

“What do you need from me, Rosie? You’re banned from this place.” Well, that’s something she managed to leave out. Though, somehow, it doesn’t surprise me that Rosie would somehow get herself banned from a rough-and-tough biker bar, despite her sweet appearance.

“What, I can’t just come in to see an old friend?” He continues to glare at her before she sighs, and her voice veers from the sugar-coated sweet tone to a different one altogether. “Fine, I need a to-go cup of the oldest scotch you have in this place.” Silence fills the space for a beat before the man replies. Exasperation, I’m thinking, follows Rosie with whoever she interacts with.

“You can’t get a to-go cup, Rosie. Then you’d be driving with an open container.” Her nose scrunches up, contemplating her next move. When she lands on her new tactic, she pouts before speaking again.

“The whole bottle?” she says with a raise of her shoulder.

“Our best bottle is going to cost you fifteen hundred dollars. Is the bookstore doing *that* well?” She grimaces, and I try and wrap my head around a bottle of alcohol that costs *fifteen hundred dollars*, much less it being at a place like this.

“Maybe with a friends and family discount?”

“Friends!?” he says aghast. “We are not friends, Rosie.”

“Oh, come on. Remember that time I dog-sat for you while you went to Denver? Or when I made you chicken soup when you were sick?” Rosie tries, but Jake just glares at her, crossing his arms over his chest and looking down his nose at her.

“I don’t know, when I think about you, I mostly remember how you told everyone we were mutual friends with that I was shit in bed and I cheated on you.” I cringe at that, but Rosie barely even shifts her face, no look of remorse or pity crossing it.

“And?” *Damn, the girl is brutal.*

“And that’s messed up! I should sue you!”

It’s clear she’s either going to try a new angle or completely give up on playing nice when her eyes roll, arms crossing on her chest in a mirror of his. She looks so incredibly unfazed, I’m almost envious.

“For *what*, Jake?”

“Libel or something!” He throws his hands up in the air, clearly frustrated, and Rosie pouts at him, as if she feels *bad* for the man.

“That’s for printed lies, bud. God, maybe I should have *also* told everyone that you were a dumbass,” she mumbles under her breath.

“I think the word you’re looking for is *slander*,” I add without really meaning to. I expect her ire, but Rosie looks over at me with a small smile, like she likes how I’m adding to her grand show of dramatics.

“Yeah! What he said! I should sue for slander because you told everyone I was a cheater who sucks in bed.”

Rosie’s face then screws up, a mix of confusion and pity showing once again.

“Honey, that’s not how that works,” she says gently, reaching out across the bar to pat his arm, which he’s placed on the worn bar top like he’s a small child who is bartering for a third ice pop. “It has to be proven to be untrue if you’re going to sue me for slander.”

“I’m not shit in bed.”

She gives him a look that hurts *my* ego, and I’m not even close enough to get the full brunt of it. “You keep telling yourself that, baby,” she says, and someone in the crowd lets out a low *oooh* like it was a schoolyard burn.

“Fuck off, Rosie.” Rosie doesn’t back down, instead standing there, hip cocked and her arms crossed on her chest like she’s an impatient mother waiting for her child to stop throwing a temper tantrum at the store.

“Hey, hey,” I say, stepping slower to Rosie because, despite everything, I do feel a bit protective of my neighbor and now pseudo-partner in crime.

“And who the fuck is this guy?” Jake asks, tipping his chin to me but looking at Rosie.

“Her nei—” I start, but Rosie is faster and speaks with a catlike smile, and panic runs through me.

“My new boyfriend,” she says with a wide smile. *Yeah, that panic was warranted.*

Jake lets out a humorless laugh before running a hand over his thinning hair, and without meaning to, I let myself bask in the fact that both sides of my family have always had thick heads of hair until the end. “You bring your new piece in here and what, want me to do you favors? You always were a bitch.”

“Okay, there’s no reason to—” I start, stepping closer to the bar because even if she’s a bit of a pain and likes to stir the

pot, that doesn't mean she's a *bitch*. The big man turns to me with a look of death on his face.

"You wanna fight?" he asks, moving around the bar until there's no longer anything between us, and my pulse starts to pound.

Well. This has escalated quickly. It feels like any moment, it's going to turn into *Roadhouse*, Jake smashing a bottle on the counter and threatening me with it, and try as I might, I am *not* Patrick Swayze in this one.

"Not particularly, I just don't think there's any need to be throwing names around. The woman just came in for a drink, and—" I don't get to finish explaining why he should stop with his verbal attack on my . . . partner, because his full body turns to me, and then he swings.

I duck by the grace of whoever is watching me, but unfortunately, that means his fist meets the face of another man standing far too close behind me. He retaliates and swings back, but Jake sees it coming, dodging it, and *that* guy hits a third, a domino effect that would be funny if I weren't in the middle of it all.

Within a moment, the bar erupts into chaos. Pushing and shouting and cheering begin, and I try my best to keep an eye on Rosie as well as avoid getting hit myself. Someone lifts a chair and slams it over another man's head, and that's when I make the executive decision that we need to get out of here. Fuck the liquor—we can find some other workaround. As I turn to where I last saw Rosie, I see her climbing onto the bar top with her heels still on, and I panic. She must be trying to grab the top-shelf liquor herself, which in this scenario, is a recipe for disaster. I make my way toward her to stop her. But

before I can, her hands are cupped around her mouth and she shouts, “Stop!”

Everyone goes quiet, some spell she’s cast on the entire room. My eyes drift around in awe at the still room. Someone is holding an empty beer bottle up, clearly about to smash it and use it as a weapon.

“Listen here, you assholes,” Rosie yells before she smiles down at the two dozen men whose rapt attention is completely on her, and I realize this is it—this is me seeing her magic at work on a large scale. I look around the bar once more with new eyes, and awe takes over me.

I’ve always been into magical beings: reading about them, collecting items and cards about them, playing games based on them, but I always knew they were fake. Until recently, that is. But when I see Rosie working her literal magic on everyone in this room, I wonder how I could have ever doubted the truth with her living across from me. Bodies around me are frozen, and there’s not a single other sound in the rowdy bar other than her heels clicking on the wood.

“I am here on a mission. A quest, if you will.” She begins moving, pacing the bar as if this is a TED Talk instead of a woman pausing a bar brawl. “A mission for true love, to break a family curse.” I wonder if her magic helps ease the fact that she’s spilling all these secrets to them. Perhaps it erases all memory of actual magic while in use.

I have so many questions, but I try to file them away until later, just as enraptured by Rosie as the rest of the bar.

“I am just a woman, standing on top of a bar, hoping you all will believe in the promise of love. This man,” she gestures to the bar owner, “was not my true love, but that does

not mean I'll stop looking. In my quest, I need to get some scotch of the finest caliber in order to woo a man." *A dead man*, I think to myself. "Is it too much, in these days of swiping and social media and ghosting, to search for that one person who will be *your* person? Is it out of line to wish for the person meant to become yours? I believe not." She moves a hand over the stunned, silent crowd, and I notice a man who had his arm pulled back to punch someone relaxes his hold on the opposing man's shirt, his other arm dropping. Blood leaks out of his rival's nose, and I cringe before averting my gaze back to Rosie. "I believe everyone, all of you, should find that person. It's your divine right to find your soulmate and live happily ever after. I'm trying to find mine. I come from a long line of women with broken hearts, and I want to be the first not just to settle," she shifts her hand again, gesturing to where Jake is standing, arms crossed on his chest, and watching her, "but to find my other half. Is that too much to ask for? I think not. You all just fought, eager to prove your strength and stick up for one another. I, too, am fighting, but not out of anger or boredom, but desperation. I think that is even more beautiful, even more valiant. Don't you all? Maybe the world would be better off if there were a little less fighting among each other and a little more love." The room is silent as she finishes her monologue, and my pulse pounds.

At any moment, the fighting is going to start once again. Considering I'm standing in the middle of it, I'm not going to be able to avoid it. With her warm eyes scanning the room triumphantly and a small smile on her lips, all I can do is quickly devise a strategy to reach Rosie and somehow get us both out

MORGAN ELIZABETH

of here safely. I wonder if there's a back entrance we could sneak to or—

The room erupts, and my back tightens.

Until I realize it erupts in *cheers*. Clapping and hooting and hollering.

"I'll buy it!" a man shouts.

"Me too!"

"Give the girl the whole bottle!" a third man in a motorcycle jacket shouts. Soon, the room is a chorus of agreement, and I watch with awe as the entire room falls under her spell. Literally, I assume, though those pink glittering strands aren't visible the way they were in the field. I suppose she didn't have time to add a caveat to make it visible to me again. My smile widens as I watch Rosie, who is smiling as well, triumph on her face instead of the shock on mine.

She knew this would work.

"Alright, Rosie, you made your point. Get off my bar before the health inspector comes and writes me up," her ex calls from behind the bar. That's when her eyes meet mine, finding me as if she knew exactly where I was all along. She takes two steps down the bar until she's standing right before me. Without even thinking about it, my hands lift, gripping her waist and lifting her up and off the bar. I hold her for a second longer once her feet are on the ground before releasing her and stepping back, my hands feeling like they've been set afire.

From a single touch.

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"What do you call that one?" I ask as we slide into my car, Rosie cradling her bottle of scotch. It's not even opened, and she didn't have to touch her wallet to get it. I think Jake was as eager to get

MEET CUTE MAGIC

her out of his bar as I was, fearing another uprising.

“What?” she asks, looking to me with a peaceful, fulfilled smile.

“That magic, in the bar?” I ask as I turn on the car and buckle my seatbelt before pulling out of the lot. I’m not sure when her magic will wear off, but if they remember everything that happened, it might be a good idea to get out of here as soon as possible.

Silence comes from the other side of the car, and when I hit a red light, I look at her.

“You thought that was magic?” It’s a question, but it comes out like a statement.

“Uh, obviously? Everyone was completely still, looking at you. What else would that have been?” A beat passes before a loud laugh fills the distance between us, its sound tinged with that same magic she used before, somehow soothing and calming my frayed nerves from the fight. When she comes down from her hilarity, she pats my arm.

“Oh, no, buddy. That was just a pretty girl in a push-up bra being loud and catching their attention.” She shrugs as I gape at her. “Sometimes the most magical things are the most ordinary ones.”