

**AIRPORTS,
EXES,
AND OTHER
THINGS
I'M OVER**

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Petroff*



Swoon READS
NEW YORK

A SWOON READS BOOK

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**FOR MY BROTHER AND COUSINS—AN INCREDIBLE CREW THAT
I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO GROW UP ALONGSIDE. HAVING YOU
(AND YOUR FABULOUS SIGNIFICANT OTHERS & KIDS) IN MY LIFE
IS SOMETHING FOR WHICH I WILL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL.**

ONE

Could people actually pass out from excitement? I was starting to think so as I clutched my best friend Trina Gibson's arm. My body was trembling. Literally. I didn't even know that could happen. Sure, in rom-coms and steamy, smutty novels, but in real life? Come on. Yet, here I was shaking like a kindergartener desperately in need of a bathroom. All because Kevin Wayward, music god, had taken the stage, and *I*, Sari Silver, music god wannabe, was there to witness it firsthand. There wasn't even an adjective to explain what I was feeling. Exhilarated, elated, ecstatic, euphoric, some other e-word? All I knew was that this was where I needed to be.

It didn't matter that I didn't get a table, despite getting to the club a couple of hours early and being subjected to two less-than-stellar (to put it nicely) bands, or that I was squished next to my best friend and a bunch of strangers up against a musty-smelling wall. The discomfort was worth it. Spring break was beginning in the most kick-ass way possible.

"We are actually here. This is really happening," I said, practically squealing.

"I know," Trina said. "We earned this." She held up her free

arm, the one I wasn't latched onto, and the fluorescent green wristband slid down her dark-brown skin.

"Yes, we did." Everyone in the music world knew the Meta Club. Countless legends got their start there, and often returned to perform. Trina and I wanted in. It was a twenty-one and over club, but we didn't let that stop us. There were months of failed fake ID attempts, begging, singing outside the club until we sweet-talked (or bugged to death, depending on who you talked to) them into letting us in. Since then we'd seen so many amazing shows, and tonight was the icing on the cake. Sure, we had to wear wristbands that kept the bartenders from serving us drinks, but who cared? We were in Meta, and the place gave me a natural buzz.

Kevin held up his hands to quiet the crowd, and I grabbed Trina tighter. I was about to hear Kevin Wayward live. There was a good chance I really was going to lose consciousness.

"As some of you know," he said. "I wandered into this little club in the Village five years ago and, well, the rest is history." History that included getting discovered his first time performing here and going on to win five Grammys—something I would kill for. "But I haven't forgotten my start and that's why I'm back tonight."

Everyone started screaming and applauding again, and Trina turned to me. "That's going to be you someday."

I crossed my fingers *and* my toes. "Hopefully."

"Definitely," she said.

I knew she was just being a good best friend, but I couldn't help praying her words would come true. The image of people lining up to see Sari Silver in concert washed over me. It was what I wanted more than anything.

Kevin Wayward picked up his guitar, stepped closer to the mic, and within seconds let his music pour out. Chills ran through my body. He was so good. It wasn't just that his voice was raw and soulful but that his lyrics were haunting and catchy at the same time. It was just him and his guitar, but it was enough. If I could affect people with my music even a portion of the way he did, I'd be very happy.

By the time Kevin finished his set, I'll admit, I was in total awe. In one song the guy had me almost in tears, the next totally wanting to kiss my boyfriend, and the last tapping my foot and singing along with the rest of the audience at the top of my lungs. Listening to his recordings was nothing compared to hearing him live—it was like the emotions registered ten times higher.

My hands were numb from clapping so hard. "That was incredible," I said, once the room died down. Trina and I moved to a nearby table. Another act was about to take the stage, but the room had pretty much cleared out once Kevin left. "I cannot believe Mike didn't want to come."

Mike Wilson was her boyfriend of three years.

She waved her hand. "You know he has no taste in music. Even if he hadn't gone away with his family for the weekend, he wouldn't have showed. He would have been all about Paul's party."

"Well it is the 'party of the year,'" I said, making air quotes. At least that's what Paul and everyone else were calling it. Not that they weren't right. A party at the start of spring break our senior year, in Paul's giant town house while his parents were out, had the makings of an epic night. Although not as epic as this concert. *This* was everything.

“Thank you for skipping it to come here with me,” Trina said.

“Are you kidding me? Like I’d miss this.”

She shrugged. “Yeah, but Zev is Paul’s cousin; I know he wanted you to be there.”

“You and I have been planning tonight for ages. My boyfriend can handle the evening without me. No way I was going to cancel. This is our night. Besides, Zev’s got me *all* week.” I raised my eyebrows up and down. Tonight was just the start of my vacation, and if it was any indicator of what was to come, this was going to be a week I’d still be talking about when I was eighty.

She shook her head. “I still can’t believe you convinced your parents to let you spend spring break in Florida with your boyfriend.”

“Just call me the parent whisperer.” Although we both knew that wasn’t true. My parents could be a little helicopterish, which meant I had to fudge the truth here and there. In this instance, I told them I wanted to spend my vacation at my gram’s in Florida. It wasn’t until after I booked my nonrefundable flight that I let them know Zev was going to be spending the week down there, too. His grandparents lived about seven minutes away from my gram in Boca. My parents were less than thrilled with this development. But, hey, it wasn’t my fault the area was basically a mecca for old people from Manhattan. At least that’s how I explained it to them. They gave in. Probably figured I couldn’t get into too much trouble while staying at a retirement village. I hoped to prove them wrong.

“We can still catch some of the party if we go now,” Trina

offered. “Don’t tell me you’re not curious. You’re always curious.”

“Seriously, I’m fine with anything. It’s totally up to you. We Are Now is performing next. They’re pretty good.”

Trina scrunched her nose. “They’re okay. I’m just sick of them already. I don’t know why they keep getting booked every single week. You should be up there.”

“Tell me about it.” I’d been leaving demo after demo for Sheila, the club’s owner, but so far all I’d gotten was an *I’ll let you know*. “We can do something else if you want. This night is all yours. You’re the one stuck here all break.”

“Yeah.” Trina let out a sigh. “With my sister. Why does NYU have to have the same break as us?”

Her sister, Keisha, was a junior at New York University—the same school Trina had decided she’d go to next year—and she was driving Trina batty with her nonstop “college wisdom and experience.” I would never tell Trina this, best-friend code and all meant I had to take her side 100 percent of the time, but I could see where Keisha was coming from. I’d probably do the same thing if my little brother wound up at the same school as me.

“Let’s see how the party looks,” Trina said, and pulled out her phone. She punched up GroupIt and scrolled through what seemed like a million photos. She froze and looked up at me. “You are not going to like this. At all. We should get to the party now.”

I took a deep breath. “What is it?”

She turned the phone so I could get a clear look. “Bethanne is hanging all over Zev.”

I let the air out. “Is that it? That’s no surprise.”

“Umm . . . why aren’t you freaking out?” she asked. “You’re the one who said she wants him back.”

I shrugged. “I know, but he doesn’t want her. I told Zev what she was up to and he swore up and down that they were just friends. I trust him.”

Trina nodded. She knew how much he loved me. The guy was getting on an airplane for me tomorrow, and that was major. He had a *huge* flying phobia. Enough so that his family drove the last four times they went to Florida. That wasn’t all. He brought my whole family chicken soup when we all caught the flu, he helped my brother with his bar mitzvah lessons, he listened to me practice guitar for hours just so he could spend more time with me, and he always put me first. There were a lot of things that I freaked out about, but Zev cheating was not one of them.

Trina went back to swiping. “It’s still annoying,” she said. “Look at this. It says she tagged Zev Geller in seven photos. I *really* can’t stand her.”

I rolled my eyes. She wasn’t alone. Bethanne Dubois was not exactly my favorite person, either. I found her to be smug and obnoxious and that was before I started dating her ex. Not that I had anything to do with the breakup. She ended things with him the fall of sophomore year. Zev and I didn’t even really know each other until we became juniors. We started dating that December. Obviously, I didn’t love that Bethanne was making a play for him, even if Zev couldn’t see it for what it was, but I knew it wasn’t going to amount to anything. So if Zev wanted her as a friend, while I didn’t quite understand it, I could live with it.

“I think we should go to the party,” Trina said.

“Not if this is because of Bethanne,” I told her.

“It’s not. There are a ton of people there. And look.” She pointed to another picture on her phone. “Trevor’s there with his new boyfriend. He’s been talking about him for weeks. I haven’t met him yet. We’re all going to prom together; it would be nice to get to know him beforehand, right?”

“Yeah.” Although I wasn’t positive that was her true motive, I was never one to pass up a good party. And even though I’d be seeing Zev tomorrow, the idea of hanging out with him tonight too made me smile. It would be the perfect end to a perfect night.

TWO

“You know you drive almost as bad as my gram,” I told Trina once I was safely out of her car.

Paul had a totally sick town house. Unfortunately, it was out of the way of any public transportation and way too long of a walk.

“Which is why my parents like me to practice,” she answered, matter-of-factly. Being in Manhattan, we didn’t tend to drive much. My family didn’t even have a car, but Trina’s did. It primarily lived in a parking garage, but every so often one of them took it out. I wanted to take a cab to Paul’s, but Trina insisted on driving. I knew my parents would have flipped, they were not fans of teen drivers, but I decided this was one of those things they didn’t need to know about. After all, chances were good Trina had more skills behind the wheel than some of the cab drivers I’d ridden with. “And you are not one to talk,” she pointed out.

“Very true.” I didn’t have a license. I hadn’t even bothered taking driver’s ed. I didn’t have a car to practice with, I always planned on going to college in the city (and now that I got into the Manhattan School of Music, I was definitely sticking

around), and there were enough cabs and car services to make it seem like a waste of time. Trina assured me I would regret the decision, but so far I hadn't.

"And did you see the way I nailed the parallel parking?" she said. "One shot. Right in."

"Very impressive," I told her. "Your keys," I said, pointing to the car.

"Oh yeah." Trina was the smartest person I knew, but could be completely absentminded when it came to the little stuff like locking doors or remembering to take her things. Although the car keys weren't entirely her fault. She was used to leaving them in the engine for the parking attendant. She grabbed the keys, clicked the locks shut, then struggled to fit the keychain into her wristlet.

"Give it to me," I said, and tossed it into my purse.

Trina traveled light. Phone, apartment key, credit card, license, a couple of bucks, and a lip gloss—that was it. Me on the other hand? My bag was a bottomless pit. It had everything: a notebook and pen to write down lyrics that popped into my head, Band-Aids, a flashlight, a glue stick, sunscreen, makeup, aspirin, an umbrella, a book, and a variety of other supplies—because you never know what you might need. I thought it was very *Mary Poppins* of me, but Zev joked it was like I was in training to be a *Let's Make a Deal* audience member. The show's host gave people money for having random things on them. But Zev could make fun all he wanted—he wasn't laughing when his pants split right before his improv show last month (okay, he kind of was) and I came to the rescue with a needle and thread.

"Kind of quiet for the party of the year," I said as we walked up the steps to Paul's.

“Maybe everyone left already.” We got to the door. “Do I knock or just go in?” Trina asked.

I pressed my ear up and smiled as I made out the familiar beat to one of my favorite songs coming from inside. “They’re still in there,” I said, and tried the handle. It was open.

“Quick, shut the door!” someone yelled before we even fully stepped inside. It was our friend, Amy. “Sorry,” she said, after we did as instructed. “One of the neighbors threatened to call the cops, so Paul put me on door duty.”

A possible visit by the police? Paul’s party could very well live up to the hype.

Trina tensed up. “I will be grounded for life if we get busted here.”

Even though it was ages ago, her parents, *and* mine, were still pretty pissed over the fake ID thing.

“I think we’ll be okay. Besides we’re already here,” I reminded her. Now that we were, I was kind of excited. It looked like the whole senior class and then some were crammed inside Paul’s place. I didn’t want to leave before we even got a chance to say hi to everyone. “Just one drink, maybe two, then we’re out of here,” I assured her.

She gave me a look. “Yeah, I know,” I said. I always mean to just pop in and stay for fifteen minutes, but somehow, I always wind up being the last one to leave. “But this time I mean it.” I held up three fingers. “Scouts honor. I have my flight tomorrow. I need some sleep.”

Trina still looked skeptical.

“Besides,” I said, “we didn’t hear anything outside. As long as Amy keeps doing her job, we’ll be fine. No one will call the cops.”

“You’re right,” Trina said, her body relaxing. “And worst-case scenario, I guess a jail cell beats staying in my apartment with my sister.”

I shook my head. “Come on,” I said, taking her arm and pulling her through the crowd. I wanted to find Zev.

“Drinks are in the kitchen,” Amy called after us.

We didn’t make it that far, though. “You’re here!” Trevor said, catching us midway. “I thought you had the concert?”

“We did and it was . . .” I gestured to show my head exploding. “We thought we’d finish up the night here.”

“Nice.” He introduced us to his new boyfriend, Dominick. The two met at an internship orientation for the city’s Department of Design and Construction. Trevor was into the design aspect and Dom the engineering. When Trina heard that, I knew where the conversation was headed. The mere mention of anything STEM related was all it took to draw her in. My eyes glazed over as she and Dom threw around terms like *microscale sensors*, *fluidic systems*, and *MEMS*.

“Some of this will help,” Trevor said, pointing to his drink.

“What is it?”

“A wide assortment of what I found lying around,” he said, offering me the cup. “Want some?”

“Uhh, yeah.” I winked at him and took a huge sip. Then I did everything possible not to spit it back in the cup. “Oh my God. That was disgusting.”

Trevor laughed. “Maybe not my best creation, but I worked with what I had. There’s beer in the kitchen. And I think you’ll find something else you’ll like in there.”

“Zev?”

“At least as of a few minutes ago.”

“Then I will be right back. Anybody else want anything?” I asked.

They all shook their head. Trina rarely drank and never when she was driving.

“Sari!” my physics partner Jeremy said when I entered the kitchen. “Want?” he asked, holding up a beer.

I nodded.

“Catch.”

“No!” I yelled, moving closer. The chances of the bottle actually landing in my hands were about as good as Kevin Wayward materializing in a burst of smoke. Probably worse.

“Thanks,” I said, taking the drink from him. “Have you seen Zev?”

I couldn’t wait to tell him all about the concert.

“Over by the fridge, last I saw,” Jeremy said.

“’K, I’ll be right back.” After listening to all those Kevin Wayward songs, no one could possibly blame me for wanting to snuggle up beside my boyfriend. Some of those songs were seriously hot.

I squeezed through a couple of people to try to get to the other side of the room. Zev was the tallest guy in our class, so he’d be easy to find. I thought I spotted the back of his head, but the guy in front of me was blocking my view.

“Excuse me,” I said.

He moved a little, and I got a better look at that floppy, dark hair. It was Zev!

I moved closer and was about to call out to him, but his name got stuck in my throat.

He wasn’t alone.

He was with Bethanne.

But they weren't just standing there. Zev's mouth was attached to hers. They were *kissing*.

Everything seemed to happen so slow and so fast at the same time. I gasped and the bottle slipped from my hand, shattering at my feet. Kind of like my life.

Images and sounds swirled around me. Someone asking me if I was okay, the whispering and ogling from my classmates, and then, of course, Zev. He turned and caught my eye. His mouth was agape and his expression one of panic.

"Sari, it's not—"

I didn't wait for an explanation. I just ran. There was nothing he could say. I pushed through the crowd until I was outside. I heard Amy yell to shut the door, but I didn't care. I just needed to get away. Away from the memory of the guy I loved kissing someone else. Of his lips, those soft lips that were supposed to be mine, touching Bethanne. Away from the image of the two of them pressed up against each other. I had been so stupid to believe nothing was going on between them. Now I knew the truth, even though part of me wished I didn't. And away from the reality that Zev and I were no longer *Zev and I*.

But no matter how far I ran, I couldn't erase the hurt I was feeling.

THREE

Somehow I'd made it down the steps and partway up the street. I felt the urge to collapse right onto the ground, but there was no way I was going to let that happen. I wiped away tears with the back of my hand, but more just kept coming. I needed to pull it together. Zev couldn't be too far behind me, and he was not going to see what a mess he turned me into. No way I was giving him that satisfaction. I needed a place to hide. Quickly.

Paul's street and the surrounding ones were residential. Why couldn't he live near a bodega or a twenty-four-hour CVS like the rest of Manhattan? There was nothing but town houses, apartment buildings, trees, and cars around here.

Cars. I had access to one of them.

I fished through my bag until I found Trina's key chain. I pushed the button to unlock the car, and the alarm wailed.

Crap. I had no idea how to turn this thing off. I looked back at the door. Still no sign of Zev, but who knew how much time I had? Probably not long. I kept hitting the button. The noise finally stopped. I opened the door, got in the backseat, locked myself in, and let my head rest on the seat.

I so wanted this to be a dream. One that I'd wake up from any second. Only I knew that wasn't the case. Zev cheated on me. It was hard to believe, but I saw it with my own eyes. Not just me. Jeremy, Chaya, Seth, Tova, everyone in that kitchen. Zev didn't even care that the whole school would be gossiping about how poor Sari got dumped in the most brutal way possible. I didn't even want to think about the looks of pity they'd be giving me.

"Sari! Where are you? Sari!"

My body went still at the sound of Zev's voice. I squeezed my eyes shut and prayed he didn't find me.

"Sari!" he called again. I used to love the way he said my name, now it made my chest hurt. "Sari!" His voice was getting closer. I hoped he didn't recognize Trina's car. He'd only ridden in it a handful of times. I curled up into the tiniest ball I could manage.

Another pair of footsteps ran over. "Just go, Zev." It was Trina. Hearing her voice only made me cry harder.

"I need to talk to her," he said.

"You did enough," she told him. "I've got this."

"No, I need to explain."

"No, you need to go." Her voice was seething. "I'm serious, Zev. Get of here. Now. She'll talk to you when she wants to."

A few seconds, a minute, an hour went by. I couldn't tell. It felt like an eternity, but was probably mere moments. Time always seemed slower when you didn't want it to be. There was a light knock on the window. "Sari," Trina said.

I didn't look up. "Are you alone?"

"Yes," she answered softly.

I clicked the button on the key chain, and slid over to make room for her as she got into the car beside me.

She put her hand on my back. "I'm so sorry."

My whole body convulsed and tears poured out of me. Not the quiet sobs from before, but loud, raw ones. The type you'd never see on TV because they're red faced, snot filled, and ugly. Trina leaned down, her body on mine, and she wrapped her arms around me. "We'll get through this," she said. "We'll get through this."

Then she just let me cry it out.

A few minutes after my wails turned back to silent tears, I sat up.

"I wish I had a tissue for you," she said.

"I have one in there." I gestured toward my purse on the floor.

She smiled at me and handed me my bag. "Of course you do."

I took one out and looked at my reflection in the rearview mirror. I was a mess. The giant top bun I had so carefully pinned up earlier was coming undone, with random strands of wavy, golden-brown hair sticking out in every direction. My eyes were red rimmed and glossy. The tears made them a brighter blue than usual. I would have liked the color under different circumstances. My makeup was frightening. Black streaks went all the way to my chin. If I was auditioning for the part of a serial killer in a horror film, I'd probably have gotten it. I didn't even bother trying to wipe it off. I just blew my nose. It was fitting that I looked as bad as I felt.

"So you heard what happened?" I asked.

Trina nodded.

“Everyone knows?” I was pretty sure of the answer, but I needed to know for sure.

She nodded again.

“I’m so stupid,” I said.

“No, you’re not.”

Yeah, I was. I had fallen for every line Zev Geller had ever fed me.

“Sari, he’s the idiot. Not you. You deserve better.”

I reached for another tissue and saw my phone blowing up. Zev’s name and a picture of us at the junior prom appeared on the screen. “Guess who it is?” I said while hitting Decline.

There were four missed calls and seven texts.

“Maybe you should talk to him,” Trina suggested. “See what he has to say?”

I shook my head. “I want nothing to do with him.” Another text popped up, and I deleted it along with every other message he ever sent me. There was no coming back from this. It was better to just cut it off cold turkey.

My phone rang again.

Trina looked at me. “I’ll be really quiet if you want to answer it.”

I shook my head.

I turned off the ringer, but I could still see Zev’s name popping up. He just kept calling. “Seriously!” I said, throwing the phone down on the seat between Trina and me. “He needs to stop. I can’t deal with this right now. I can’t talk to him. I can’t even say his name. It hurts to just look at it.”

Trina picked up the phone. “Then *He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named* is history,” she said and changed Zev’s contact information to read *Voldemort*.

“Thanks.”

She put her arm around me. “I’m here for you. Anything you need.”

“Want to take my place on a trip to Florida tomorrow?” I threw my head back against the seat. “How am I going to survive that? The flight. The *car ride*. It’s going to be hell. His *parents* are picking me up tomorrow and driving us to the airport.”

“Not anymore,” she said. “They were supposed to pick you up at eleven, right?”

I nodded.

“Well, I’m picking you up at eight. We’ll get you to the airport super early and see if you can get a standby flight. Then you won’t even have to see him.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” she said.

This could work. A week sulking in Florida definitely beat a week sulking in New York with my parents asking a million questions.

“I still need to—”

She put up her hand. “I will contact *Voldemort* and let him know you no longer need a ride,” she said, reading my mind.

“Thank you.”

“It’s what best friends are for. Now please tell me you have a makeup wipe in that bag of yours,” she said, looking inside it. “Your mother will freak if she sees you like this.”

She found one and handed it to me.

“Seriously,” I said, putting my head on her shoulder. “I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“Lucky for you,” she said, “you never have to find out.”

Even with everything that had just happened, I actually smiled. I might have had lousy taste when it came to picking a boyfriend, but my choice in a best friend was on point.

FOUR

“Sari, is that you?” my dad asked as I opened the door.

I had really hoped he’d be asleep, but I should have known better. My parents never went to bed until my little brother, Dan, and I were home and safely in our rooms for the night.

“Yep,” I called out to him, “see you in the morning.”

“What? No good night?”

I took a deep breath, stepped into the living room, and braced for an inquisition. It wasn’t just Dad in there. It was Mom, too. *Perfect.*

She dog-eared the page in her book and gave me her undivided attention. “How was the concert?”

“Good.”

“That’s it?” my dad asked. “You talked about this concert for weeks, begged us to let you stay out, and all we get is ‘good’?”

“Really good,” I said. “Amazing.”

I knew I was fortunate to have parents who cared and wanted to know what was going on in my life, but right now a tiny bit of apathy would have been greatly appreciated. I just wanted to hide under the covers and pretend this night never

happened. Answering questions was about the last thing I wanted to do.

My mom's eyes zeroed in on me. "Are you okay?"

I felt myself squirm under her gaze. "Yeah."

"Have you been crying?"

Why did she have to be so observant? "It's just really hot out." That part was true. We'd been having freakishly warm weather for this time of year. "My makeup practically melted."

Now both of my parents were studying me.

"I'm fine, really."

"Sari, what's wrong?" my dad asked.

I wasn't getting out of there without giving them something. "Zev and I got in a fight. It's nothing," I lied. I didn't feel like going into the whole thing right now. I couldn't, not without having another breakdown. It didn't help that my parents loved Zev and would be disappointed, too.

My mom came over and kissed the top of my head. "I'm sure you two will work it out. You have the whole ride to the airport, and the flight to talk things out."

"Yeah," I said. "Speaking of tomorrow. I'm going to get up early and meet Trina for breakfast and go to the airport from there. Zev knows where I'll be." I didn't want to risk telling my parents the truth. If they knew Trina was taking me to catch an early flight, there was a good chance they'd veto the idea.

My mom pursed her lips together. I knew she was hoping to have a "family" morning before I went away for the week, but I'd have been lousy company anyway. There was no way I'd get through breakfast pretending everything was all platinum-record-and-Grammy-winning-dream worthy. Besides, this was

good practice for them for when college started, and I wouldn't be around as much.

My little brother appeared from his room. "Why did you guys force me go to bed if you were going to keep me up with all your talking?" he asked.

"Sorry," my dad told him. "We'll be quieter."

Dan to the rescue. I decided to use that as my way out.

"Can I go to bed now, too?" I asked.

My parents were still scrutinizing me, but finally said okay after I promised to give them a proper good-bye in the morning.

I plugged my phone in to charge and rested it on my suitcase so I wouldn't forget it tomorrow. Trina's talk with Zev hadn't stopped him from trying to get in touch with me. There were twenty-two texts from Voldemort waiting for me. The latest message was still visible on my screen.

VOLDEMORT

Please, Sari.

Please what? Ignore the fact that he was a cheating jerk who broke my heart? I didn't need more of his lies. I erased all the texts again and kicked the suitcase. It was a painful reminder of everything that happened. I had been so excited for this trip. I thought it was going to bring us even closer. What a pathetic, lovesick dork I had been.

Tears filled my eyes again. How was I supposed to get over him? I sat back on my bed. I had never felt this empty before. Not when I got passed over for the lead in *Little Shop of Horrors*, not when I got kicked off marching band for missing too many

practices (I was more focused on my guitar work than on my drumming and moving in formation, but I really wanted to do both), not even in the eighth grade when Quinn Ridely (Bethanne's best friend) posted a picture on GroupIt of my head superimposed on Jabba the Hutt's body and wrote "Only a slight improvement." All those things seemed like nothing compared to the pain I was feeling now.

I reached for my guitar, Ruby, carefully pulling her out of the case. Touching the small red jewel I'd stuck on the front as a child, I couldn't help but smile a bit through my tears. Some things were a constant, like me and Ruby. Looked like we'd be spending a lot of time together this week. More than usual. I've heard pain is great material for songwriting, maybe this would be the silver lining to this whole disaster.

I grimaced at the saying. *Silver lining*. My dad used that all the time, a silly family joke, and I'd always roll my eyes. But now I needed it to be true.

I let out a deep breath. I was going to make something happen on this trip. I was going to take my music to the next level. I didn't need Zev to make me happy. I'd be perfectly fine all by myself.

I grabbed my phone and punched up Voldemort's name and typed: *We're over*.

My eyes lingered on the words. They stung, but I hit Send anyway.

He hadn't given me any choice; not after what he'd done.
Zev and I were officially through.

FIVE

Together Trina and I pulled my suitcase from the trunk of her car. It weighed a ton. I had *slightly* overpacked. When I was throwing everything in, I wasn't exactly sure what Zev and I would be doing, so I wanted to make sure I had all my options covered. There were formal dresses, casual-chic looks, and comfy but cute sportswear. I could have pulled most of the stuff out, I really only wanted sweats and T-shirts now, but I couldn't bring myself to go through it all. So I just lugged it with me. It may not have been the wisest choice.

"Now you remember what you have to do?" she asked.

"Trina."

"Don't Trina me. Repeat it back. Rule one."

I shook my head. "I am not doing that."

She put her hands on her hips. "There is no better way to get over a guy than by finding another one, and you'll be in Florida during spring break. I expect detailed stories when you return."

"I'll be at a retirement community. I don't think I'll be finding the type of guys you're envisioning, not unless there's a time machine involved." Not that I even wanted to meet someone

new. Obviously, I couldn't sulk over Zev forever, but it had only been a day. I wasn't ready to move on. Not yet. Not even close.

"Well, you have to keep to rule number two, at least."

"That's a given." Rule Two was that we had to talk/text every day. "When have I ever slacked on that?"

She smirked. "Eighth grade."

"That was not my fault." In the seven years we'd been BFFs we'd gone only five days without communicating, and that was just because my parents confiscated my phone and grounded me from the computer, TV, and every other electronic device. I had *allegedly* stolen Quinn's top while she was showering after gym class and replaced it with a handcrafted extra-long T-shirt that read: I'M MEAN BECAUSE I'M INSECURE. The back said: & BECAUSE I HAVE A STICK UP MY BUTT. There was even a little be-dazzled staff and butt crack.

Somehow the fire alarm went off right then resulting in her having to go and stand in front of the whole school in her new attire. I put on a Jabba the Hutt T-shirt as I walked outside. When I passed her, I said, "I think you forgot that before Luke Skywalker, Jabba destroyed his enemies. I'd call us even now." I totally got suspended, but it was worth it.

"I'm going to miss you," Trina said.

"Me too, but we're going to be talking so much you won't even realize I'm gone."

I got my knapsack from the backseat and threw it over my shoulder, and Trina handed me my guitar case and a little bag from Andrea's, our favorite bakery in the whole city.

"It's a surprise for on the plane, if you get upset or sad or even stuck on your original flight. It's totally better than He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

“You didn’t have to do this.”

She shrugged. “I wanted to. Should I wait and see if you get standby?”

I shook my head. “You better get going. That traffic agent is shooting us death glares.” I gave her a hug, as best I could with all my stuff, thanked her for everything, and then watched her drive off.

It was just me now.

I rolled my suitcase through the automatic doors. This was definitely not the trip I had been planning. The airport was busy, but it wasn’t packed like I had expected. In fact, most people were using the self-serve check-in. There were only two people in line for the counter. I got to the front in minutes.

“Let me see,” the agent said, after I asked if there were any earlier flights I could get on. “There’s actually a seat left on a flight boarding in thirty minutes. You’ll have to hurry.”

I checked my bag and rushed to security. This was going to be cutting it close, but to my surprise I actually made it through the line and screening quickly. Something in my life was finally going right. I didn’t know what was with all those people who complained about flying; this was great. After I made my way through, I slipped my shoes back on and ran to the gate.

I got there right as they called my zone to board. Did I mention how much I love the airport?

I walked down the aisle to my row and spotted an empty overhead bin above my seat. I didn’t even have to search for a place to fit my guitar. *Thank you*. The airport gods were smiling on me.

I moved into my window seat and fastened my seat belt, squishing myself as far over to the wall as I could. I did not

want my hips spilling over into the seat next to me. Economy airport seating was not exactly designed for people with curves in mind, and I certainly had my share of them. My mom joked that the women in our family got in line twice when they were handing out hips and chests. I had a few extra pounds thrown in to keep them company.

Ninety percent of the time, I was cool with that. Dealing with airplane, theater, bus, and subway seats contributed to the other ten.

A woman about my mother's age moved into the spot next to me. To my relief her hips were half the size of mine, so I didn't have to worry about brushing up against her the whole flight. She barely acknowledged me, but I didn't care. I wasn't exactly in the mood for chitchat anyway. I reached into my backpack and pulled out my earbuds and phone.

Right before I put the phone on airplane mode, I made the mistake of checking GroupIt. It felt like someone stabbed me with an icicle when I saw my profile pic. I hadn't taken down the one of Zev and me. We were cute together, height difference and all. I just hit five feet while he was six four—although he was only six one when we started dating. And his look. I was a sucker for it. Nerdy hot. Lanky with shaggy dark-brown hair and black rectangular glasses. And Zev just always seemed at ease. It was reassuring.

Stop it, Sari. I didn't need to be thinking about his attributes. I switched my photo to one of me performing in the school talent show. Music was my true love. Zev had only been a distraction.

I grabbed the bag from Andrea's Bakery and pulled out the contents. Yes! Trina got me a do'wich. My favorite dessert in

the entire universe: a glazed donut with dark-chocolate ganache, sliced in half, with chocolate hazelnut mousse on the inside surrounded by crushed Oreo. Totally decadent.

The woman next to me gave me a judgy look.

I was not putting up with it. Not today. “What?” I asked, ready to fire back with a scathing retort to the predictable “should you really be eating that” comment. I mean hello, it was a donut sandwich. *Nobody* “should” be eating it. But what I put in my mouth was nobody’s business.

“Sorry,” she said, “I’ve never seen one of those. It looks amazing.”

Oh. Okay, I was jumping to conclusions, looking for a fight. Zev wasn’t there, so random strangers were bearing the brunt of it. Anger was the second stage of grief, after all. I just wanted to be at acceptance already.

“Take this,” I said, holding out half of my do’wich. It came precut.

She looked skeptical.

“Seriously,” I said, trying to show her I wasn’t a grouchy seat-mate. “My grandmother will shoot me if I show up having already eaten. You’ll be doing me a favor.”

She took it from me. *Good*. Nice deeds and acts of kindness would help me get rid of the anger. Well, maybe.

I went back to GroupIt and pulled up Zev’s page. I immediately unfriended him. Unfortunately, he kept all his pictures and posts public, so I could still see everything.

“Who’s that?” the woman next to me asked. “Boyfriend? He’s handsome. Kind eyes.”

More like deceiving ones.

Gorgeous, though. The hazel color always drew me in, but it

was really his smile and that little dimple just below his right eye and above the apple of his cheek that accompanied it that made me melt.

“He’s nobody,” I said, more trying to convince myself than her.

Only he wasn’t nobody. He was a guy who chose to go to Columbia next year instead of Penn just so he’d be closer to me. Why would he do that if he didn’t care? Maybe . . . maybe there was a chance for us.

I had to stop thinking like this. There was no going soft. Zev was bad news. I couldn’t trust him, and I valued myself more than staying with someone like that.

I just needed a reminder. I clicked on the pictures he was tagged in, so I could see him standing there, all cozy with Bethanne. The stabbing feeling inside me returned, but that was okay. I needed it. I needed to remember that he hurt me and I should hate him.

I wanted to hate her, too. To call her names, refer to her as a cross between a Muppet and a troll. But she wasn’t. She was beautiful. Tall, lithe. They made a striking couple. Yeah, Bethanne may have stolen my boyfriend, but this wasn’t on her. It was on Zev. *He* was the one I trusted. *He* was the one who broke his word. *He* was the one I counted on. If she could just take him away like that, I didn’t really want him anyway. At least that’s what I had to keep telling myself.

I put my earbuds in, turned on some Kevin Wayward, put my head back, and closed my eyes. Apparently, Zev never got over his first love. Hopefully I wouldn’t have the same problem.