



SELENA KITT

HAPPY ACCIDENT

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By Selena Kitt

The damned door was locked!

I pounded on it, but there was no way anyone could hear me over the steady beat of music. I actually felt it—*thump-thump-thump*—when I pressed my ear to the door. I pulled my coat tighter, my legs numb with cold. At some point tonight, I had been convinced black fishnet thigh highs and a miniskirt were a good idea.

"If that isn't the opening band, Katie, I'm going to kill you!"

Katie stood there with our tickets in her hand, ready to give them over so we could get in to see *Scratch*. Breathless, I looked down the long flight of steps we'd just climbed in high heeled boots.

"They must have closed all the other entrances but the main one when the show started," Katie speculated, tucking the tickets safely into her purse. "Come on, we'll have to go around!"

"Shortcut my ass! Katie, I could be sitting in the front row listening to Rob sing right now if it weren't for you and Mapquest!"

"I think that's still *Blue Jeans Metal* playing," Katie soothed, taking my arm and pulling my coat sleeve.

I shook her off. "It better be!" I hissed, looking at my watch. "This is all your fault!"

She crossed her arms and glared. "It is not! I'm not the one who took an hour and a half deciding which tramp-wear would best attract Rob's attention!"

"Oh, please!" My crossed arms mirrored hers. "You could have thought to get something to eat before we were on the road!"

"Fine, Sabrina!" She rolled her eyes. "It's all my fault, okay?"

I sighed, eyeing the steep stairs again. "Okay, let's go. Maybe we can still make it before they start."

The door opened behind us. I heard it before I saw it from the corner of my eye, my chest swelling with the hope that it was our salvation! It opened hard and fast, catching me in the shoulder and the side of my head, a tall figure barreling through, calling behind him, "I think it's this way!"

For a moment, I saw stars as I groped for something solid. I found the handrail to the stairs, my heel slipping backward off the first step. That's when I knew I was going to fall. I screamed and saw Katie's face, a perfect expression of horror—eyes and mouth wide, her hands reaching out—but she wasn't close enough to catch me.

"Oh, damn!" It was the dark-haired guy who had hit me with the door, and he was close enough to reach me, his hands gripping my wrist and pulling so hard it felt like my arm was going to be pulled from its socket. "Are you okay?"

"The door!" Katie groaned as it swung shut behind a second guy, this one blonde, who had stepped forward to help the first as they pulled me away from the stairs.

I touched my throbbing head, rubbing it. "I'm okay!" I said it more to reassure myself than anyone else as I stared behind me at the twenty-foot fall I could have taken down the cement steps.

"The door's locked!" The blonde guy pulled futilely on it.

Katie sighed. "We know."

"Hey, are you sure you're all right?" The dark-haired guy touched my head, and when he pulled his hand away, I saw my own blood on his fingers. It made me woozy, and I grabbed the handrail again. He pulled me away from the stairs, blocking them with his body as he propped me against the door. I noticed he didn't have a coat, just jeans and a t-shirt. When I looked into his face, I recognized him as I collapsed fully against the door, sure I would pass out.

The whole world tilted sideways, and I went with it. He grabbed me again, this time holding my shoulders and upper arms, as if he could keep me from going down. For a moment, he did, but then I slid through his hands and landed at his feet on the cold concrete. He knelt beside me, swearing again under his breath.

"Tyler, try the other doors!" he called over his shoulder. I looked at Katie and knew she had just realized it, too. "Listen, we have to get you inside."

"You're Rob Burnett," I breathed, my heart thrumming in my chest, a slow heat tingling its way through my limbs in spite of the cold.

"Oh, Christ..." He groaned. "Yeah, that's me."

"You're Tyler Cook!" Katie pointed at the blonde guy trying to open the rest of the row of doors and swearing each time he found one locked. "From *Scratch!*"

"Yeah..." Tyler drew the word out as if she were going to have a problem understanding him. He nodded and put his hands in his pockets as he came toward us. "That's right. And we're supposed to be playing a show right now."

"We're...fans. We're supposed to be...watching it." Katie looked as dazed as I felt. She hadn't even been hit in the head!

I stared at Rob, who looked at me like he was trying to figure something out, and my heart did that fluttering thing again. Me, face-to-face with Rob Burnett! My mind screamed it, and my body wanted to scream it, too. I probably would have been jumping up and down and screeching if my head hadn't hurt so much.

"All right, so we're locked out." Rob held his hand out to me. I took it, thrilled at the contact, feeling lost in a surreal dream. He helped me stand, then steadied me at my elbow when I wavered again. I pressed against him, pretending it was to keep me upright, or for warmth. I just wanted to be near him.

"I still have to take a piss, man!" Tyler laughed.

"Me, too!" Rob grinned at him. "Let's figure out how to get back in. And get her to first aid." He nodded at me. "What's your name?"

"Uh..." I drew a complete blank with his eyes on me.

Katie came to the rescue. "I'm Katie and this is Sabrina."

She stood on my other side, and Tyler moved in next to her. I smiled at the way she looked at him. I never could figure out why she had a thing for the lead guitar player when Rob Burnett was available to drool over. As if either of us ever really had a shot at them, right?

"Pretty name..." Rob smiled at me. Something electric passed between us and I smiled back.

"Well, let's try this." Tyler turned and started banging on the door, yelling, "Hey! Let us in!"

Rob watched him for a moment, shrugged, and started banging, too, yelling along. I glanced at Katie and we both joined them, banging our fists and screaming. I doubted anyone could hear us over the music playing inside, but it might be worth a shot. I got tired and stopped, and we all tapered off, one by one, the four of us standing there, our breath streaming into the cold, pondering the doors.

"So you thought these doors led to the bathroom?" Katie giggled.

"It's dark back there!" Tyler defended his poor choice. "Want me to just whip it out and take a piss right here? I've *really* gotta go."

"Feel free!" Katie flipped her dark hair over her shoulder and wrinkled her nose at him. "Nothing I haven't seen before."

"C'mon," Rob snorted. "Let's try this one more time, and then we'll have to look for another entrance. Do you think you can walk okay?"

I realized, after a brief silence, he was asking me. "Yeah, I think so." I blushed, touching my head, liking and hating the special attention at the same time. It was sore, and there was a small cut, but it wasn't bleeding anymore.

"All right, let's do this." Tyler put both fists against the door. "On three, give it all you got. One. Two. Three." We pounded. We yelled. Tyler actually kicked the door with his tennis shoes.

Katie was the one who noticed a door opening next to her. "Yay!" she squealed.

"Hey, awesome!" Rob stepped toward the opening door and the incredibly loud wave of sound.

"Hold it!" A large man wearing a security guard uniform stopped Rob with a flat hand pressed against his chest. He was twice Rob's width and had a good six inches on him in height. "This entrance is closed. Take your tickets around front."

"But we're in the band!" Tyler stepped around Katie, pressing Rob's shoulder with his own. The security guard looked him up and down. I couldn't fault him for his confusion. They didn't look or dress like rock stars—no make-up or big hair or costumes. They looked like regular guys in jeans and t-shirts and tennis shoes. *The curse or blessing of the garage band*, I thought. *They blend.*

"You know...the band...*Scratch*." Rob's face grew more and more disbelieving with further explanation. "I'm Rob Burnett. This is Tyler Cook."

The guard hesitated, looking at me and Katie. "We're just fans," I explained. "We're not with them."

"But we have tickets!" Katie pulled them from her purse.

The guard pressed Rob with his hand, nodding toward Katie. "Then I can let you in. You, too." He jerked his head toward me.

Rob stared at us as we moved past him, Katie holding out our tickets. I almost laughed at the wide-eyed look on his face. Stopping in front of the security guard, I was determined to put things straight. "They really are in the band. Rob Burnett is the lead singer of *Scratch*. If you don't let them in, there isn't going to be a show!"

Tyler called over my shoulder: "There are ten thousand people in there waiting for us, dude!"

The guard shrugged a shoulder in Rob and Tyler's direction. "I'm sorry, but I just work here. I don't know you."

Tyler swore again, slapping his forehead and then slamming his fist against the door. The security guard reached toward his belt and I gasped, wondering if they carried guns. When he pulled out a walkie-talkie, I sighed in relief. The security guard pressed the button on the side of the receiver and spoke into it. "Listen, I have two young men at the back entrance who say they're in the band."

Katie looked at me. She grinned a crazy kind of smile, making me want to giggle. This was insane!

I turned to Rob. "I'm sure they'll let you in."

He laughed, shaking his head. "I *gotta* take a piss," he said over his shoulder.

"Me too!" Tyler, behind him, snorted laughter.

"Hey, hey!" Rob leaned into me and pointed past the security guard. "John! Hey, that guy knows me!" The guy, John, I assumed, heard Rob calling and turned.

The security guard blocked the door with his bulk, turning to look at the man walking toward him. "Do you know these guys?"

The walkie-talkie in the guard's hand jolted alive, full of static and crackle. "Burnett and the lead guitar player are missing. Do you have them at the back door?"

"Hey, Rob!" John peeked his furrowed brow around the security guard's shoulder. He was carrying a coiled cord over his arm like a pet snake. "Whatcha doin' out there?"

"Looking for a bathroom," Katie volunteered. I felt Rob's body shake with laughter. I turned to look at him and his eyes smiled at me.

"I'm sorry..." The look on the guard's face was priceless. He looked like someone had just walked in while he was going to the bathroom. "These guys are part of the band?"

"That one pretty much is the band." John pointed to Rob.

Tyler gave him the finger. "I resent that." He grinned.

"I apologize..." The guard moved aside to let us all in from the cold. He was bright red. "I didn't know."

"That's all right, man." Rob clapped him on the shoulder. "Easy mistake."

I heard the crowd chanting, "Rob! Rob! Rob!" There was no music playing now. The opening act must have ended.

"Hey, John..." Rob grabbed the roadie by the arm. "Do me a favor and find these two a place in the front row, would you?" He smiled at me. "I nearly knocked this one down a flight of stairs. I think she needs some first aid."

"Thanks." I smiled at him, thinking what a nice guy he was turning out to be. That was the fantasy, of course—meeting some rock star that turned out to be sweet and kind—but it didn't ever turn out that way in real life. Did it?

"Um...Rob?" Katie tugged at his sleeve. He looked from me to glance down at the tickets Katie had clutched in her hand. "We already kinda have front row seats." I nudged her quiet and she frowned at me.

"Oh!" He raised his eyebrows. "Well, tell you what, then, John, give these girls an All-Access-Pass, huh?"

Katie grinned, nudging me. The sound of the crowd was louder now, still chanting his name.

"Maybe I'll see you backstage after the show." Rob reached out to touch the side of my head again. "Make sure you get that cleaned up, okay?"

I nodded. He turned and went with Tyler, both of them walking toward a door John pointed out, while Katie and I followed John in the opposite direction. I felt an invisible tug and glanced over my shoulder to see Rob looking at us.

"Don't forget to pee!" I grinned and waved. He winked and followed Tyler through the door.

"All right, girls." John hoisted the black cord over his shoulder. "Follow me."

I started after him, my whole body buzzing with excitement. I didn't even hear the voice calling, but Katie did, stopping so fast I ran right into her.

"Sabrina!"

I turned at the sound of my name and saw Rob peeking out the door. I raised a hand to wave, my heart leaping in my chest.

"What's your favorite song?"

I stood there for a moment, not believing he had asked. I wanted to say something impressive, pick his favorite song, or something socially relevant, but it happened too fast and instead I just told him the truth: *"Can't Break a Broken Heart!"*

He gave me a thumbs-up and another wink before ducking in. Katie grinned at me. I wondered if my eyes were as shiny and glazed as hers.

We struggled to keep up with John as he took us through a twisting, turning maze of corridors. He stopped at a door marked: 'Office' telling us to wait outside while he went in.

Katie took the opportunity to grab my arm and squeal. "Oh my God! Sabrina, we just met Rob Burnett and Tyler Cook!"

I still felt too dazed by it all to squeal in response. Instead I just grinned and nodded. John came out carrying two laminated cards attached to strings.

"These will get you anywhere you want to go." He handed one to me and one to Katie. "Keep them around your neck and keep them safe."

Katie tugged hers over her head, pulling her long, dark hair out from under the rubbery string. I stared disbelievingly at mine before putting it on.

"Now, about your head." John inspected it with his eyes. He was still slinging that cord over his shoulder. It looked like it weighed a ton, but he wasn't complaining.

"No, it's okay." I waved him away. "I really just want to go see the show. I'll be fine."

"You sure?" He frowned. "First aid's right around the corner."

"She's sure," Katie insisted, grabbing my hand. "Can you just tell us how to get to our seats?"

The noise level doubled when he led us through the first set of heavy curtains, and it doubled again through the second set as we followed him into the venue. The lights were dark, and the crowd just a solid wall of sound. We stood near the top of the stadium, the stage and the roadies clearing instruments below looking like dollhouse miniatures.

Oh great. More stairs!

There was an usher near the entrance, and John left us there with a smile and a wave. Katie and I went down, flight after flight, showing our tickets to a new usher at every level until we arrived on the main floor, making our way through already crowded aisles toward the front row.

"Look at those!" I heard a voice as we passed. "Those are backstage passes!"

I imagined being her, jealous of the privilege, as I pressed the laminated card to my chest and we showed our tickets one last time before sliding into our seats. I felt like a queen. It was amazing how special you felt in the front row at a concert.

"I'm sorry I yelled at you," I apologized to Katie.

Katie's father was, after all, the only reason we had front row tickets in the first place. His work for a promotions company had always been a boon for us through high school and college, whenever our favorite band-of-the-month came into town.

This time was different, though. It wasn't just that *Scratch* was our favorite band—it was really Rob Burnett I was here to see. I wouldn't admit it to anyone but Katie, who had known me in my teenage rock-star-crush days, but I had a serious thing for Rob Burnett. I knew it was ridiculous, a thirty-four-year-old elementary school teacher with a crush on a rock star. Silly or not, I felt an inexplicable connection to him. Sometimes I thought Rob channeled my own thoughts and feelings through his songs.

So, of course, when I heard *Scratch* was coming to town, front row seats became an imperative. I don't think I'd ever wanted anything more. I guess the last minute glitch at Katie's dad's office, which almost cost us the tickets, made me realize how important seeing Rob really was to me. We'd nearly been thrown into the general population, probably somewhere in the upper bowl, relegated to carrying a pair of binoculars and Kleenex for the nosebleeds. I'd given Katie hell about it, too, I remembered, feeling guilty.

"Apology accepted." Katie stuck out her tongue at me and then lifted her laminated card and mouthed, "All-Access-Pass," punctuating each word with a raise of her eyebrows. Then she squealed again and hugged me. Some part of me still thought I was going to just wake up.

That's when the stage went dark, and the crowd's wave of sound broke like a tidal wave over my head. We both screamed and clutched at each other in our excitement, bodies all around us standing, insisting we stand with them. Colored laser lights played over a white sheet descending from the ceiling in front of the stage, and I saw shadowy figures taking their positions.

I couldn't believe, as the sheet dropped in a ghostly dance to the floor and the lights went up and the music began, that I was watching the same Rob Burnett I'd been standing face-to-face with less than half an hour before. He'd thrown a jeans jacket over his t-shirt, but he looked just like he had outside. The entire place came alive when he began to sing. The sound of his voice transported me, as it always did, magnified by ten because he was right there in front of me.

The whole arena was a sea of bodies, bobbing and swaying as one entity. Shrill screams went off around the theater like pressure cookers exploding, and I felt one building in me too. Katie went off first, screeching and waving her arms. She looked straight at Tyler, and he grinned and gave her a wink! That was enough to make me squeal, clutch her arm, and shake her. She hardly noticed.

My heart hammered in my chest as Rob prowled the perimeter of the stage. He stopped and smiled at a fan reaching out to him as he sang. The roadies whisked the sheet away, and the light moved all over him now, his face bright with primary colored hues. I couldn't take my eyes off him—his powerful build, his flashing eyes!

They went immediately into another song, and then another, the wildness in the crowd rising with every note. Rows and rows behind us, signs began to pop up, held way above the mass of heads. I looked back once in a while, just to get the perspective of sitting here, right in the front row. I smiled at one of the signs which read: "You *Scratch* my itch!"

When the song ended, the crowd's voice rose in praise, and Rob grinned. He looked like he was having a great time as he wiped sweat from his face with a towel. He tossed it into the audience at the opposite end of the stage and a dozen people scrambled for it. *How Elvis*, I thought, laughing out loud.

"I gotta tell ya, those damn lasers scare the crap outta me." The light path followed him toward the edge of the stage and he stepped back. All at once, the crowd appreciated his humor with a loud roar.

"You guys are a great crowd!" Rob put the microphone in its stand and the fans screamed their appreciation. "Sometimes I still can't believe I get to do this for a living." My heart swelled at his words. "Honest, we're five ordinary guys, playing our music up here just because we can. People seem to want to hear us or something. I think we're pretty lucky."

A girl's voice from behind us rang out, "We're the lucky ones!"

Rob shielded his eyes as he looked out into the audience, replying, "I'm glad you think so."

The collective wave of emotion was amazing as they went into another song. This one was slower, but his voice was expressive, deep and resonant. He held the shirt cuff of his sleeve as he sang, like he was holding a security blanket. I watched him, moved, a lump in my throat.

I was swept away in the current, jostled forward again by people flooding into the space in front of the stage. Katie and I found ourselves together, dancing and singing in front of the same security guard who had let us in the arena. He

gave us a half-smile, just a flash, before he resumed his obdurate stance, looking over the crowd.

I was disappointed Rob hadn't noticed or acknowledged me, the way Tyler had Katie, but I shook it off, touching the All-Access-Pass strung around my neck. The thrill of connecting with him face-to-face, and the possibility of doing so again, should be enough, I reasoned.

Someone threw a rose on stage and Rob grabbed it, walking around with it clenched between his teeth. It was during the guitar solo, and I laughed as Rob strutted toward Tyler, who grinned at him. I was amazed how his hands just knew what to do, without having to look or really pay attention to his instrument. It must become second nature, I thought, like learning the steps of a dance and just letting it flow.

Rob took out the rose to sing the next verse, but he carried it with him. When the song ended, he glanced at Tyler. "Hey, Tyler, you got any water for this pretty flower?"

Tyler snorted. "Yeah, sure, right here in my pocket."

"Dude, I'd reach my hand in your pocket anytime. We all know you're the sexiest man on this stage...with a big guitar!" Rob waggled his eyebrows, and I laughed again, amazed I could actually see him do it—that's how close we were! Katie screamed in agreement at Rob's sentiment. She clearly thought Tyler was a sexy man with a big guitar, too!

"I'd let you." Tyler shrugged. "But these pants ain't got no pockets!"

Tyler had changed from his jeans and into a pair of very tight leather pants. Just that I was privy to that knowledge made me feel lightheaded. I felt strange, like I was floating. *It just can't get any better than this*, I thought.

And then it did.

"Guess I'll have to find something else to do with this, then, huh?" Rob turned toward the audience with the rose. "This next song is dedicated to a girl I bumped into earlier tonight."

My heart stopped. In spite of the body heat generated by the crowd and the beads of sweat rolling between my breasts, I felt suddenly chilled. I actually got goose bumps. As Rob moved toward us, my mind screamed, *He isn't really—this isn't happening! No way!*

He bent toward me, on one knee as he extended the rose. Girls all around us were reaching for it, but I stood transfixed, mouth open. *This can't be real!* Rob held the rose above the array of hands, making direct eye contact with me. He held the mic off to one side and said to me, just to me: "For you, Sabrina. Glad you got your pass!" His eyes lingered at the laminated card between my breasts and then he winked. "See you after the show."

I finally got my arm to work, reaching for the rose and offering him a shocked, bemused smile. He nodded, standing and moving center stage. "Because it's your favorite song..." He winked at me. I felt waves of jealousy from everyone around me, and I was both uncomfortable and exhilarated at once.

"Startin' in sin with you, what's this poor boy gonna do?"

This ain't love, honey, so it must be art.

*I can't give what ain't mine, girl, so take all you want to,
You can't break a broken heart."*

Katie screamed, pulling my sleeve. The rose trembled in my hand as Rob began to sing my favorite song. I knew he was singing it for me as he prowled the stage, back and forth, the veins on the side his neck bulging when he sang the chorus. My eyes focused there on the pulse of him, the blood and sweat of him throbbing there for all of us to see. The moment was intimate and sublime, a gift he shared not just with the crowd, but exclusively with me. For one brief, shining moment, I had been part of it.

The rest of the concert was a blur. I clutched the rose, the stem nestled right against the All-Access-Pass stuck to my damp chest. The pseudo-finale left the entire arena vibrating and alive as the lights went dark. The crowd began to chant, "Rob, Rob, Rob!" I was immediately taken back to standing in the cold, hearing his name being called again and again, so afraid I wasn't going to get in to see him, afraid our night was going to be ruined.

Yet, it just couldn't have turned out better. My heart soared when the lights came on a few moments later, and they sailed into another song. I felt as if I couldn't get enough, like I wanted more and more, until I was bursting with the fullness of his presence, the music a live thing, moving through and into me again and again.

When the real finale came, Katie and I hugged, holding each other aloft as the throng of people around us cheered and chanted for more. We knew it was over when the lights went up and the roadies started dismantling the equipment.

A couple of girls came up to us, eyeing the passes around our necks and asking how we got them. Katie talked to them while I grabbed our coats.

"Let's ask him how to get backstage," Katie suggested, motioning to the security guard who had let us in. I raised my eyebrows and nodded at the brilliance of her plan. We could have wandered forever not knowing where to go. The guard went to talk to another security guard, asking us to wait.

"Katie, oh my God," I gushed, resting my head on her shoulder. "Did you see him? Did you see him when he gave me this?" I showed her the rose. It didn't have a little rubber stopper of water at the bottom, and it was already beginning to droop.

"Everyone saw, Sabrina!" She lowered her mouth to my ear. "I think he really likes you."

I laughed, lifting my head to look at the two guards still talking. "Oh, come on, Katie. This is Rob Burnett we're talking about. He felt bad about what happened. He was just being nice. And he's married." Still, the thought made me tingle all over.

Katie shrugged. "I'm just saying. The way he looked at you? I'd bet you he would take you to his hotel in a heartbeat. You think these guys don't have one-night-stands with fans?"

I contemplated her words and even let myself fantasize about it a little bit, a warm flush spreading through my limbs. "What about you and Tyler?" I asked, a clear deflection.

Katie's smile was determined. "Let's just say I don't intend to let the opportunity pass me by!"

The security guard came toward us. "I can show you backstage if you want."

I smiled at him. "Hey, thanks. Are you sure?"

"Just cleared it with my boss," he replied. "It's not a problem. Follow me." The phrase reminded me of Lurch from *The Addams Family*, and I couldn't help smiling as he turned his considerable Lurch-like bulk and we fell in line behind him.

I held Katie's hand as she swerved her way through the multitudes of people, keeping her eye on the guard's back. He glanced over his shoulder now and then to make sure we were following until he stopped outside of a black door which blended into the black venue walls. There were guards posted there, too, but no more hordes of people. We had sailed through those with our passes, showing them to other guards on the way.

"Thanks so much," I told him. "What's your name?"

I half-expected him to say Lurch, but he answered, "Gary. You two be good now."

Katie grinned. "Oh, we will. We promise. Very good."

I nudged her as we showed our passes to the sentries outside the door. One of them opened it and let us through, telling us there would be two more checkpoints. He was right—another hallway, and another door flanked by guards, and then up a small flight of stairs.

The last checkpoint door with one guy standing guard opened to a huge room full of people sitting on couches and chairs. A big flat screen TV sat against one wall with a hockey game on. Every surface had food and drink, fruit plates, vegetable trays, cases of water, beer, wine. Everyone talked and laughed together, like they all knew each other. They looked up when the door opened, and then continued their various conversations.

I looked sideways at Katie and she shrugged, reaching for a beer on the end table nearest us and twisting off the lid. "Guess we should just, uh...make ourselves at home...and wait?"

We wedged ourselves together on an ottoman, Katie drinking Heineken and me with an Evian water, which felt like liquid heaven pouring down my throat. My voice was hoarse from screaming. I pretended to be watching the hockey game, feeling awkward and uncomfortable, my eyes skipping around the room now and then, looking for the place where Rob might come in. I couldn't pretend I didn't want to see him again.

The hockey game went into overtime while Katie got up to get another beer. I shrugged my coat off, too warm, and picked fuzz off my black t-shirt. I didn't see him come in, but the reaction of the room told me he was there—somewhere behind me. I turned to look over my shoulder as the whole band entered the room together.

People flocked around them. Several were obviously fans, like us, proud and lucky with their All-Access-Passes hanging around their necks. I wondered idly how you got your hands on one when the lead singer didn't nearly knock you

down several flights of stairs. Katie tipped her beer at me and sauntered over nearer to the band. I turned, but didn't move from my seat on the ottoman, feeling uncertain and deflated. In spite of my dismissal at Katie's suggestion, a part of me clung to the spark of hope the fantasy might come true, that I might end up in Rob Burnett's hotel room.

As I watched him talking, signing autographs, joking and laughing, I saw something I hadn't before in the few moments he was outside with us. This was his public face. Outside, he had been wide open, showing me something real, probably surprised into it by circumstance, but still... What I was looking at now was clearly a façade. It made me sad and I wanted to leave. Katie had cornered Tyler, I noticed, and she pressed as close as decency would allow as they talked—probably closer. I knew we wouldn't be going anywhere any time soon, so I sat and sipped my water and decided to just people-watch.

Rob saw me and smiled, waving. I half-waved, but didn't move from my seat. Instead, I drank my Evian, crossing my legs at the ankles and watching, wondering how in the world this situation had manifested. I still felt like I was drifting through. A few girls with autographed tour programs tucked under their arms giggled together as they passed me. They had taken several pictures with Rob and received a myriad of kisses from him. Now Rob looked at me, his gaze steady and attention focused, although he talked to a guy beside him wearing a *Scratch* t-shirt.

I tipped my Evian bottle, draining the last drops, and turned to the table for more when I felt him standing by me. I don't know how I knew it was him, but I knew it before I turned and found myself face-to-face with the snap on his jeans.

"Hi, Sabrina." Rob smiled and I melted. I didn't want to melt. It just happened. His clothes were different than his concert outfit, I noticed, and his hair was wet. Shower, I thought. Of course, they must shower after the show.

"Hey, Rob." I smiled and hoped I wasn't blushing. My cheeks felt hot. "Fantastic show!" I couldn't think of anything else to say, although I realized he must have heard that particular phrase hundreds of times from fans. So much for being determined to be unique and unusual and different.

"Thanks," he replied. "How's your head?"

"Oh, it's fine." I touched the spot where he'd hit me with the door. It was still tender. I'd never even made it to the bathroom to even look at it. It occurred to me then, I must look awful—a big cut on my head on top of being sweaty from dancing during the show.

"I'm really sorry about that," he apologized, sitting on the couch across from me.

"No harm, no foul." I winked. "Don't worry. I won't sue you or anything."

He raised his eyebrows. "Is that why you think I invited you? Because I was afraid of getting sued?"

I shrugged. "Big rock star, lots of money, a little accident—yeah, it crossed my mind you might be worried."

He nodded, frowning, but didn't respond. Instead, he reached over and grabbed a cranberry juice from the table, opening it and balancing the lid on his knee as he drank it all in one tip-up.

"Do you want something?" he asked when he finished, waving toward the collection of beverages. "It's all free."

"What a life." I smiled. "I'll take another water."

"Come on, live a little." He grabbed a beer, cracking it open before handing me the bottle.

I took a sip and winced. "I forgot how awful this stuff is."

"Not a drinker, huh?"

I made another face. "No, not really. Sweet things. Girlie drinks, you know, daiquiris and stuff like that, but I don't drink much."

He grinned. "So, I could get you drunk and take advantage of you?"

I smiled, feeling a slow heat flushing my cheeks. "I'm a cheap date that way."

He leaned back, arms behind his head, and studied me. "So tell me, what is there to do around this town?"

"Detroit?" I nearly spit out my mouthful of beer. "Besides seeing the homeless or getting mugged?"

He laughed. "That bad, huh? The bus doesn't leave until the day after tomorrow. Guess they should have planned our layover for Florida?"

"Well..." I took another sip of the beer, feeling guilty he'd opened it just for me. "Actually, there is something going on tonight at *The Attic* in Hamtramck, but I don't know if you'd be interested."

"Isn't that a blues bar?" Rob perked up. "Someone told me about it last time we came through, but I never had a chance to go. I love the blues."

"You do?" I knew very well he did. I wasn't a lazy Rob Burnett fan. I knew all his influences. "Jimmy Voss is playing a set there tonight."

Rob sat straight up, the cap from his cranberry juice tumbling from his knee and clattering to the floor. "You're kidding me! Raymond Voss' brother? The *Bad Dog Blueshounds*?"

"The same." I sipped my beer again. I was getting used to the taste.

Rob looked at his watch. "What time did they start?"

"Oh, I think around eight." I shrugged. "I wanted to go myself, but ya know, I had tickets to see *Scratch*."

Rob leaned forward, his knees touching mine. "Do you think they're still playing?"

"They play all night, until closing time," I told him, catching his enthusiasm. I really had wanted to go, and if *Scratch* weren't in town, that's probably where I'd have been tonight. "Uncle Jessie Winters plays there every Saturday night."

"You're kidding me!" Rob's jaw dropped. "Can you get me there?"

I glanced at Katie, still standing in the corner, talking to Tyler. He laughed, leaning in to say something into her ear. "I have a car." I tried not to think about the possibilities as a hot excitement filled my belly. "If that's what you mean."

He glanced over his shoulder. "Well, I'd hate to drag along my bodyguard for the limo ride. It would be nice to be just an anonymous, regular guy for the night."

"I think we'll be safe." I laughed. "That security guard, Gary, didn't have a clue! He wasn't even going to let you into the venue!"

"Do I have a forgettable face?" He gave me a sad pout and I paid no attention to the way it made my breath catch.

I bit my lip. "Hardly. Let me check things out with Katie?"

"Sure." He leaned back again, putting his feet on the ottoman as I stood.

When I explained things to Katie, she jumped at the sudden opportunity, turning to Tyler. "Do you think you could get me home?"

I stared, marveling at her manipulation, trying to hide my smile of surprise.

"Yeah, sure." Tyler slid an arm around her shoulders. "Not a problem."

When I returned to the couch, a girl sat close next to Rob, asking him for an autograph. Signing her ticket, he glanced at me. "All set?"

I nodded, watching the blonde out of the corner of my eye. She gave me a dirty look and I ignored that, too.

"Great!" He stood, handing the ticket to the blonde and edging away from the heel snaking up his pant leg.

"How are we going to work this?" I turned my back to the blonde as Rob took me elbow and guided me away from the couch. "I mean, we'll get mobbed if we walk out that door, right?"

"Oh, definitely." He slid his hand down to mine and pulled me with him. His fingers were warm, and I felt thick calluses on them, presumably from playing guitar. "That's why I'm going incognito."

He put on a baseball cap and a soft brown leather jacket. Then he threw on a pair of sunglasses and turned to look at me, holding his arms out as if to say, "Ta da!"

I laughed. "Take of the glasses. You have enough problems seeing where you're going in the dark without them."

"Hey, I said I was sorry about that." He smirked and tossed the glasses onto a table. "Okay, here's what we do. Jim over there will take you to your car and show you where to pick me up. Then he'll come in and get me. Sound like a plan?"

I saw Jim sitting in one of the recliners, his feet up, drinking a Coke and eating a handful of peanuts. "He's...what, your bodyguard?"

Rob grinned. "Yep. Personal protection agent. That's the p.c. term."

I tilted my head, trying to tell if he was kidding or being serious, or maybe a little of both. "Okay, well let's get your P.P.A. and go."

Rob made quick introductions. Jim stood so fast he spilled his peanuts all over the floor. The walk to my car seemed to take forever, and we didn't talk much. I wanted to ask him if he knew if Rob went out with many fans after his shows, but I couldn't get up the nerve. Jim filled my little passenger seat and directed me to one of the back doors of the venue, very near the stairs I'd climbed with Katie just hours before.

Jim left me alone there. I took the opportunity to check my hair and make-up in the rear view mirror. It wasn't as bad as I'd feared. I smoothed my straight, dark hair, curling the ends under my chin with my fingers. I glanced at the "no parking" sign my little Kia idled underneath, hoping a cop didn't come by. Jim returned with Rob and I unlocked the door to let him in. The sunglasses were on his face again and I saw a bunch of girls flying down the flight of stairs, pointing at the car.

"Okay, let's roll." His voice was breathless and I put the car into gear, pulling away from the curb. "Once we're away from the arena, we'll be good."

I looked at him while we stopped at a red light. "Don't you think the sunglasses make you look even more conspicuous?"

"Yeah." He tossed them onto the dashboard along with the hat. "Jim insisted. He doesn't approve of this little trip."

"He could have tagged along." I looked around for signs to the expressway. I hated trying to navigate in the dark, but I didn't want to appear lost.

"I didn't want him to." Rob's hand slid over my knee, giving me a brief squeeze. In my surprise, my foot hit the gas pedal harder than I expected when we took off. Thank God the light had turned green!

Rob flipped through my CDs as I drove. *The Attic* was only fifteen minutes away, not far at all. My sense of direction was awful, though—hence Katie's Mapquest directions to the venue—and with Rob sitting next to me, I felt even more spacey than usual.

"Hey, look!" Rob pulled *Scratch's* "Open Season" out from my collection.
"Oh, and what's this? Rick Springfield?"

I flushed. "So?"

"Here! Janis Joplin!" He popped it into the CD player. "This'll get us in the mood for some blues."

Janis started to wail "Try, try, try just a little bit harder," and Rob sang along. I glanced over, feeling my chest constrict. Part of me was acting all casual, a thirty-something year old woman making small talk and dodging my little car through traffic. Another part of me was twelve years old, standing in complete awe, watching myself sitting next to Rob Burnett, lead singer of *Scratch*, while he sang along to Janis Joplin and occasionally drummed out a beat on the dashboard of my Kia.

When I began to sing along with Rob, he raised his eyebrows in my direction. "Hey, you can sing!" I winked, still singing, and he joined in again. The last verse came on just as I was pulling into *The Attic* parking lot and we sang it together. I waited to cut the engine, deciding to show off a little at the last minute and leaning in to harmonize with him at the end.

"Nice!" His compliment made me flush, and we grinned at each other in the dark heat of the car. Our smiles faded, almost in harmony, as his eyes locked with mine. I hadn't realized how close we were, just inches away, really. I felt his breath on my face. He smelled like cranberry juice, and I knew I probably still smelled like beer. I tasted it as I swallowed, seeing his eyes flicker to my mouth.

"Hey, Sabrina." The sound was just breath really.

"Hey, Rob." My own voice was a whisper as I tilted my face up, my eyes searching his.

I watched his eyes and saw the decision flash through him in an instant as he leaned in and captured my mouth, his lips pressing mine, soft and light, an easy, casual thing. I made a small sound in my throat, my hand squeezing his arm, his shoulder. The kiss deepened and I opened my mouth to him, his hand slipping behind my head, pulling me closer.

He broke the kiss first but I kept my eyes closed, breathless, my whole body vibrating with sensation. His eyes were open when I looked at him. I couldn't read his expression. It was like he was searching for something. I wished I knew what.

"Ready?" His voice came back, clear and strong and I nodded.

I looked at my watch as we got to the door of *The Attic*. It was already eleven. I hoped my assumption—that they played all night—was accurate. If it wasn't, I was going to have one disappointed rock star on my hands. The music vibrated the soles of my boots as we stood at the door paying the cover charge. Rob paid mine, in spite of my objection.

The place—dim, smoky and rocking hard—had dark paneled walls. They reflected little light, but the strange, painted tin of the ceiling attempted to make up for it. On a night like tonight, with wall to wall people, I thought this was what sardines must feel like. Rob grabbed onto my hand, pulling me through the crowd, moving steadily towards the music.

It was loud enough already so he had to lean in and yell, "Do you want something?" He pointed toward the bar in front of us. I shook my head, waving him to the right, toward the music. I glimpsed the stage. It was through a door at the end of the bar and writhing bodies blocked the entrance.

I drew closer to Rob as we squeezed into the crowded room. People were seated at candlelit tables and many stood along the walls or between the tables, dancing and cheering. Jimmy, still on stage, played a smooth Texas blues like only one of the Voss brothers could.

Rob stopped, staring at the stage, his eyes glazed and his mouth caught in a half-smile. It occurred to me that his expression would have mirrored my own at the very moment Rob himself had stepped on stage that night.

"Hey! Rob Burnett?" A waitress, carrying a tray of empty glasses, stopped to tilt her tawny head at him.

He didn't look away from the stage. "Yeah."

"Wow! Awesome!" She smiled, trying to catch his eye. When he glanced at her, flashing her a quick grin, she rewarded him. "Hey, why don't you sit up front with Uncle Jessie?"

I did a double take. Here I'd been thinking we'd have to find a place to stand against the wall! The blonde smiled at me, but now her expression appeared different. I felt like she would have ripped my hand from his given the chance.

"That'd be great!" Rob grinned, his eyes widening when he looked at me. He looked exactly like Katie had earlier tonight when Rob informed us we were getting all-access passes and I fought the urge to laugh out loud.

The waitress led us through the crowd to a table right in front of the stage. The vibration of the music rolled through me, up my feet and legs, right into my pelvis, a rocking pulse. I pursed my lips against a smile while the waitress made introductions.

"Uncle Jessie, this is Rob Burnett—from *Scratch!*!" The blonde beamed, leaning in to yell the words. I couldn't tell if the volume was because the music was so loud or because Uncle Jessie was going deaf. An old man, his gray hair and mustache a subtle contrast to his dark skin, lifted a wrinkled hand at Rob and smiled, his eyes bright.

"You're Uncle Jessie Winters!" Rob exclaimed, shaking the man's hand so hard I worried about the old guy for a second. Rob slid into the chair next to him, still grasping his hand. "I can't believe it! You're Uncle Jessie Winters!"

I stood there, forgotten, grinning and hugging myself. Voss finished a song and the crowd cheered, whooping and hollering for more the way you can only do in a blues club. The waitress tried to get Rob's attention, asking if he wanted anything, but someone behind her called for a drink and she was forced to move away from our table.

I slid into a chair next to Rob, smiling at the dark-skinned woman on my right. She smiled, but her attention was focused on the stage. Rob and Uncle Jessie were able to talk more freely now that the music lulled. Voss tuned his

guitar and he took a shot of what looked like whiskey from one of five full shot glasses sitting on a stool on stage.

"Yeah, I loved his stuff!" Rob clapped the old man on the shoulder. He must have felt me move in next to him, my thigh brushing his, because he turned to me, still grinning. "Sabrina! This is Uncle Jessie Winters! This is the guy who single-handedly kept blues alive around here in the 70's!"

I laughed. "I live here, Rob. I know all about the jam sessions in the house on 29th Street."

"Oh, right." His face fell for a moment, and I squeezed his arm and winked.

I reached over him to shake Uncle Jessie's hand. "I've seen you play. You're amazing! It's nice to meet you. I'm Sabrina."

Uncle Jessie smiled and gave me a nod as Voss started another song. His guitar skills were legendary and his music was just Uncle Jessie's style, right out of Memphis in the 60's. A lot of acts they'd had in here lately appealed to a younger crowd, less delta blues and more blues-rock and blues-funk. From the corner of my eye, I saw Uncle Jessie nodding and tapping his foot to the beat. Rob leaned back and watched Voss in amazement, his eyes on the guitar strings as if he were watching magic.

Jimmy rolled with one of his tribute songs to his brother, Raymond. I liked rock concerts, but for me, blues clubs were so much more intimate and intense, the audience calling out in response to the music as it moved them. This was one of my favorites, and I whooped along. For me, the words were irrelevant—it didn't

matter what they were singing, it was the rough sound of the voice, the sweet licks of the guitar, as if my body were being played along every riff. Blues music made me want to take my clothes off.

I shrugged my coat onto the chair and strung my purse over it, the song moving me in my seat. There was just no sitting still for music like this. It radiated a rhythmic kind of heat, and Jimmy's guitar was like dark lightning in a summer sky. I danced in my chair, my eyes closed, arms raised above my head, letting the music move down the front of my body and seep into my hips, like thick honey. I felt Rob's hand on my thigh and just smiled in response, not opening my eyes.

When the song ended, I leaned back with a sigh, looking at Voss on the stage. He downed another shot, raising the glass as he turned to the mic, like he was making a toast. "Well, folks, are you having a good time?"

The room stomped and howled in response, Rob and I included. Our eyes met and we both grinned.

"More!" Rob's voice surprised me and I jumped at the sound. He was flushed, his eyes bright, as he squeezed my leg—my thigh this time.

"I got a song or two left in me tonight, I think." Jimmy set the empty glass behind him on the stool. "Anything you want to hear, pretty lady?"

Rob's hand on my thigh was distracting and it took me a moment to realize that Voss was looking at us. I glanced up, surprised. He couldn't mean me? But Jimmy looked right at me and winked. I put my hands to my cheeks, feeling them burn.

"Lost In You?" I called out, even though I was sitting only six feet from him.

Voss smiled, nodding, and turned to cue the band. "You gotta give a pretty lady what she wants." The room agreed in unison, whooping and jeering.

Rob slipped his arm over my shoulder, pulling my chair closer to his. "You seem to have a way with musicians," he murmured against my ear.

I shivered as his breath moved the hair on the back of my neck. "Do I?"

His eyes fell to my mouth again and I knew he was going to kiss me. His lips met mine just as Voss began making his guitar sing—a long, slow wail. I slid my arm over Rob's shoulder and across the back of his t-shirt, kneading the muscles there with my fingers. His tongue found mine and I moaned. Voss' voice was like liquid smoke and between the music and Rob's mouth on mine, I was completely carried away.

When I broke the kiss, Rob's eyes met mine in the dimness. "Dance with me?"

"Now?" He looked around in surprise. There were a few people dancing alone or with a partner, but not many. There was no real dance floor.

I nodded, standing and starting to dance by myself, glowing in the heat of Voss' guitar. I stretched my hand out to Rob, enticing him. He watched me, his gaze roaming over my body as I undulated in response to the pulse of the music, before he stood and pulled me to him. I felt his denim-clad thigh between mine as we swayed, his hand against the small of my back, pressing me hard against his chest.

The throb and swell of the music moved us against one another, a delicious chafing. Jimmy's voice and the slide of his guitar urged me to melt into Rob's body, the flush between us turning to fire. Under the pressure of his hands, the surge and ripple of him, the room disappeared. Our bodies clung together with the sweltering flow of the music all around us.

Rob pulled me close, his mouth against my ear as he sang the words, "Need you more every day, hooked on you, don't want nobody else..."

The realization hit me—I was dancing ten feet from Jimmy Voss while Rob Burnett held me and sang the same song into my ear. The motion felt natural, easy, but the thought made my knees weak. I clutched him and he moved to kiss me again as we danced, his tongue playing over mine, his mouth sweet, dark heat.

When the song ended, I didn't want to let him go. I kept my arms around him, my head against his chest, my eyes closed, breathing in his scent.

"Well, folks, I've been up here going on two hours now, I think it's time to give Uncle Jessie his stage back, whaddya say?"

Clever, I thought, looking at Voss. There were no arguments from the crowd with that segue. Everyone cheered and stomped for Uncle Jessie as he stood, slightly hunched, and lifted one hand in acknowledgment to the crowd. He made his way onto the stage as Voss made his way off.

Rob squeezed me hard, kissing my forehead, a chaste thing in comparison to the past few moments. "This is so awesome. Thank you, Sabrina."

I pressed my hip against him as I turned, pulling out my chair. "My pleasure."

Uncle Jessie sat at the piano and started banging out a boogie beat. He looked small and ancient sitting with a homemade harmonica holder around his neck, but the man could play like nobody's business!

Rob caught the waitress and ordered us two beers. I just tapped my foot to the music, enjoying the feel of his arm and thigh against mine as we listened to the music. When the waitress put our drinks on the table, Rob paid her. She leaned down to whisper something into his ear.

Rob's mouth smiled, but his eyes didn't. "No, but thanks."

I raised my eyebrows but didn't say anything, twisting the cap off my beer and taking a swig as I watched the waitress swish away.

"To accidents." Rob tipped his beer toward me and clinked the bottleneck against mine.

I laughed. "Interesting toast."

"Should I say, happy accidents?" He smiled around the rim of his bottle as he started to drink.

"Hey, mind if I join you?" We both looked up to see Jimmy Voss standing behind us and pointing to the chair Uncle Jessie had vacated.

"Sure!" Rob jumped up, pulling the chair out. "Please, sit!"

I hid a smile behind my beer bottle. "Hi, Jimmy, great set."

Voss gave me a nod, his dark eyes flickering to where my flesh was exposed between black fishnet thigh-highs and mini-skirt. I was strangely

dressed for a blues bar. Rob took his seat again, his eyes on Voss. His mouth worked, but nothing came out.

"I'm Sabrina." I jerked my head toward Rob. "This is Rob Burnett. He's the lead singer of *Scratch*. And of course, we know who you are."

"He doesn't know who *Scratch* is!" Rob nudged me hard under the table, reminding so much of Katie I had to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing.

"Sure I do." Voss took out a cigarette and lit it. He ran a hand over his hair, a deep, slicked back black. "Couldn't turn on my damned radio without hearing '*Can't Break a Broken Heart*' every half hour or so for about a month."

I laughed. "You listen to popular radio?"

"What, you think I only listen to blues?" He blew smoke from the side of his lopsided smile. "Gotta check out the competition. '*Bad Dog Blues*' played on a ton of popular stations once upon a time. You were probably still in diapers then, honey."

I stuck my tongue out. "I was in high school, thank you very much. I'm not as young as I look."

Voss signaled the waitress before winking at me. "Music to my ears."

I flushed and pretended to be interested in a bad painting of Sonny Boy Williams on the wall over Voss' head.

"So, you can sing, pretty boy, but can you play?" Voss turned his eyes to Rob.

"I'm a crappy guitar player." Rob fingered the napkin under his beer and flushed. "I play just enough to write songs. But I really admire what you do."

Voss nodded. "Thanks." He turned to pay the waitress for the beer and two shots she set on the table. He drank the shots fast, hissing after each one, and then twisted the cap off the beer.

"So, I'm curious." Rob watched him down half the beer. "I've heard you've gone to open tuning—with a capo?"

Voss set his beer down and raised an eyebrow at me. "And the boy said he couldn't play!"

"I know a lot," Rob replied, looking sheepish. "I just don't practice enough."

"Nah." Voss nodded toward the stage. "I tune her just like everybody else, son. But I've found the capo does some good work on the right fret."

I looked at them both like they were speaking alien and then took a sip of my beer, turning to watch Uncle Jessie. People whistled and hollered for more so he started banging on the piano again. He looked like he was having a great time.

"Cool!" Rob's voice brought my attention back to the table. "That's like playing every song in 'E'! No wonder your sliding licks work the way they do!"

Voss nodded, signaling the waitress again. "Trade secrets, musicians only." Then he glanced at me and smiled that lopsided smile, amending himself. "Musicians and pretty ladies."

Rob and Voss started talking guitars and slides and licks and I tuned them out again. I liked watching, Rob's eyes shining as he talked music with one of his

idols, Voss smiling and looking at him like any elder would some young buck—tolerant, patient and a little amused. Voss finished off four more shots, following those with two more beers as they talked. I was still nursing my first, but Rob was on his third.

"So, pretty lady, do you sing?" Voss flicked open his lighter and lit another cigarette. It just added to the image of the raspy-voiced blues artist.

"No." I blushed. "Only in the shower."

Voss leaned back in his chair, tipping the legs up. "Now that I'd like to see."

Rob, who had forgotten about me while they were lost in conversation, turned to put his arm over my shoulder. "Don't let her fool you. She's amazing."

I gaped at him, pinching his leg under the table. "No, I'm not!"

"So, pop star, wanna come up and sing something with me?" Voss offered. He was still looking at me.

Rob's jaw dropped. "Me? Really?"

"Sure." Voss stabbed his just-lit cigarette out. "I'm due up there in half an hour. I'll call you and the pretty lady up for a song."

My heart beat in my throat so hard I couldn't even talk.

"Hell, yeah!" Rob accepted. "We'd love to!"

Voss got up, downing the rest of his beer and tossing some money on the table. "See you in a few." He gave me another wink before wandering toward the bar.

"I can't believe you!" I hissed. "There is no way I'm going to get up there!"

"Oh, come on, don't be a killjoy." Rob poked my ribs. "I'll sing—you just stand there and be the pretty lady."

I gave him a sour look, my lips pursed, my eyes narrowed. "Very funny, Mr. Burnett."

"How about another beer? Or a shot?" Rob signaled to the waitress. "That will loosen you up!"

I frowned. "I'm a lightweight and you know it."

"Yep." He ordered two shots. When she set them down, the blonde leaned down and whispered something into Rob's ear again.

"Sure, where?" he asked. I watched as she lifted her shirt free from her skirt, exposing her smooth belly, a little hoop in her navel. She handed him a Sharpie, and I watched, my arms folded across my chest, as she turned around and pulled her skirt down her hip, revealing a small tattoo of "Hello Kitty."

"Right over the pussy." She lifted her shirt out of the way, revealing a smooth expanse of skin. Rob signed his name there, right over "Hello Kitty's" head. The girl turned and kissed him. She aimed for his mouth but he turned his head and she got more cheek than she wanted.

I grabbed for the shot she set in front of me, frowning at the dark amber-colored liquid. I downed it, choking and coughing as it burned its way through my chest, my eyes watering. I smacked the table a few times, as if the motion would move the fire through me a little faster.

Rob lifted the colorless shot at me. "This one was yours. Peach schnapps. You just drank the whiskey."

I grabbed it from him, swallowing. It burned less this time, the taste a little sweeter. I closed my eyes and tilted my head back, feeling my eyes watering again, tears slipping down my temples. I opened my eyes, looking for my beer.

Rob half-grinned, staring at me open-mouthed. "Well, that should loosen you up!"

He wasn't kidding. I didn't drink often, and when I did, it was more along the lines of wine coolers and mixed drinks. I'd never done a shot in my life. I felt fuzzy almost immediately. It brought a dull buzzing sensation, like a livewire loose in my head. *It'll fade*, I reasoned with myself. *Just a matter of time, right?*

"So, what do you wanna sing?" Rob pulled my chair toward him so he could talk into my ear. On stage, Uncle Jessie continued banging on the piano and playing his harp. The notes seemed less sharp, softer around the edges, since the two shots.

"Janis," I said immediately. There was only one song I thought I could sing well. "The one we sang in the car...do you think the band knows it?"

"Probably." Rob's hand moved to my shoulder, his thumb caressing the skin of my neck. I leaned into him with a small sigh. He whispered into my ear, "I am so glad we came here."

I met his eyes and even in my sudden alcohol fog, I saw the dazzled look there. The star was star struck. "Me, too." I stood and the room tilted. I put my hand on Rob's shoulder to steady myself as things righted themselves. "Be right back!"

I grabbed my purse and threaded my way through tables and into the ladies room. While I was in the stall, I heard the blonde waitress come into the bathroom, giggling with another girl and talking about never washing her ass again. I waited until they left before I ventured out to wash my hands.

I stood at the mirror, wishing now I hadn't dressed this way. The fishnets and boots seemed too slutty, the black mini-skirt too short, the black button-down blouse tucked into it much too tight and low-cut. Katie had approved it before we left but, of course, she approved it for a rock star fan, not for standing on stage singing with a rock star. That hadn't exactly been in the plan.

I smoothed my hair again, urging it to curl under at the ends. I touched up my make-up, my hands trembling. For the first time since we'd left the arena, I wondered what Katie and Tyler were doing, and I wondered, too, for the first time, what I was doing. Yes, I was star struck over Rob Burnett, and yes, I found myself very attracted to him, and yes, I had no doubt I would end up at his hotel tonight if that's what I wanted. At least, I was pretty sure...

So what was I going to do, give up this opportunity? I decided I looked too pale and pinched my cheeks to add a little more color. Should I just drive him to his hotel and call it a night? I knew I wasn't much more to him than the blonde whose ass he had autographed with a marker. I just happened, by chance and circumstance, to be one tiny step above that.

Still, a voice in my head kept telling me this was all going too fast, I shouldn't be doing this, Sabrina Taylor wasn't this kind of girl, and on top of all that, the voice kept insistently repeating, *he's married, you know*. Slinging my

purse over my shoulder, I headed for the door, wondering if one more shot might shut that voice up for good.

When I returned to the table, Voss was on stage, Uncle Jessie with him this time, along with the band. I considered begging off, even telling Rob I was going to leave and ask him to call a cab. But when he smiled and offered me a chair, that thought immediately left my head. I knew I was going to get on stage with Rob Burnett and Jimmy Voss and sing something, in spite of the butterflies in my stomach.

Thank God for liquid courage. I had the waitress bring me another beer. Rob raised an eyebrow and winked as I drank half of it in a few gulps and then wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. When Jimmy ended the song, he looked right at us. Right at *me*. And he grinned. I turned to Rob, about to say something, but I couldn't seem to form any words.

"Got a little treat for you, folks!" Voss nodded toward Rob. "We got a regular ole rock star in the audience tonight! Everybody—Rob Burnett from *Scratch!*" The blonde waitress squealed and a few others whistled and applauded, encouraging the crowd to acknowledge him. Rob looked embarrassed as he half-rose and sort of waved.

"Bring the pretty lady on up here." Jimmy winked at me. "Let's do a little Janis tonight."

Rob grabbed my arm as he stood. I couldn't do anything but follow. He steadied me as we climbed the steps to the stage, and I was glad, because I was shaky. Jimmy leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Don't be nervous,

darlin'...just imagine all those folks in their underwear...I know that's how I'm imaginin' you..."

I flushed but managed to smile at him, still feeling weak-kneed. I hadn't even looked out toward the audience yet. Just the thought of all those people staring at us made me dizzy. Voss cued the band and they started to play. I recognized the music right away. I'd sung karaoke to this a million times. *Just like karaoke, no big deal.* I didn't believe it for a minute.

"You okay?" Rob whispered, leading me toward a mic. I nodded, not trusting my voice. I hoped I was going to have one when I was supposed to sing. The song had no intro to speak of—it wasn't a guitar song, it was a vocal song. It didn't show Jimmy's skill at all, and I knew he was playing it because it was what I said I could sing.

The question is...can I?

When Rob started to sing, I cleared my throat and leaned in with him, but my voice shook. I'd made the mistake of looking out into the audience. I didn't want to know how many people were out there, but it felt like a million.

Rob grabbed my chin and turned my face to him, singing and looking into my eyes. God, his eyes were so blue! Rob nodded, encouraging me. I felt pulled into the moment, just like I had in the car, leaning in to share the mic with him. I forgot everything but the song and his eyes, feeling something pass between us as our voices melded, something warm flowing through me, the sound of us together moving in waves.

We made it through the second verse, and I felt something loosening in my chest. I let my voice open a bit, going with the surge and swell of the music. We got to the part of the song Janis started really letting go on, and I wondered how this was going to work. I glanced behind me at Uncle Jessie pounding on the piano and smiled.

Then I closed my eyes and sailed through the whole part before I realized Rob was letting me sing it by myself. When I opened my eyes, he smiled at me, but he'd backed off from the microphone.

My eyes must have shown my panic, because he took my hand and popped the mic off the stand, handing it to me. I shook my head, and someone up front in the audience yelled, "Yeah, let her sing it!"

"Bring it home, little darlin'." Voss grinned.

I frowned but closed my eyes and sang my heart out. I was doing it—I was singing—in front of a live audience, with Uncle Jessie playing on piano behind me, Jimmy Voss on guitar, and Rob Burnett standing aside and watching me with something akin to awe in his eyes.

I wondered when someone was going to pinch me and wake me up. I closed my eyes again and sang. I just let the music move me. I felt it pounding through my body, the vibration of it on the stage itself tenfold compared to standing down there on the floor. When the song finished, I wasn't prepared for the applause. It shocked me and I flushed, fumbling to put the microphone into the stand. Rob helped me, then took my hand and had me bow with him.

Voss came and whispered in my ear, "Let's do another one, pretty lady."

I shook my head, waving him off, although part of me wanted to. Part of me wanted to stay there on stage all night. *You could get addicted that kind of high*, I thought.

"Let's thank them, folks," Voss said into the mic as Rob and I walked down the steps and off the stage. "Rob Burnett and Miss Sabrina." The crowd whooped and cheered. I knew my face must be red because it felt like it was on fire.

"They liked you." Rob's breath tickled my ear.

"It's probably just the fishnets," I joked, tugging at my thigh highs.

"I know I like them." He grinned and ran his hand over my leg. His touch was like white lightning and I closed my eyes for a moment. My heart pounded in my chest and I felt weightless. I didn't know if it was the alcohol, or my brief stint as a singer, or the closeness of Rob's body to mine—maybe a combination of all three.

Voss went into another song while people came to us, saying things, but half the time I couldn't hear them, or really remember what they said. I think the shots and the beer were catching up to me. I felt high, and I probably was—an altogether unfamiliar feeling.

"Sabrina, let's go." Rob slipped his hand around my shoulder.

I looked at him, surprised. "Don't you want to hang around after the show? Talk to Jimmy or Uncle Jessie for a while?"

"No." He shook his head, glancing at the stage before turning his eyes to mine. "Let's get outta here."

I stood and the world tilted again, forcing me to grab at the table to keep myself from toppling over. Rob held my arm as I plucked my jacket and purse from the chair and we made our way through the crowd toward the door.

"It's freezing," I murmured as we walked together in the cold. I realized I was still holding my jacket over my arm but Rob put his arm around my shoulder and pulled me close, a familiar gesture that made me immediately warm, at least on the inside.

Shivering, I fumbled through my jacket pockets, looking for my keys. I'd made two attempts to get the key to connect with the door lock when Rob took me by the shoulders and steered me around to the passenger side.

"What are you doing?" I asked as he unlocked my door.

Rob pressed me into the car with his hip. "I think you've had a little too much to drink."

He got into the driver's side as I pulled my jacket over me, cold but not thinking clearly enough to actually put it on. He started the car, turning the radio down. Janis was still singing. I'd never hear her sing again without remembering, I realized, and it made me smile.

"How come you didn't want to stay?" I asked.

He put the car in reverse. "I didn't like the way he looked at you."

"Who?"

Rob pulled from the parking lot onto the road, heading toward the expressway. "Voss."

I blinked at him in the dimness, the streetlights flashing by giving me a strange, broken view of his expression. He looked somewhere between angry and embarrassed.

"Do you know where you're going?"

"Nope." He glanced in the rear view mirror and changed lanes. "Where do you live?"

I swallowed. "Don't you want to go to the hotel?"

He shook his head. "I should get you home. I'll call a cab to take me back."

I nodded, feeling tears sting my eyes. I didn't know what I expected. My chest felt tight and I turned my face toward the window.

"Take the expressway. North." I leaned my forehead against the glass. We drove in silence and I edged down in the seat, looking out the window at the embankment wall passing by.

"Sabrina?" His voice was soft.

I didn't look at him. "Hmm?"

"Are you and Katie roommates?"

I turned to face him, but his eyes were on the road. "No. I've got a little house in Ferndale. Katie lives twenty miles from me. Which is why we were late, tonight, actually..." My voice trailed off as I remembered climbing all those steps, pounding on the door.

I saw the flash of his smile. "Good."

"Can I ask you something?"

He nodded. "Sure."

I wanted to ask him what he was doing, what we were doing, what I was doing, where it was all going to go, but I didn't know how.

Instead, I asked, "Where's your wife?"

His eyes flashed over me for a moment and he made a noise in his throat, something between a snort and a laugh. "That's a damned good question."

I didn't reply and just looked out the window.

He cleared his throat. "She left me just before the tour started."

I stared at him, my mouth dry. "Oh." It was all I could think to say.

"Life on the road sucks." He sighed, adding, "Life sucks."

I nodded, pointing toward an exit sign. "Here."

He took the exit. "Tonight's the first time I've felt good about something—someone—in a long time."

I pointed right. "Turn here."

He did, taking the opportunity to look at me. "I feel like I'm walking around empty all the time."

I reached over and touched his arm, my eyes soft. "I'm sorry."

He shrugged. "Where am I going?"

"I don't know." I shrugged.

He laughed. "No, I mean, where's your house?"

I blushed. "Oh. Up here on the left. Just past the stop sign. The yellow one."

He pulled into my driveway, cutting the engine. It clicked in the silence. "I'll walk you to your door."

We got out and I shrugged my jacket on before locking the passenger door. Rob moved to my elbow, helping me up the stairs. I still felt dizzy, but it was starting to fade.

"Thanks." I held a hand out for my keys.

"No." He twisted my key ring around his finger. "Let's not do that."

"What?" I looked at him. The air filling my lungs was cold compared to the heat in my chest. I knew it was the alcohol making me feel so warm—either that or the toe of Rob's boot touching mine.

He pressed my keys into my hand. "Pretend. Play games."

"Okay." I looked for my house key, trying to distract myself. "Then let's stop."

He moved in, his hands sliding under my jacket and behind my back. I lifted my face to his, aching for him to kiss me, and he did, pressing me against the screen door and sliding his thigh between mine. I couldn't breathe and didn't want to, his tongue licking at my lips, begging for entrance. I slipped my free hand around to the back of his neck, slanting my head and pulling him in. I didn't know how long we kissed, but I had to break the connection, afraid of being lost. I pressed my forehead to his and gulped, my eyes still closed.

"That was better," he whispered. "Let's try it again." His full weight pressed against me as he captured my mouth once more, his hands roaming over my back. I whimpered, my keys slipping from my hand and plunking onto the cement porch as I hung onto him, my arms around his neck, letting him explore my mouth with his tongue. The dull ache of excitement and anticipation which had

thudded along with the music between my legs all night long came rushing in and I squeezed my thighs around his, my skirt riding up.

"Yeah," he murmured against my mouth. "Now this feels real."

"Does it?" I looked at him, his eyes just dark, shining orbs in the dimness, my heart pounding in my chest, my breath coming fast. "How about this?" It was the alcohol making me brave, I knew. I reached behind me, grabbing his hand that was pressed flat against my back and pulled it between my thighs. My panties were soaked with the wildness of the night and the moment.

He smiled, his fingers rubbing me there. "Mmm, now that's beyond real." He pulled my panties aside, making a small noise when he felt my smooth, wet pussy lips. His mouth found mine again in the darkness as he pressed his fingers into me. I moaned, grinding my hips against him and sucking at his tongue. I lifted my leg, hooking it around his, pulling him toward me hard and rocking.

He groaned against my mouth and I leaned my head back as his lips moved over my jaw, his tongue making delicious circles down my throat. His fingers found an easy in and out motion, his thumb making exquisite circles against my clit, a heightening rhythm that had me spreading my legs wider and gasping at the stars.

"Deeper!" I squeezed his fingers, trying to draw him in. Together we sent white streams of breath between us wafting out and disappearing into the cold night air. I glimpsed the headlights of a car passing by on my quiet little suburban street as Rob slid his fingers as far into me as he could, his thumb still working round and round my clit.

"Rob..." I felt a tight, swirling ache in my belly, something coiling and waiting to spring. "Don't stop."

"No," he panted, moving faster instead, the wet squelch between my legs the only sound now besides the buzz of the streetlights and the rasping of our breath. "I won't stop. I promise."

And he didn't, his hand working between my legs as I writhed and ground my pelvis against him, arching my back, my whole body a tightening spiral of need. I closed my eyes and pressed my forehead against his neck as he shoved me against the door, his hand buried between my legs.

"Close. So close..." I didn't know if I was telling him or me, feeling the rising hum of my orgasm approaching. He pressed his fingers deep, just his thumb moving now against my clit, focusing the sensation and bringing me into it. I moaned and rocked, biting and sucking at his neck as I came, gushing around his hand in pulsing waves.

"Ahhh, God! Yes!" He held me close with one arm as I started to sink. My knees weakened and the world tipped upside down. He lifted his other hand, still wet with me, to his mouth, sucking his fingers. I flushed, watching him, very aware now we were standing on my porch, resting against the front door.

"My keys..." I made an effort to reach for them but found myself trapped. Rob stooped to get them and handed them to me. I found my house key, pulling my skirt down and turning toward the door, my head still swimming. My hands were trembling and I couldn't seem to get the key to go into the lock. I looked at him, smiling an apology.

"Here." He took the key, sliding it in and turning it. I pushed the door open, switching on the light. It hadn't occurred to me the place was a mess. I turned to say something, but he filled the doorway, his eyes only on me. Shutting the door behind him, he lifted my chin and kissed me. I could smell myself, taste my juices on his lips.

"Bedroom," was all he said, kissing me backward. I nodded, dropping my purse and keys, slipping my jacket down and tossing it on the couch as I passed. He shrugged his jacket off and threw it over mine, following.

There were clothes all over my bed, remnants of a night spent changing, trying to find the perfect concert-going outfit, the one that would attract Rob's attention the most. I smiled at the pile of skirts and blouses, belts and shoes.

I leaned in and swept them all to the floor. Turning on the bed, I looked at him. He slid off his boots and unbuttoned his shirt, looking at me sprawled on the bed. '

"Here." I pressed my boot to the middle of his chest. He caught it in his hand. "Unzip me?"

The boots were knee-length, the zippers long. His eyes followed both zippers down, first one, then the other, tossing the boots to join his on the floor. I admired my legs in fishnets, stretching them out and resting them on his shoulders. I knew he could see straight up my skirt, my panties askew, the material pressing between my pussy lips.

"You know you're sexy as hell." He grinned. I smiled. "At least, after a few drinks, you sure know it."

I nudged his shoulder with my toe, making a face. "Quit teasing."

"Look who's talking." He spread my legs with his hands, his eyes lingering between them. "I've wanted to see up that skirt all night."

"This skirt?" I wiggled my hips, tugging it upward.

"Yeah," he breathed, his hand moving over the top edge of the elastic on my black bikini panties. He pressed his hand to my belly, stroking the sensitive flesh just below my navel. I shivered and started unbuttoning my blouse.

I didn't remember the buttons being so small and difficult when I put it on. Rob helped me, kneeling between my thighs as he worked the buttons from the bottom up, our hands meeting in the middle. He spread my shirt open, his eyes moving over the black lace of my bra, my nipples hardening, pressing against the silky material.

"You're like a painting." He traced one finger between my cleavage, over my belly, dipping into my navel. "I could write a song about you."

"That would be flattering." I felt dreamy, seeing everything in soft-focus.

"What would you call it?"

"Siren Song." His hand moved to undo my belt and slip my skirt over my hips and thighs. He tossed it on the floor, spreading my legs again with his hands and kneeling between them.

"I'm not sure that's a compliment." I caught his hand in mine, bringing it to my mouth and kissing his fingertips, one by one.

"It is," he assured me. "You're quite irresistible." He moved off me. "Roll over."

I obliged, letting him pull my shirt off. He unhooked my bra, his hands kneading warmth into the flesh of my back. I slipped off the straps, flinging it over the side of the bed.

"Up." He lifted my hips, pulling me to my knees. I let him lead me, lost in the soft kisses raining over my back and bottom. His hands roamed over my legs in the fishnets and when he pulled my panties down my thighs, I moaned, feeling completely exposed to him, now.

His breath was hot over my ass as he began to feather kisses there, moving closer and closer to my center. Wiggling towards him, I arched my back, his tongue beginning to probe between my pussy lips.

"Yes!" I spread myself open, showing him. He rewarded my effort, slipping his tongue deeper into my folds. His nose pressed into the soft flesh of my perineum, his breath like velvet heat. His tongue took the same circular path his fingers had traveled over my clit when we were outside, this time an easier, softer touch.

He tugged my panties further down, trying to work them off me. I stretched out, loathe to move away from his tongue, so he could slip them past my knees. Rolling to my back, I spread my legs, opening my slit for him with my fingers. His eyes were already there, his tongue moving across his lips as he watched me touch my clit and slide my finger into my pussy.

"Hell, yes! Keep doing that!" He unbuttoned his shirt the rest of the way and threw it into the growing pile of clothes on the floor as he watched me finger myself. Bare-chested, he moved around the end of the bed, stretching out next to

me on his side and propping his head on his elbow so he could put his face right near the apex of my thighs and watch me.

"Put two more fingers in there," he murmured, and I turned my head, realizing, when he reached his hand down there to adjust himself, I was face-to-face with the zipper of his jeans.

"I don't know if I can," I admitted, sliding a second finger into my wetness.

He groaned, his hand moving, rubbing over the crotch of his jeans.

"More."

I slid another finger inside, three fingers now, moving slowly in and out.

"Yeah! Fuck your little pussy, Sabrina." He kissed the elastic across the top of my stocking. The sound of his words made me shiver, and I fingered myself faster.

He grabbed my hips, and I gasped as he rolled onto his back, pulling me with him. His fingers probed me, thicker and rougher than mine, sliding into my flesh. His tongue found my clit, licking and sucking with abandon, as if he could devour me. I whimpered, wiggling on his face, resting my cheek against the seam of his jeans, feeling the throb of his cock.

"Rob," I whispered, moving my hips in little circles. "Oh, God, that's so good."

He didn't answer me, but he made a noise in his throat, his tongue flicking faster through my slit. I rubbed my cheek against his crotch, feeling the heat of him, and then I unsnapped his jeans and tugged his zipper down. Boxers. I smiled, reaching my hand to find him, bent and straining against the thick denim.

Tugging his jeans downward, I freed his cock, wrapping my hand around it. He groaned, the sensation a sweet vibration through my flesh, as I began to lick the tip, working my tongue all around the head. His cock was thick and already wet with pre-cum. I teased the head with my lips, kissing and licking in turns, enjoying the feel of his tongue and fingers in my pussy.

I felt him slowly getting distracted, his tongue forgetting about my clit entirely as I took the full length of him into my mouth. He groaned, pressing his hips up, and I nearly gagged, easing back and using my hand around the base to stroke him as I sucked. I rolled my hips, reminding him, and his tongue found me again, fluttering over my clit and then flattening out, moving back and forth.

"Oh, yes!" I whispered it around the head of his cock, my hand jerking him faster. His tongue rippled back and forth over my clit, a slick, wet rhythm that made me undulate against him.

My hand stopped moving on his cock, and I just squeezed him, the tip red and swollen. He began humming, a low, swelling vibration that seared through me, his tongue playing measured beats against my clit.

"Oh, Rob, oh my God... what are you doing?" I panted, the swell of my orgasm beginning to peak. "Oh, don't stop! Don't stop!"

My hips rocked and rocked as I started to quake on top of him, the surge of my climax spreading through my pelvis and trembling my thighs.

"Oh, oh, oh," I whispered, over and over, my mouth pressed against his thigh.

His tongue kept moving over my clit, but I slipped a protective hand over my mound. "No, no more, I can't," I begged him, rolling onto the bed.

He slipped his jeans and shorts down and moved to stretch out beside me, kissing me deeply. His tongue was thick with my juices and I sucked at it, moaning. He slipped his hand between my legs, moving my hand aside and cupping my whole mound with his, rocking just a little, making me shiver.

"You're so beautiful." His eyes moved over my body, lingering at my breasts. He dipped his head and licked at my hard, pink nipple. I squirmed, the sensation almost too much post-orgasm.

"I want you." His eyes met mine. "I want to be inside you."

"Yes." I let my knees fall fully open, my eyes still half-closed, my whole body flushed.

He moved between my legs, and I took his full weight, wrapping my arms around him. Looking between us, I watched him slip his cock through my fleshy folds, up and down, searching. I lifted my hips, guiding him. He groaned and pressed his hips forward, rocking the length of his stiff cock into me.

"Oh, Sabrina," he whispered against my ear. "Oh, fuck!"

"Yes!" I ground my hips into his. "Fuck me!"

He lifted his head to meet my eyes, rolling his hips as he moved, a sweet, fluid motion. I was so wet, I felt it even on my thighs—he slid through me like butter. Slipping my arms around his neck, my eyes searching his, I lost myself in the feel of his body, his belly moving against mine.

"Yes!" I urged him on, working my body under his, reveling in the wet heat of us, joined together at last. His cock throbbed as he moved into me, burying his cock to the hilt and holding himself there, breathing hard.

"Fuck, Sabrina..." He shook his head, eyes closed. "I can't last long—you feel too good."

"It's okay." I ran my hands down the thick ropes of his arms. They trembled with effort. Tracing my fingers over his face, his chin, down his neck and over his chest, I found his nipples, hard, dark pebbles, and flicked them with my thumbs.

"Oh, damn," he moaned, and I felt him let go as he began thrusting into me, deep and hard. His cock was steel heat, and I watched him bite his lip, his eyes half closed, his face twisted in anticipation of the ultimate pleasure. I wanted to give it to him.

"Come for me!" I rubbed my thumbs over his nipples and clamped onto his cock with my pussy, squeezing, milking him. He gasped, his body twisting into mine as he thrust deep one last time, and I felt him swell and surge inside of me, a dam bursting in hot, rhythmic waves. He shuddered, collapsing, and I held him close, murmuring endearments softly into his shoulder.

"Well, if that was a game, I like how it's played," I said, and felt laughter rumbling through his chest.

"You're something." He rolled off, throwing an arm over his forehead as he stared at the ceiling. When I looked at him, it hit me with a sudden, breathless force—I just had sex with Rob Burnett! He was in my bed! I couldn't have

predicted how this night was going to end back when Katie and I were singing along to *Scratch* songs on the way to the arena. Never in a million years.

"Rob?" I rolled, hooking my thigh over his. He looked far away, lost in thought, but he turned his eyes to me, searching my face.

"How's your head?" His fingers touched my forehead.

I'd completely forgotten about the place where the door had hit me. I rubbed at it. It was starting to scab over. "Feels fine. I don't know how it's going to feel tomorrow, though."

He chuckled, his eyes bright. "You're gonna be *very* hung over tomorrow, lightweight."

I smiled, remembering how I'd given in to the alcohol—how I'd given in to it all.

"It's worth it." I rested my head on his chest. "And I didn't even puke."

He laughed. "Yet."

"Bite your tongue!"

"What were you going to ask me?" He stroked my hair.

"Oh. I just wondered—" I took a deep breath and swallowed. "You mentioned calling a cab."

He frowned at me. "Do you want me to go?"

"No!" I half-sat to look at him. "But...I mean...oh, I don't know."

He traced the curve of my breast with his finger. "No games. What do you want?"

"I want you to stay."

He nodded, his eyes lingering where his fingers moved over my flesh.

"What do you want?" I put my hand on his belly, still wet with sweat. "No games."

"I'd like to stay tonight."

I smiled, leaning over him to turn off the light. He pulled me against him, wrapping his arms around me and breathing me in, his chest swelling.

"Happy accidents," he breathed and let out a little laugh.

"Sounds like a song title."

"Maybe it will be." He pressed his lips to mine in the darkness.

* * * *

When a dozen red roses were delivered to the door, I remembered the rose Rob had given me last night. I'd left it somewhere.

I read the card, standing in the doorway, leaning against the very screen door Rob had pressed me into just the night before.

No games...and it was no accident. Rob. Along with a phone number.

I picked up the phone, started to dial, but changed my mind, deciding to call Katie first. I was sure we had a lot to talk about!

The End

ABOUT SELENA KITT



Like any feline, Selena Kitt loves the things that make her purr—and wants nothing more than to make others purr right along with her! Pleasure is her middle name, whether it's a short cat nap stretched out in the sun or a long kitty bath. She makes it a priority to explore all the delightful distractions she can find, and follow her vivid and often racy imagination wherever it wants to lead her.

Her writing embodies everything from the spicy to the scandalous, but watch out—this kitty also has sharp claws and her stories often include intriguing edges and twists that take readers to new, thought-provoking depths.

When she's not pawing away at her keyboard, Selena runs an innovative publishing company (www.excessica.com) and in her spare time, she worships her devoted husband, corrals four kids and a dozen chickens, all while growing an organic garden. She also loves bellydancing and photography.

Her story, *Connections*, was one of the runners-up for the [2006 Rauxa Prize](#), given annually to an erotic short story of “exceptional literary quality,” out of over 1,000 nominees, where awards are judged by a select jury and all entries are read “blind” (without author's name available.) She has also been an EPIC Award Finalist two years in a row (2008 and 2009) with [EcoErotica](#) and [The Real Mother Goose](#).

She can be reached on her website at www.selenakitt.com.

If you liked HAPPY ACCIDENT, try:



PAPERBACK ROMANCE

Maya's heart yearns for romance and adventure, so that's what she writes about--but James Reardon, her college creative writing professor, insists she's wasting both time and talent. Determined to prove him wrong, Maya stumbles onto the fact that her professor's been keeping secrets--not the least of which is his attraction to her. Faced with a choice, she will have to decide whether or not to reveal his secret to the world--and her own desire for a man nearly twice her age.

Warnings: This title contains graphic language and really hot sex.

EXCERPT from **PAPERBACK ROMANCE**:

She heard him come in, and she found herself hesitating to go back out, staring at herself in the mirror. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed, and her whole body tingling, like a limb that had gone to sleep and was just waking up.

What was happening seemed so out of character for both of them—it seemed too fantastic to be real. Was she really sitting in her Ancient History class right now,

looking out the window, chewing on a pen cap, and dreaming all of this? Part of her thought that must be the case. When she opened the door, he was standing by the open window, looking out at the lake. He smiled at her and held out a hand. She took it, still marveling at his touch, and joined him. The sun was brilliant on the water as it rippled toward shore.

“Look.” He pointed toward the mallards that were paddling toward the reeds. As she watched, she saw a mother duck leading her little downy ducklings all in a row for a swim out on the lake.

She watched them in wonder, all too aware of James’ body, his hip against her hip, his hand moving around her waist. “I wonder which one is going to grow up to be a swan?”

He smiled down at her, his attention shifting, his eyes falling to her mouth. “This one.” He tilted her chin up and kissed her. This wasn’t like the tentative kiss in the car. This one was full of passion and an eager longing that matched her own. She whimpered against his lips, seeking his center with her tongue.

He breathed her in—she could feel the expanding of his chest as he pulled her in tight, his hands seeking the bare skin of her back under her t-shirt. The bed seemed miles away as they kissed and touched their way towards it, peeling off clothes and exploring each other as they went. His mouth seemed to want to devour her and she met him like a lifetime of pent-up breath until they were gasping, collapsed, his body pressing her to the floor still five feet short of the bed.

Her t-shirt was pulled up, his jacket off, shirt unbuttoned, and they were pressed belly to belly, but it made the thickness of her jeans too much—she couldn’t feel the

heat of him like she wanted. Her fingers fumbled with the snap and zipper, wiggling out, and the writhing of her under him as she exposed her panties and bare thighs brought a growl from his throat that sent a shiver through her.

She toed her jeans the rest of the way off, wrapping her legs around him when they were free, digging her heels into his lower back and arching. He fumbled with the front hook of her bra and she brushed his hands away, impatient, rolling on top of him and sitting. His eyes were full of lust as he looked up at her peeling off her t-shirt, unhooking her bra and letting her breasts spill out into his hands as she leaned forward to kiss him, her mouth hungry.

She rocked her hips, her thin panties rubbing against the material of his trousers, the bite of his belt a shock as he grabbed her sides and slid her up so he could lick and suck at her nipples like a man who had never tasted flesh before. The eagerness of his mouth made her hips rock hard and she wanted more still. She slid up his belly and sat on his chest, pulling her panties aside to show him the red fuzz between her legs. The groan that elicited was so gratifying that she gave him a little more pink, spreading her lips open so she could rub her clit...

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