

maybe someday

Books by Colleen Hoover

SLAMMED SERIES

Slammed

Point of Retreat

This Girl

HOPELESS SERIES

Hopeless

Losing Hope

Finding Cinderella

All Your Perfects (stand-alone)

Finding Perfect

MAYBE SOMEDAY SERIES

Maybe Someday

Maybe Not

Maybe Now

IT ENDS WITH US SERIES

It Ends with Us

It Starts with Us

STAND-ALONES

Ugly Love

Confess

November 9

Without Merit

Too Late

Regretting You

Heart Bones

Layla

Verity

Reminders of Him

Also by Colleen Hoover and Tarryn Fisher

Never Never:

The Complete Series

maybe someday

a novel

Colleen Hoover

ATRIA PAPERBACK

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI



An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, LLC
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2014 by Colleen Hoover

COLLEEN HOOVER® Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. For information, address Atria Books Subsidiary Rights Department, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020.

First Atria Paperback edition March 2014

ATRIA PAPERBACK and colophon are trademarks of
Simon & Schuster, LLC

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact
Simon & Schuster Special Sales at 1-866-506-1949
or business@simonandschuster.com.

The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors to your live event. For more information or to book an event, contact the
Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau at 1-866-248-3049
or visit our website at www.simonspeakers.com.

Manufactured in the United States of America

47 49 50 48

ISBN 978-1-4767-5316-4
ISBN 978-1-4767-5317-1 (ebook)

All song lyrics displayed in this book written and owned by
Griffin Peterson (ASCAP) © 2013 Griffin Peterson/Raymond
Records, LLC—All rights reserved

For Carol Keith McWilliams

Special Content

Dear Reader,

Maybe Someday is more than just a story. It's more than just a book. It's an experience, and one that we are excited and grateful to share with you.

I had the pleasure of collaborating with musician Griffin Peterson in order to provide an original sound track to accompany this novel. Griffin and I worked closely together to bring these characters and their lyrics to life so that you will be provided with the ultimate reading experience.

It is recommended these songs be heard in the order they appear throughout the novel. Please scan the QR code below to experience the *Maybe Someday* sound track. This gives you access to the songs and also to bonus material, should you wish to learn more behind the collaboration and implementation of this project.

Thank you for being a part of our project. It has been incredible for us to create, and we hope it will be just as incredible for you to enjoy.

Colleen Hoover and Griffin Peterson



To listen to the songs, please scan the QR code above. To do so, download the free Microsoft Tag app. Then hold your phone's camera a few inches away from the tag, and enjoy what comes next.

You may also visit the website at www.maybesomedaysoundtrack.com to access this content.

maybe someday

prologue

Sydney

I just punched a girl in the face. Not just *any* girl. My best friend. My roommate.

Well, as of five minutes ago, I guess I should call her my *ex*-roommate.

Her nose began bleeding almost immediately, and for a second, I felt bad for hitting her. But then I remembered what a lying, betraying whore she is, and it made me want to punch her again. I would have if Hunter hadn't prevented it by stepping between us.

So instead, I punched *him*. I didn't do any damage to him, unfortunately. Not like the damage I'd done to my hand.

Punching someone hurts a lot worse than I imagined it would. Not that I spend an excessive amount of time imagining how it would feel to punch people. Although I am having that urge again as I stare down at my phone at the incoming text from Ridge. He's another one I'd like to get even with. I know he technically has nothing to do with my current predicament, but he could have given me a heads-up a little sooner. Therefore, I'd like to punch him, too.

Ridge: Are you OK? Do u want to come up until the rain stops?

Of course, I don't want to come up. My fist hurts enough as it is, and if I went up to Ridge's apartment, it would hurt a whole lot worse after I finished with him.

I turn around and look up at his balcony. He's leaning against his sliding-glass door; phone in hand, watching me. It's almost dark, but the lights from the courtyard illuminate his face. His dark eyes lock with mine and the way his mouth curls up into a soft, regretful smile makes it hard to remember why I'm even upset with him in the first place. He runs a free hand through the hair hanging loosely over his forehead, revealing even more of the worry in his expression. Or maybe that's a look of regret. As it should be.

I decide not to reply and flip him off instead. He shakes his head and shrugs his shoulders, as if to say, *I tried*, and then he goes back inside his apartment and slides his door shut.

I put the phone back in my pocket before it gets wet, and I look around at the courtyard of the apartment complex where I've lived for two whole months. When we first moved in, the hot Texas summer was swallowing up the last traces of spring, but this courtyard seemed to somehow still cling to life. Vibrant blue and purple hydrangeas lined the walkways leading up to the staircases and the fountain affixed in the center of the courtyard.

Now that summer has reached its most unattractive peak, the water in the fountain has long since evaporated. The hydrangeas are a sad, wilted reminder of the excitement I felt when Tori and I first moved in here. Looking at the courtyard now, defeated by the season, is an eerie parallel to how I feel at the moment. Defeated and sad.

I'm sitting on the edge of the now empty cement fountain, my elbows propped up on the two suitcases that contain most of my belongings, waiting for a cab to pick me up. I have no idea where it's going to take me, but I know I'd rather be anywhere except where I am right now. Which is, well, homeless.

I could call my parents, but that would give them ammunition to start firing all the *We told you so's* at me.

We told you not to move so far away, Sydney.

We told you not to get serious with that guy.

We told you if you had chosen prelaw over music, we would have paid for it.

We told you to punch with your thumb on the outside of your fist.

Okay, maybe they never taught me the proper punching techniques, but if they're so right all the damn time, they *should* have.

I clench my fist, then spread out my fingers, then clench it again. My hand is surprisingly sore, and I'm pretty sure I should put ice on it. I feel sorry for guys. Punching sucks.

Know what else sucks? Rain. It always finds the most inappropriate time to fall, like right now, while I'm homeless.

The cab finally pulls up, and I stand and grab my suitcases. I roll them behind me as the cab driver gets out and pops open the trunk. Before I even hand him the first suitcase, my heart sinks as I suddenly realize that I don't even have my purse on me.

Shit.

I look around, back to where I was sitting on the suitcases, then feel around my body as if my purse will magically appear across my shoulder. But I know exactly where my purse is. I pulled it off my shoulder and dropped it to the floor right before I punched Tori in her overpriced, Cameron Diaz nose.

I sigh. And I laugh. Of course, I left my purse. My first day of being homeless would have been way too easy if I'd had a purse with me.

"I'm sorry," I say to the cab driver, who is now loading my second piece of luggage. "I changed my mind. I don't need a cab right now."

I know there's a hotel about a half-mile from here. If I can just work up the courage to go back inside and get my purse, I'll walk there and get a room until I figure out what to do. It's not as if I can get any wetter.

The driver takes the suitcases back out of the cab, sets them on the curb in front of me, and walks back to the driver's side without ever making eye contact. He just gets into his car and drives away, as if my canceling is a relief.

Do I look that pathetic?

I take my suitcases and walk back to where I was seated before I realized I was purseless. I glance up to my apartment and wonder what would happen if I went back there to get my wallet. I sort of left things in a mess when I walked out the door. I guess I'd rather be homeless in the rain than go back up there.

I take a seat on my luggage again and contemplate my situation. I could pay someone to go upstairs for me. But who? No one's outside, and who's to say Hunter or Tori would even give the person my purse?

This really sucks. I know I'm going to have to end up calling one of my friends, but right now, I'm too embarrassed to tell anyone how clueless I've been for the last two years. I've been completely blindsided.

I already hate being twenty-two, and I still have 364 more days to go.

It sucks so bad that I'm . . . *crying*?

Great. I'm crying now. I'm a purseless, crying, violent, homeless girl. And as much as I don't want to admit it, I think I might also be heartbroken.

Yep. Sobbing now. Pretty sure this must be what it feels like to have your heart broken.

"It's raining. Hurry up."

I glance up to see a girl hovering over me. She's holding an umbrella over her head and looking down at me with agitation while she hops from one foot to the other, waiting for me to do something. "I'm getting soaked. *Hurry*."

Her voice is a little demanding, as if she's doing me some sort of favor and I'm being ungrateful. I arch an eyebrow as I look up at her, shielding the rain from my eyes with my hand.

I don't know why she's complaining about getting wet, when there isn't much clothing to *get* wet. She's wearing next to nothing. I glance at her shirt, which is missing its entire bottom half, and realize she's in a Hooters outfit.

Could this day get any weirder? I'm sitting on almost everything I own in a torrential downpour, being bossed around by a bitchy Hooters waitress.

I'm still staring at her shirt when she grabs my hand and pulls me up in a huff. "Ridge said you would do this. I've got to get to work. Follow me, and I'll show you where the apartment is." She grabs one of my suitcases, pops the handle out, and shoves it at me. She takes the other and walks swiftly out of the courtyard. I follow her, for no other reason than the fact that she's taken one of my suitcases with her and I want it back.

She yells over her shoulder as she begins to ascend the stairwell. "I don't know how long you plan on staying, but I've only got one rule. Stay the hell out of my room."

She reaches an apartment and opens the door, never even looking back to see if I'm following her. Once I reach the top of the stairs, I pause outside the apartment and look down at the fern sitting unaffected by the heat in a planter outside the door. Its leaves are lush and green as if they're giving summer the middle finger with their refusal to succumb to the heat. I smile at the plant, somewhat proud of it. Then I frown with the realization that I'm envious of the resilience of a plant.

I shake my head, look away, then take a hesitant step inside the unfamiliar apartment. The layout is similar to my own apartment, only this one is a double split bedroom with four total bedrooms. My and Tori's apartment only had two bedrooms, but the living rooms are the same size.

The only other noticeable difference is that I don't see any lying, backstabbing, bloody-nosed whores standing in this one. Nor do I see any of Tori's dirty dishes or laundry lying around.

The girl sets my suitcase down beside the door, then steps

aside and waits for me to . . . well, I don't know what she's waiting for me to do.

She rolls her eyes and grabs my arm, pulling me out of the doorway and further into the apartment. "What the hell is wrong with you? Do you even speak?" She begins to close the door behind her but pauses and turns around, wide-eyed. She holds her finger up in the air. "Wait," she says. "You're not . . ." She rolls her eyes and smacks herself in the forehead. "Oh, my God, you're deaf."

Huh? What the hell is wrong with this girl? I shake my head and start to answer her, but she interrupts me.

"God, Bridgette," she mumbles to herself. She rubs her hands down her face and groans, completely ignoring the fact that I'm shaking my head. "You're such an insensitive bitch sometimes."

Wow. This girl has some serious issues in the people-skills department. She's sort of a bitch, even though she's making an effort not to be one. Now that she thinks I'm deaf. I don't even know how to respond. She shakes her head as if she's disappointed in herself, then looks straight at me.

"I . . . HAVE . . . TO . . . GO . . . TO . . . WORK . . . NOW!" she yells very loudly and painfully slowly. I grimace and step back, which should be a huge clue that I can hear her practically yelling, but she doesn't notice. She points to a door at the end of the hallway. "RIDGE . . . IS . . . IN . . . HIS . . . ROOM!"

Before I have a chance to tell her she can stop yelling, she leaves the apartment and closes the door behind her.

I have no idea what to think. Or what to do now. I'm standing, soaking wet, in the middle of an unfamiliar apartment, and the only person besides Hunter and Tori whom I feel like punching is now just a few feet away in another room. And speaking of Ridge, why the hell did he send his psycho Hooters girlfriend to get me? I take out my phone and have begun to text him when his bedroom door opens.

He walks out into the hallway with an armful of blankets and a pillow. As soon as he makes eye contact with me, I gasp. I hope it's not a noticeable gasp. It's just that I've never actually seen him up close before, and he's even better-looking from just a few feet away than he is from across an apartment courtyard.

I don't think I've ever seen eyes that can actually speak. I'm not sure what I mean by that. It just seems as if he could shoot me the tiniest glance with those dark eyes of his, and I'd know exactly what they needed me to do. They're piercing and intense and—oh, my God, I'm staring.

The corner of his mouth tilts up in a knowing smile as he passes me and heads straight for the couch.

Despite his appealing and slightly innocent-looking face, I want to yell at him for being so deceitful. He shouldn't have waited more than two weeks to tell me. I would have had a chance to plan all this out a little better. I don't understand how we could have had two weeks' worth of conversations without his feeling the need to tell me that my boyfriend and my best friend were screwing.

Ridge throws the blankets and the pillow onto the couch.

"I'm not staying here, Ridge," I say, attempting to stop him from wasting time with his hospitality. I know he feels bad for me, but I hardly know him, and I'd feel a lot more comfortable in a hotel room than sleeping on a strange couch.

Then again, hotel rooms require money.

Something I don't have on me at the moment.

Something that's inside my purse, across the courtyard, in an apartment with the only two people in the world I don't want to see right now.

Maybe a couch isn't such a bad idea after all.

He gets the couch made up and turns around, dropping his eyes to my soaking-wet clothes. I look down at the puddle of water I'm creating in the middle of his floor.

"Oh, sorry," I mutter. My hair is matted to my face; my

shirt is now a see-through pathetic excuse for a barrier between the outside world and my very pink, very noticeable bra. “Where’s your bathroom?”

He nods his head toward the bathroom door.

I turn around, unzip a suitcase, and begin to rummage through it while Ridge walks back into his bedroom. I’m glad he doesn’t ask me questions about what happened after our conversation earlier. I’m not in the mood to talk about it.

I select a pair of yoga pants and a tank top, then grab my bag of toiletries and head to the bathroom. It disturbs me that everything about this apartment reminds me of my own, with just a few subtle differences. This is the same bathroom with the Jack-and-Jill doors on the left and right, leading to the two bedrooms that adjoin it. One is Ridge’s, obviously. I’m curious about who the other bedroom belongs to but not curious enough to open it. The Hooters girl’s one rule was to stay the hell out of her room, and she doesn’t seem like the type to kid around.

I shut the door that leads to the living room and lock it, then check the locks on both doors to the bedrooms to make sure no one can walk in. I have no idea if anyone lives in this apartment other than Ridge and the Hooters girl, but I don’t want to chance it.

I pull off my sopping clothes and throw them into the sink to avoid soaking the floor. I turn on the shower and wait until the water gets warm, then step in. I stand under the stream of water and close my eyes, thankful that I’m not still sitting outside in the rain. At the same time, I’m not really happy to be where I am, either.

I never expected my twenty-second birthday to end with me showering in a strange apartment and sleeping on a couch that belongs to a guy I’ve barely known for two weeks, all at the hands of the two people I cared about and trusted the most.

1.

TWO WEEKS EARLIER

Sydney

I slide open my balcony door and step outside, thankful that the sun has already dipped behind the building next door, cooling the air to what could pass as a perfect fall temperature. Almost on cue, the sound of his guitar floats across the courtyard as I take a seat and lean back into the patio lounger. I tell Tori I come out here to get homework done, because I don't want to admit that the guitar is the only reason I'm outside every night at eight, like clockwork.

For weeks now, the guy in the apartment across the courtyard has sat on his balcony and played for at least an hour. Every night, I sit outside and listen.

I've noticed a few other neighbors come out to their balconies when he's playing, but no one is as loyal as I am. I don't understand how someone could hear these songs and not crave them day after day. Then again, music has always been a passion of mine, so maybe I'm just a little more infatuated with his sound than other people are. I've played the piano for as long as I can remember, and although I've never shared it with anyone, I love writing music. I even switched my major to music education two years ago. My plan is to be an elementary music teacher, although if my father had his way, I'd still be prelaw.

"A life of mediocrity is a waste of a life," he said when I informed him that I was changing my major.

A life of mediocrity. I find that more amusing than insulting, since he seems to be the most dissatisfied person I've ever known. And he's a lawyer. Go figure.

One of the familiar songs ends and the guy with the guitar begins to play something he's never played before. I've grown accustomed to his unofficial playlist since he seems to practice the same songs in the same order night after night. However, I've never heard him play this particular song before. The way he's repeating the same chords makes me think he's creating the song right here on the spot. I like that I'm witnessing this, especially since after only a few chords, it's already my new favorite. All his songs sound like originals. I wonder if he performs them locally or if he just writes them for fun.

I lean forward in the chair, rest my arms on the edge of the balcony, and watch him. His balcony is directly across the courtyard, far enough away that I don't feel weird when I watch him but close enough that I make sure I'm never watching him when Hunter's around. I don't think Hunter would like the fact that I've developed a tiny crush on this guy's talent.

I can't deny it, though. Anyone who watches how passionately this guy plays would crush on his talent. The way he keeps his eyes closed the entire time, focusing intently on every stroke against every guitar string. I like it best when he sits cross-legged with the guitar upright between his legs. He pulls it against his chest and plays it like a stand-up bass, keeping his eyes closed the whole time. It's so mesmerizing to watch him that sometimes I catch myself holding my breath, and I don't even realize I'm doing it until I'm gasping for air.

It also doesn't help that he's cute. At least, he seems cute from here. His light brown hair is unruly and moves with him, falling across his forehead every time he looks down at his guitar. He's too far away to distinguish eye color or distinct features, but the details don't matter when coupled with the passion he has for his music. There's a confidence to him that

I find compelling. I've always admired musicians who are able to tune out everyone and everything around them and pour all of their focus into their music. To be able to shut the world off and allow yourself to be completely swept away is something I've always wanted the confidence to do, but I just don't have it.

This guy has it. He's confident and talented. I've always been a sucker for musicians, but more in a fantasy way. They're a different breed. A breed that rarely makes for good boyfriends.

He glances at me as if he can hear my thoughts, and then a slow grin appears across his face. He never once pauses the song while he continues to watch me. The eye contact makes me blush, so I drop my arms and pull my notebook back onto my lap and look down at it. I hate that he just caught me staring so hard. Not that I was doing anything wrong; it just feels odd for him to know I was watching him. I glance up again, and he's still watching me, but he's not smiling anymore. The way he's staring causes my heart to speed up, so I look away and focus on my notebook.

Way to be a creeper, Sydney.

"There's my girl," a comforting voice says from behind me. I lean my head back and tilt my eyes upward to watch Hunter as he makes his way onto the balcony. I try to hide the fact that I'm shocked to see him, because I'm pretty sure I was supposed to remember he was coming.

On the off chance that Guitar Boy is still watching, I make it a point to seem really into Hunter's hello kiss so that maybe I'll seem less like a creepy stalker and more like someone just casually relaxing on her balcony. I run my hand up Hunter's neck as he leans over the back of my chair and kisses me upside down.

"Scoot up," Hunter says, pushing on my shoulders. I do what he asks and slide forward in the seat as he lifts his leg over the chair and slips in behind me. He pulls my back against his chest and wraps his arms around me.

My eyes betray me when the sound of the guitar stops

abruptly, and I glance across the courtyard once more. Guitar Boy is eyeing us hard as he stands, then goes back inside his apartment. His expression is odd. Almost angry.

“How was school?” Hunter asks.

“Too boring to talk about. What about you? How was work?”

“Interesting,” he says, brushing my hair away from my neck with his hand. He presses his lips to my neck and kisses his way down my collarbone.

“What was so interesting?”

He tightens his hold on me, then rests his chin on my shoulder and pulls me back in the chair with him. “The oddest thing happened at lunch,” he says. “I was with one of the guys at this Italian restaurant. We were eating out on the patio, and I had just asked the waiter what he recommended for dessert, when a police car rounded the corner. They stopped right in front of the restaurant, and two officers jumped out with their guns drawn. They began barking orders toward us when our waiter mumbled, ‘Shit.’ He slowly raised his hands, and the police jumped the barrier to the patio, rushed toward him, threw him to the ground, and cuffed him right at our feet. After they read him his rights, they pulled him to his feet and escorted him toward the cop car. The waiter glanced back at me and yelled, ‘The tiramisu is really good!’ Then they put him in the car and drove away.”

I tilt my head back and look up at him. “Seriously? That really happened?”

He nods, laughing. “I swear, Syd. It was crazy.”

“Well? Did you try the tiramisu?”

“Hell, yeah, we did. It was the best tiramisu I’ve ever had.”

He kisses me on the cheek and pushes me forward. “Speaking of food, I’m starving.” He stands up and holds out his hand to me. “Did you cook tonight?”

I take his hand and let him pull me up. “We just had salad, but I can make you one.”

Once we’re inside, Hunter takes a seat on the couch next

to Tori. She's got a textbook spread open across her lap as she halfheartedly focuses on both homework and TV at the same time. I take out the containers from the fridge and make his salad. I feel a little guilty that I forgot tonight was one of the nights he said he was coming. I usually have something cooked when I know he'll be here.

We've been dating for almost two years now. I met him during my sophomore year in college, when he was a senior. He and Tori had been friends for years. After she moved into my dorm and we became friends, she insisted I meet him. She said we'd hit it off, and she was right. We made it official after only two dates, and things have been wonderful since.

Of course, we have our ups and downs, especially since he moved more than an hour away. When he landed the job in the accounting firm last semester, he suggested I move with him. I told him no, that I really wanted to finish my undergrad before taking such a huge step. In all honesty, I'm just scared.

The thought of moving in with him seems so final, as if I would be sealing my fate. I know that once we take that step, the next step is marriage, and then I'd be looking at never having the chance to live alone. I've always had a roommate, and until I can afford my own place, I'll be sharing an apartment with Tori. I haven't told Hunter yet, but I really want to live alone for a year. It's something I promised myself I would do before I got married. I don't even turn twenty-two for a couple of weeks, so it's not as if I'm in any hurry.

I take Hunter's food to him in the living room.

"Why do you watch this?" he says to Tori. "All these women do is talk shit about each other and flip tables."

"That's exactly why I watch it," Tori says, without taking her eyes off the TV.

Hunter winks at me and takes his food, then props his feet up on the coffee table. "Thanks, babe." He turns toward the TV and begins eating. "Can you grab me a beer?"

I nod and walk back into the kitchen. I open the refrigerator door and look on the shelf where he always keeps his extra beer. I realize as I'm staring at "his" shelf that this is probably how it begins. First, he has a shelf in the refrigerator. Then he'll have a toothbrush in the bathroom, a drawer in my dresser, and eventually, his stuff will infiltrate mine in so many ways it'll be impossible for me ever to be on my own.

I run my hands up my arms, rubbing away the sudden onset of discomfort washing over me. I feel as if I'm watching my future play out in front of me. I'm not so sure I like what I'm imagining.

Am I ready for this?

Am I ready for this guy to be the guy I bring dinner to every night when he gets home from work?

Am I ready to fall into this comfortable life with him? One where I teach all day and he does people's taxes, and then we come home and I cook dinner and I "grab him beers" while he props his feet up and calls me *babe*, and then we go to our bed and make love at approximately nine p.m. so we won't be tired the next day, in order to wake up and get dressed and go to work and do it all over again?

"Earth to Sydney," Hunter says. I hear him snap his fingers twice. "Beer? Please, babe?"

I quickly grab his beer, give it to him, then head straight to my bathroom. I turn the water on in the shower, but I don't get in. Instead, I lock the door and sink to the floor.

We have a good relationship. He's good to me, and I know he loves me. I just don't understand why every time I think about a future with him, it's not an exciting thought.

Ridge

Maggie leans forward and kisses my forehead. “I need to go.”

I’m on my back with my head and shoulders partially propped against my headboard. She’s straddling my lap and looking down at me regretfully. I hate that we live so far apart now, but it makes the time we do spend together a lot more meaningful. I take her hands so she’ll shut up, and I pull her to me, hoping to persuade her not to leave just yet.

She laughs and shakes her head. She kisses me, but only briefly, and then she pulls away again. She slides off my lap, but I don’t let her make it very far before I lunge forward and pin her to the mattress. I point to her chest.

“You”—I lean in and kiss the tip of her nose—“need to stay one more night.”

“I can’t. I have class.”

I grab her wrists and pin her arms above her head, then press my lips to hers. I know she won’t stay another night. She’s never missed a day of class in her life, unless she was too sick to move. I sort of wish she was feeling a little sick right now, so I could make her stay in bed with me.

I slide my hands from her wrists, delicately up her arms until I’m cupping her face. Then I give her one final kiss before I reluctantly pull away from her. “Go. And be careful. Let me know when you make it home.”

She nods and pushes herself off the bed. She reaches across me and grabs her shirt, then pulls it on over her head. I watch her as she walks around the room and gathers the clothes I pulled off her in a hurry.

After five years of dating, most couples would have moved

in together by now. However, most peoples' other halves aren't Maggie. She's so fiercely independent it's almost intimidating. But it's understandable, considering how her life has gone. She's been caring for her grandfather since I met her. Before that, she spent the majority of her teenage years helping him care for her grandmother, who died when Maggie was sixteen. Now that her grandfather is in a nursing home, she finally has a chance to live alone while finishing school, and as much as I want her here with me, I also know how important this internship is for her. So for the next year, I'll suck it up while she's in San Antonio and I'm here in Austin. I'll be damned if I ever move out of Austin, especially for San Antonio.

Unless she asked, of course.

"Tell your brother I said good luck." She's standing in my bedroom doorway, poised to leave. "And you need to quit beating yourself up, Ridge. Musicians have blocks, just like writers do. You'll find your muse again. I love you."

"I love you, too."

She smiles and backs out of my bedroom. I groan, knowing she's trying to be positive with the whole writer's block thing, but I can't stop stressing about it. I don't know if it's because Brennan has so much riding on these songs now or if it's because I'm completely tapped out, but the words just aren't coming. Without lyrics I'm confident in, it's hard to feel good about the actual musical aspect of writing.

My phone vibrates. It's a text from Brennan, which only makes me feel worse about the fact that I'm stuck.

Brennan: It's been weeks. Please tell me you have something.

Me: Working on it. How's the tour?

Brennan: Good, but remind me not to allow Warren to schedule this many gigs on the next leg.

Me: Gigs are what gets your name out there.

Brennan: OUR name. I'm not telling you again to stop acting like you aren't half of this.

Me: I won't be half if I can't work through this damn block.

Brennan: Maybe you should get out more. Cause some unnecessary drama in your life. Break up with Maggie for the sake of art. She'll understand. Heartache helps with lyrical inspiration. Don't you ever listen to country?

Me: Good idea. I'll tell Maggie you suggested that.

Brennan: Nothing I say or do could ever make Maggie hate me. Give her a kiss for me, and get to writing. Our careers are resting squarely on your shoulders.

Me: Asshole.

Brennan: Ah! Is that anger I detect in your text? Use it. Go write an angry song about how much you hate your little brother, then send it to me. ;)

Me: Yeah. I'll give it to you after you finally get your shit out of your old bedroom. Bridgette's sister might move in next month.

Brennan: Have you ever met Brandi?

Me: No. Do I want to?

Brennan: Only if you want to live with two Bridgettes.

Me: Oh, shit.

Brennan: Exactly. TTYL.

I close out the text to Brennan and open up a text to Warren.

Me: We're good to go on the roommate search. Brennan says hell no to Brandi. I'll let you break the news to Bridgette, since you two get along so well.

Warren: Well, motherfucker.

I laugh and hop off the bed, then head to the patio with my guitar. It's almost eight, and I know she'll be on her balcony. I don't know how weird my actions are about to seem to her, but all I can do is try. I've got nothing to lose.

2.

Sydney

I'm mindlessly tapping my feet and singing along to his music with my made-up lyrics when he stops playing mid-song. He never stops mid-song, so naturally, I glance in his direction. He's leaning forward, staring right at me. He holds up his index finger, as if to say, *Hold on*, and he sets his guitar beside him and runs into his apartment.

What the hell is he doing?

And oh, my God, why does the fact that he's acknowledging me make me so nervous?

He comes back outside with paper and a marker in his hands.

He's writing. What the hell is he writing?

He holds up two sheets of paper, and I squint to get a good look at what he's written.

A phone number.

Shit. His phone number?

When I don't move for several seconds, he shakes the papers and points at them, then points back to me.

He's insane. I'm not calling him. I can't call him. I can't do that to Hunter.

The guy shakes his head, then grabs a fresh sheet of paper and writes something else on it, then holds it up.

Text me.

When I still don't move, he flips the paper over and writes again.

I have a ?

A question. A text. Seems harmless enough. When he holds up the papers with his phone number again, I pull out my phone and enter his phone number. I stare at the screen for a few seconds, not really knowing what to say in the text, so I go with:

Me: What's your question?

He looks down at his phone, and I can see him smile when he receives my text. He drops the paper and leans back in his chair, typing. When my phone vibrates, I hesitate a second before looking down at it.

Him: Do you sing in the shower?

I shake my head, confirming my initial suspicion. He's a flirt. Of course he is, he's a musician.

Me: I don't know what kind of question that is, but if this is your attempt at flirting, I've got a boyfriend. Don't waste your time.

I hit send and watch him read the text. He laughs, and this irritates me. Mostly because his smile is so . . . *smiley*. Is that even a word? I don't know how else to describe it. It's as if his whole face smiles right along with his mouth. I wonder what that smile looks like up close.

Him: Believe me, I know you have a boyfriend, and this is definitely not how I flirt. I just want to know if you sing in the shower. I happen to think highly of people who sing in the shower and need to know the answer to that question in order to decide if I want to ask you my next question.

I read the lengthy text, admiring his fast typing. Guys aren't normally as skilled as girls when it comes to speed-texting, but his replies are almost instantaneous.

Me: Yes, I sing in the shower. Do you sing in the shower?

Him: No, I don't.

Me: How can you think highly of people who sing in the shower if you don't sing in the shower?

Him: Maybe the fact that I don't sing in the shower is why I think highly of people who do sing in the shower.

This conversation isn't going anywhere.

Me: Why did you need this vital piece of information from me?

He stretches his legs out and props his feet up on the edge of the patio, then stares at me for a few seconds before returning his attention to his phone.

Him: I want to know how you're singing lyrics to my songs when I haven't even added lyrics to them yet.

My cheeks instantly heat from embarrassment. Busted.

I stare at his text, then glance up at him. He's watching me, expressionless.

Why the hell didn't I think that he could see me sitting out here? I never thought he would notice me singing along to his music. Hell, until last night, I never thought he even noticed me. I inhale, wishing I'd never made eye contact with him to begin with. I don't know why I find this embarrassing, but I

do. It seems as if I've invaded his privacy in some way, and I hate that.

Me: I tend to favor songs with lyrics, and I was tired of wondering what the lyrics to your songs were, so I guess I made up a few of my own.

He reads the text, then glances up at me without a hint of his infectious smile. I don't like his serious glances. I don't like what they do to my stomach. I also don't like what his smiley smile does to my stomach. I wish he would stick to a simple, unattractive, emotionless expression, but I'm not sure he's capable of that.

Him: Will you send them to me?

Oh, God. Hell, no.

Me: Hell, no.

Him: Please?

Me: No.

Him: Pretty please?

Me: No, thank you.

Him: What's your name?

Me: Sydney. Yours?

Him: Ridge.

Ridge. That fits him. Musical-artisty-moody type.

Me: Well, Ridge, I'm sorry, but I don't write lyrics that anyone would want to hear. Do you not write lyrics to your own songs?

He begins to text, and it's a really long text. His fingers move swiftly over his phone while he types. I'm afraid I'm about to receive an entire novel from him. He looks up at me just as my phone vibrates.

Ridge: I guess you could say I'm having a bad case of writer's block. Which is why I really, really wish you would just send me the lyrics you sing while I'm playing. Even if you think they're stupid, I want to read them. You somehow know every single song I play, even though I've never played them for anyone except when I practice out here.

How does he know I know all his songs? I bring a hand up to my cheek when I feel it flush, knowing he's been watching me a lot longer than I initially thought. I swear, I have to be the most unintuitive person in this entire world. I glance up at him and he's continuing with another text, so I look back to my phone and wait for it.

Ridge: I can see it in the way your whole body responds to the guitar. You tap your feet, you move your head. And I've even tried to test you by slowing down the song every once in a while to see if you would notice, and you always do. Your body stops responding when I change something up. So just by watching you, I can tell you have an ear for music. And since you sing in the shower, it probably means you're an okay singer. Which also means that maybe there's a chance you have a talent for writing lyrics. So, Sydney, I want to know what your lyrics are.

I'm still reading when another text comes through.

Ridge: Please. I'm desperate.

I inhale a deep breath, wishing more than anything that this conversation had never started. I don't know how in the hell he can come to all these conclusions without my ever having noticed him watching me. In a way, it eases my embarrassment over the fact that he saw me watching *him*. But now that he wants to know what lyrics I made up, I'm embarrassed for an entirely different reason. I do sing, but not well enough to do anything with it professionally. My passion is mostly for music itself, not at all for performing it. And as much as I do love writing lyrics, I've never shared anything I've written. It seems too intimate. I'd almost rather he had sent me a vulgar, flirtatious come-on.

I jump when my phone vibrates again.

Ridge: Okay, we'll make a deal. Pick one song of mine, and send me the lyrics to just that one song. Then I'll leave you alone. Especially if they're stupid.

I laugh. And cringe. He's not going to let up. I'm going to have to change my number.

Ridge: I know your phone number now, Sydney. I'm not giving up until you send me lyrics to at least one song.

Jesus. He's not going away.

Ridge: And I also know where you live. I'm not above begging on my knees at your front door.

Ugh!

Me: Fine. Stop with the creepy threats. One song. But I'll have to write the lyrics down while you play it first, because I've never written them out before.

Ridge: Deal. Which song? I'll play it right now.

Me: How would I tell you which song, Ridge? I don't know the names of any of them.

Ridge: Yeah, me, neither. Hold up your hand when I get to the one you want me to play.

He puts down his phone and picks up his guitar, then begins playing one of the songs. It's not the one I want him to play, though, so I shake my head. He switches to another song, and I continue to shake my head until the familiar chords to one of my favorites meets my ears. I hold up my hand, and he grins, then starts the song over from the beginning. I pull my notebook in front of me and pick up my pen, then begin to write down the lyrics I've put to it.

He has to play the song three times before I finally get them all out. It's almost dark now, and it's hard to see, so I pick up my phone.

Me: It's too dark to read. I'll go inside and text them to you, but you have to promise you'll never ask me to do this again.

The light from his phone illuminates his smile, and he nods at me, then picks up his guitar and walks back inside his apartment.

I go to my room and sit on the bed, wondering if it's too late to change my mind. I feel as if this whole conversation just ruined my eight o'clock patio time. I can't go back outside and listen to him ever again. I liked it better when I thought he

didn't know I was there. It was like my own personal space with my own personal concert. Now I'll be way too aware of him to actually enjoy listening, and I curse him for ruining that.

I regretfully text him my lyrics, then turn my phone on silent and leave it on my bed as I go into the living room and try to forget this ever happened.