

Chapter 2

The barbecue is in full swing. You and Raven both decide to splurge and buy a mixed drink instead of the standard beer and wine; beer in this humidity just doesn't seem like a good idea, and wine seems a little too fancy for the food being served. You are trying not to think too much of anything, but the word "date" keeps popping into your head. Such an innocent phrase, meant to make you feel at ease, your'e sure. It has done the complete opposite. Thankfully, the drink you are holding seems to help.

Then the guys arrive.

You don't even notice at first. You and Raven are standing off to the side of everyone. You have been oddly detached all day, trying not to get caught up in all of the hype, afraid you will only wind up disappointed. You are still nervous enough not to eat much, and the alcohol goes straight to your head, making you feel a little fuzzy. Your actions are a few seconds delayed, but it doesn't make you seem drunk or standoffish; only observant and nonchalant.

You both hear the commotion before you see anything. Girls screaming, the the sound of all of them scrambling and shoving. You have grown used to the sound- people have been getting worked up over nothing all day- so it doesn't immediately grab either of yours attention. It isn't until the actual name-calling starts that you look over.

"Joe! Oh my gosh, Joe!" One girl yells.

"Donnieeeeeee," another squeals. The sound is so high-pitched that you see Donnie cringe. His face is so contorted, it is comical. You and Raven both laugh.

The guys look over at you. You are both still smiling, and they all smile back. Raven waves. Jordan peers out over his sunglasses as Donnie hurriedly signs an autograph for squealy-girl, the entire time looking in your direction.

Wow, seeing him looking at you that way... your stomach does a slight somersault and you take another sip of your drink, swallowing hard. Your heart begins to hammer in your chest, that nervous-with-excitement feeling. Raven gives you a long, wide-eyed look, and you know she feels the same.

You briefly debate whether or not to approach them. You don't have long to decide. In fact, you don't have to decide anything. you see them making their way through the crowd, getting closer to you. They keep looking at you and Raven, seemingly in a hurry to perform what is expected of them. You see them emerge from the sea of fans and turn to face you.

All five of them are heading your way.

There is no time to even think. Funny- the time approaching this day seemed to last forever. In the next few seconds, they are standing in front of you. Their stance and attitude must have spoken volumes to the other fans, because not one person followed them over to you.

You briefly wonder at how jealous all of the other girls must be. You feel empowered by that thought, a cocky grin spreading across your face, just as they all reach you.

"Hello, ladies," Donnie says smoothly, grinning like a Cheshire cat. Everyone is smiling, grinning flirtatiously, as if you all know each other, or share an inside joke. It is contagious.

"Hello yourself," Raven answers. It is clear where the interest lies among the two of them.

Joe chimes in. "Why are you out here all by yourselves?" He is not wearing sunglasses. OF course not. If he were, how could he hypnotize the ladies with those Caribbean-blue eyes? You steel yourself before you meet his gaze.

Holy hail! You begin to feel as if you are swimming in them. You hesitate a couple of seconds longer than intended. Joe notices and his smile widens. "Cat got your tongue?" he asks playfully.

You quickly recover. "No, just having a few quiet moments." You are finally able to pry your eyes away from him. *Damn, girl, breathe!* you instruct yourself silently. You take another sip of your drink.

"Are we interrupting you?" It is Jordan who speaks. Your heart thuds at the sound of his voice. So smooth, even in casual conversation. You look up at him. A frown plays at the corner of his mouth; it is replaced by a smile so quickly, you almost think you imagined it. But when you look in his eyes, you see a trace still there. This puzzles you a little.

"Not at all," you say, at the same time Raven says, "You are more than welcome to interrupt us anytime."

Your eyes widen a little. You know Raven doesn't drink on a regular basis, but you didn't realize one drink would affect her so much. Jordan raises his eyebrows in response. You giggle.

This seems to have broken the tension. Donnie and Raven are still ogling at one another, lowering their voices and having their own private conversation. The others

begin to snicker.

"So, what's your name, b beautiful?" Danny asks, looking pointedly at you. You take another sip of your drink before you answer, hoping to mask the effort it takes you to swallow. "Jolanda," you say.

Jordan's head snaps up to look at you. You stop breathing. You gaze at one another for a long moment.

"You okay, man?" Jon asks him. Jordan clears his throat and tears his eyes away from you. "Yeah, yeah, I'm fine." You are instantly a little hurt. That exchange coiled have meant anything. *Ok, it could have meant anything*, you say to yourself, *including something good*. You put your thoughts in check and raise your chin a little higher.

You then see a member of the ILAA staff approaching. The burly man looks none too happy at having to corral the guys in for their own Meet and Greet. This makes all of you smile again. "Uh, oh, we've done it now," Donnie says under his breath. The tone in his voice makes you think of a little boy who knows he's been caught doing something he shouldn't have been doing. He rolls his eyes in exaggeration. You and Raven suppress grins.

"I will see you later, baby," you hear Donnie say to Raven in a low, sexy voice. He leans over and kisses her on the cheek. The exchange looks as though they've known one another for years.

You and Jordan turn toward one another. "So," he says, smiling, "I believe we have a date later, as well."

There was that word again! Damn, what was he trying to do to you? Trying not to read more into it than what is there, you say, "Yep! See you at the Meet and Greet!"

The sparkle fades from his eyes just enough for you to notice. He manages to keep his smile firmly in place. "See you then!" With that he turns on his heel and walks away.

The others are starting to head back, as well, Jon giving Jordan funny looks out of the corner of his eye. Danny is eyeing you. His expression is unreadable. Was the exchange between you and Jordan that odd? Was the tension between you not in your imagination? What the hell?!

You turn to ask Raven. One look at her, however, and it is clear she has no idea of what took place. Her expression is one of sheer bliss, the look in her eyes far away. You sigh inwardly and keep your concerns to yourself. Raven has had her moment- you don't want to ruin it.