night to end on a bad note so I decide to bring him back to me.

"Hey! Peter! Come back to me."

Chuckling he finally stops looking at the ground like it's made of hot coals and peers up at me from under his hat. A flash of recognition clouds my mind. I know I've seen that look before. Still, I can't quite put my finger on it.

"Have you ever been to Times Square before?" I ask casually. "Yes, I have for work once. It's pretty spectacular. I've never been able to enjoy it like a proper tourist before though. Take pictures in weird poses that make the native New Yorkers roll their eyes. You know what we should do? Ice cream."

A man after my own heart. This guy knows how to treat a girl. *Too bad he already has one.*

"Yes, we should!" I say with no hesitation ignoring my inner sulking child. Not that I want to prolong the goodbye. Well I do, but it's not *only* about that.

"Done!" he exclaims with just as much hesitation it took me.

I don't even think he notices us walking right past the entrance of my hotel; he has one thing on his mind. Walking up to an ice cream cart Evan asks what I want.

"Anything vanilla and chocolate and pile it high my friend." Laughing with the cart attendant he orders my cone and one for himself, Rocky Road double scooped. We find a railing and he holds my ice cream so I can sit on top of it while I eat. He leans back beside me and outstretches his long legs. Eating in silence for a minute I take in all the color and life. The square is bustling with people even at this hour of the night.

*Morning?*

I've pretty much lost track at this point. It's quite a site though.

Lights, colors, flashing from huge signs and cameras alike. So many advertisements its almost laughable. The pinnacle of product placement is right here. Buy this! Watch that! A huge lit up sign in front us with the words 'Live life' catches my eye. I nudge Evans arm and nod over to it. He rewards me with an adorable lopsided grin before he continues to lick his ice cream. *Now that's a vision being locked to memory!*

Shaking my head ever so slightly as if to spill out those kind of thoughts of him, I roll my eyes at myself. I have to stop ogling him every chance I get.

*Just one more time!*

Glancing quickly to the side I see him starting in on his cone instead.

*Damn!*

You know what, he may have a girlfriend but I am still human and there is no denying that face. I'm not the only one that thinks so as a group of girls and guys walk past us and two of the girls nearly trip over each other to get a better look. At least I don't look that obvious.

Finishing our cones, I decide that it's time to say goodbye. As much fun as this has been I can feel how tired me and my poor feet are. Every inch of me does not want to leave this spot. There are no words for how much I am going to miss this, miss him. Getting up, we begin walking to my hotel entrance in silence. Both in deep thought only looking at the ground. I finally chance to look up and see the little v is back and he's shuffling.

*This is going to suck.*

Before I can start a pathetic speech of 'This was nice' or 'We should do this again sometime' he looks up at me with the most heartbreaking look. Sheer panic mixed with longing and undeniable sadness. It's the first time I've been able to see complete raw emotion in his eyes without his mask. An overwhelming feeling of sorrow passes over me and I do what I can to not let my eyes fill with tears. A movement behind Evan catches my eye and my thoughts are immediately distracted by the two girls from earlier who almost ate pavement looking at him. He notices my sudden change of emotion and turns to face the two of them. My front to his back now, the taller one gestures with her finger towards him while their other friends look on in as much joy as she is radiating. In a shaky, nervous yet excited voice she asks, "Excuse me, are you Evan Parker?" If I only knew just how much that one tiny question would change everything.

## Chapter 24

*Evan Parker? Evan freaking PARKER?*

That's how I knew him.

That's why he was so familiar.

He has been on the big screen in almost every major motion picture over the last three plus years. How could I have been so stupid.

*Oh my god, what if there were cameras!*

What would the headlines be? 'Evan Parker caught with mystery woman.' I'd be a homewrecker. I can't even begin to wrap my head around what's happening in front of me, I'm so angry. How could he not tell me? I feel as though that's a very significant detail that should have been shared.

Thoughts of the past few hours' pop into my head now. The note he passed to the hostess and the paper he signed for the girl at the information desk. They were autographs. They were fans of his. The reason why he's wearing a hat at night. The woman in front of the karaoke bar that thought she knew him.

*I'm such an idiot. How did I not put two and two together?*

I wondered why we got into the 40/40 club so quickly and the reason why he never got in trouble for going after Ryan. *Unbelievable.*

He doesn't move at first. Doesn't even make a sound to the point where I think he's holding his breath. The girls look almost uncomfortable for a minute until he makes a move towards them and his mask clicks into place.

I see it, but I don't feel anything. I just watch as they all giggle and hop up and down in front of him. Pure giddy joy on all their faces as the rest of their friends come to join the line of autographs and pictures. I see it now. People walking past him, pointing, staring and whispering. I never noticed any of it this whole time, or maybe somewhere deep down inside I was just ignoring it because I didn't care. He looks so incredibly uncomfortable with it all to me. To other people, his fans, they would never notice. He's shuffling his feet as he's talking to everyone, not a sign of Evan being comfortable.

Evans almost finished taking pictures when I feel my pulse pick up. I'm getting angrier by the minute and I can tell he can feel it. After the group says their excited goodbyes, he turns to me. Eyes wide like I'm some wild animal ready to attack or run.

*He should be scared.*

I try to put as much venom into my voice when I say, "How could you not tell me?" but all I hear is my small hurt voice that pisses me off further.

Putting his hands up in surrender as he approaches me cautiously he replies with, "I didn't know how to."

Scoffing at him I can't help but reply, "You didn't know how? Are you serious right now? How about, oh I don't know, I'm a super successful actor that everyone knows. Do you know how stupid I feel right now Ev?"

Shaking his head, his masks slips away from his face to reveal only hurt. He starts to speak but I cut him off in anger.



“No, you don’t get to be hurt right now Evan. You should have told me! What if someone took a picture of us on the statue when, you know.”

Realization hits his beautiful features like a slap to the face. He clearly didn’t think at all about that. Zoe’s face pops into my head now. Evan Parker and Zoe Hale, I’ve seen it so many times before on entertainment shows, magazines at the supermarket and around social media. She’s stunning.

*Of course.*

Long legs, long blonde perfectly tended to hair. Face you’d sell your soul for.

*Everything I’m not.*

I can feel my emotions getting out of control so I focus on the one that’ll get me through the next few minutes with him, my anger.

“Izzy, I didn’t want to tell you because I didn’t want you to know me as Evan Parker. I just wanted to be Evan with you. No preconceived notions, no stories made up by the media. That’s not how I wanted you to know me. I’ve loved the realness between us. Just you and I, nothing and nobody else.”

Staring at him, actually him, for the first time I study his features. The beautiful blue eyes, straight nose, dark brown stubble. Now I know there’s brown hair underneath the hat too. He’s magnificent, no wonder Zoe snagged him. My anger is starting to melt and give way to sadness. I try to hold on to it but I just can’t. My heart is breaking.

Trying to keep the tears at bay I stare down at my hands in front of me. This is it, I need to finish this. I don’t want to be the fool, don’t want to be the other woman. I wish he would’ve had more faith in me in the beginning to tell me the truth.

“Evan, you are you because of this,” placing my hand over his heart and on his solid chest, “Not what you do. I just can’t believe you would think so low of me not to know the difference.”

I feel him suck in a breath as his eyes start to shine. I know I’ve hurt him but right now all I can feel is my heart shattering into a million pieces. I take a few steps back, staring at him as I go toward the front door of the hotel.

“Thank you Evan, for everything. I’m glad I fell on you.” Giving him a small genuine laugh as my eyes fill with tears. “Goodbye Peter.”

Looking down at me with a look of pure anguish he replies, “Goodbye my sweet Wendy. Thanks for letting me walk with you.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Thank you for reading Walk With You. I hoped you enjoyed the walk through New York City with Isabelle and Evan. If you would like to please take a moment to leave me a review at your favorite retailer?

Thanks for your support!

Anna Heal

### **About the author:**

Anna Heal is the author of Walk With You, as well as the upcoming follow up Forever With You. Anna lives on the beautiful west coast of British Columbia, Canada with her husband and their two tiny humans.

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I would love to hear your feedback and reviews.

HERE'S A QUICK TEASER FROM THE FOLLOW UP TO WALK WITH YOU.

## FOREVER WITH YOU

### Prologue

#### *6 months ago*

I didn't watch him get into his taxi. I didn't want to watch him leave, the goodbye was enough. I barely made it back to my hotel room before my eyes filled with tears. Bobbing and weaving passed the hotel staff so I wouldn't alert them or make them ask what was wrong. As soon as I got into my room, I fell apart. Every single emotion of the night flooding my head like a tidal wave. I couldn't have helped it if I tried. How did this all happen? Why didn't I choose a different location to go to, a different street to stop at? Why couldn't I have waited just three more seconds before getting out of the taxi? I guess that's fate for you. Making you believe you run your life when let's face it, you control nothing.

I find my phone, still on the small table where I had left it this afternoon. Three text messages from my best friend Ella, two from Shannon, and a funny lighthearted voicemail from Jon followed up by a worried one with all three of them on the line. I'm never going to live this one down. I really don't feel like talking to anybody right now, actually I don't feel like doing anything right now unless it involves the big comfy white queen sized bed behind me. I quickly type out a text to all three of their phones telling them that I'm fine, safe and sorry I made them worry. I'll call them in the morning and hopefully I'll be more equipped to function as an emotional human then.

Washing my face, brushing my teeth and throwing my hair in a top knot, the only thing in my mind is Evans face. His eyes seeping into my soul, his lush mouth making my insides twist. Walking into the small living area of my room I stare at my iPad. I could just open Google right now and learn everything about him. His birthday, his height, his childhood and everything in between. I can't make myself do it. I just want to remember the Evan that caught me when I fell out of the taxi. The Evan who wouldn't take no for an answer and walked with me all the way back to Manhattan from Brooklyn. Just Evan, my Evan, not Evan Parker the Hollywood heartthrob. I don't want to know the stories. Definitely don't want to see any pictures of him and Zoe together because I'm sure there is an abundance of those. No I won't torture myself like that. Not yet anyway.

I walk over to the bed and flop face down on it, half pulling the duvet cover over myself. It's so comfortable I don't think I'll ever move again at this point. Sighing into the mattress I will my brain to turn off, then scream at it to stop showing me Evans glorious face. I especially don't want to see the last face he gave me. The hurt and heartache behind it. The shine in his eyes. Leaving him on the street like that probably wasn't my best move but it was the only thing I could do in the moment. I know I hurt him, but he hurt me too. We'll probably never see each other again. You know, unless I turn on a TV or read a magazine, or watch a new movie, or turn on the Internet.

*My life is about to suck for a while.*

Turning over to stare at the ceiling I can feel my eyes start to tear again. No, I'm not going to let myself cry anymore tonight. I close my eyes and sigh into the empty room. "Alone again." I say to myself. I just have to get through tomorrow's meeting and then I can pack and go back home. I'm in desperate need of some friend comfort, and I can't wait to hug them all so tight when I see them. Momentarily comforted by the thoughts of my wonderful friends my mind starts to slow and my body starts to finally relax. I start to drift in and out of sleep urging my subconscious not to think of the one thing keeping me slightly awake. It's no use, I let go and focus on him. All of him, every part. The only thing left is to sleep, and dream apparently.

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