

The Coffee Shop

“This is a stupid idea.”

“It’ll be great. Just wait,” Topher says from the backseat of Kurt’s SUV. I’m riding shotgun and we’re on our way to meet Alex at a coffee shop.

Correction: we’re on our way to crash her plans with Mike.

“But she has a boyfriend.” I’m all for torturing myself on the trails, but setting myself up to get burned by the most intriguing girl I’ve met in forever does not sound like a good time.

“Alex knows what she’s doing,” Kurt says. He parks in a lot a block from Pearl Street Mall, and my feet drag as we get closer to the shop.

Topher elbows me. “Turn that frown upside-down. I have a good feeling about this.”

We step inside and I’m slammed with a wall of chocolate. Not literal chocolate, but it smells like we got sucked inside a candy bar. Alex and Mike are sitting near the window and Alex’s eyes go wide when she sees us. “I thought you said she knew we were coming,” I whisper to Kurt.

“Relax,” he whispers back, squeezing my shoulder.

The girls face us and we all say “Hey, Mike,” at the same time. Just call us the fricking Three Musketeers. I knew Mike was pretty, but seeing her in normal clothes—and without a helmet—does weird things to my chest. It’s like I can’t breathe, but my heart is trying to thump into my throat. Her blond hair is longer than I realized, and it practically glows beneath the

twinkly lights hanging from the ceiling. Just as I'm wondering how it would feel to run my fingers through it, Topher pats her on the head.

"Your hair's nice without that helmet."

I blush for him, but she pokes him in the side. "I was thinking the same about you."

He pretends to flip his hair over his shoulder. "The ladies love it."

"I'm sure they do." She laughs, and our eyes meet, and I wish there was a subtle way to get rid of everyone else.

Alex and Kurt are already touching each other, making me even more aware of how awkward I feel just standing here. "Do you have more treats?" Alex asks.

Toph throws his hands in the air. "We have mousse balls!"

I roll my eyes, but Mike chokes on her drink. Before I can second-guess myself, I rush to pat her back, but slam on the breaks before making contact. She has a boyfriend. And we barely know each other. "You okay?"

Her eyes water and she laughs, still coughing. "I'm sorry, mousse balls?"

"Mousse," Kurt says. "The chocolate fluffy stuff."

"They're round balls so..." I add.

"Mousse balls!" Topher shouts again.

She looks at Alex with what I hope is mock horror. "Is it too late to change my mind?"

We grab chairs and crowd around the table, and I suppose there's a benefit to the guys knowing I'm into Mike because they make sure I'm next to her. My long legs have a tendency to bump into others, so I'm careful to keep my limbs to myself. Time seems to fly by, and I try not to frown when Mike announces she needs to leave. Alex catches my eye and I telepathically beg her to find a reason to keep Mike here a little longer.

Alex winks at me. “We’ll walk you,” she says, pushing back her chair. Then pauses. “It’s too nice out to go home yet. Do you have a little more time?”

Alex knows me better than anyone, but I’m impressed she read my mind like that.

Mike checks her phone. “I have twenty-three minutes.”

“Perfect. Let’s hit Pearl Street.”

We stand, and I end up so close to Mike that her perfume wraps around me. My body leans in as if on its own, and she smiles up at me.

The others beat us outside, so Mike and I end up following half a block behind. Not that I’m complaining. She has a quiet way about her that makes me want to know more. Usually girls are so loud and self-centered that I can’t wait to run away, but she’s not like that at all. I move closer, hoping our arms will touch, then remind myself she has a boyfriend and drift away.

We chat about school until she stops in front of a window display. “My friend—well, sort of friend—has some of these.” She scans the display like she’s looking for something specific.

“Do you want to go in?”

She nods, already moving toward the entrance, and I lift my fingers to my mouth and whistle for the guys. Mike jumps beside me. I wave at the others and point at the store.

“Do you not believe in texts?” She asks.

I open the door for her and shrug. “I’m old school.”

Her jaw drops, and I catch myself staring at her mouth. “You don’t have a phone?”

I laugh and pull my phone from my pocket. I’m old school, not a caveman. “Can’t text when you’re riding. So we whistle and yell.”

She wanders to a rack of bracelets. I don’t want to seem like a puppy following her around, but she’s the only reason I’m in here. “You don’t strike me as the yelling type,” she says.

“Only when I need to.”

She picks up a bracelet and I look over her shoulder to see the word.

“Courage?” I ask.

She takes a deep breath. “Yes.”

“No offense but,” I pause, and my heart gallops when she lifts her gaze to mine. “You don’t strike me as the type who needs that reminder.”

Something clicks between us just then. An understanding. A connection that goes deeper than window shopping and riding bikes. Her cheeks turn an adorable shade of pink and she hurries to the register to pay.

Maybe there’s hope for this yet.