



SOMEWHERE

ONLY

WE

KNOW

MAURENE GOO

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*In memory of my grandmother Swan Hee Goo,
who introduced me to all the great black-and-white romances.*

And for Christopher, who introduced me to the real thing.

*She went, ever singing,
In murmurs as soft as sleep;
The Earth seemed to love her,
And Heaven smiled above her,
As she lingered towards the deep.*

—by **JOHN KEATS PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY,**
“Arethusa”

FRIDAY

CHAPTER ONE

LUCKY

WHEN YOU HAVE A FACE THAT'S RECOGNIZABLE BY AN entire continent, you have zero room to make mistakes.

Especially onstage.

I gazed into the screaming crowd, lights blinding me and the sound of my voice faint through the headset. The nonstop roar made it impossible for me to hear my own voice.

Once during a performance, when I threw my body into the outstretched arms of my backup dancer, the tiny microphone had shifted under my curtain of hair, and my voice cracked during the most dramatic moment of my hit single “Heartbeat.”

It was the crack heard around Asia. Endless video loops of that moment were played on the Internet—some superimposed with cartoon rabbits and added screechy sound effects. My favorite one showed

an animated pane of glass shattering at the exact moment of the voice crack. It was so masterfully done, I laughed every time I watched it.

My management label didn't find it funny, though. They saw it as a lapse, an imperfection on an otherwise perfect K-pop star.

That lapse was what I was thinking about as I stood on a stage in Hong Kong. The final stop on my Asian tour.

There was something about the vibration in the air, though—the currents of excitement filling in the spaces between me and the crowd. It was why I did this. Whatever I had been feeling days or seconds before I stepped onstage—like worrying about messing up again—all of that disappeared when the crowd's energy slipped under my skin and into my bloodstream.

Ferocious adoration by way of osmosis.

My silver stiletto boots were planted firmly in a wide stance, and my feet were killing me as per usual. I had this recurring nightmare of my boots chasing me around a parking lot. They were human-sized and ran after me in never-ending circles. My managers insisted on me wearing the same boots when I performed—my “signature look.” Over-the-knee boots that stretched up the long expanse of my legs.

I was tall. Five foot ten—a veritable giant in Seoul. But there was no such thing as “too tall.”

As I went through the familiar steps of the choreography for “Heart-beat,” I managed to ignore the pain shooting up from the balls of my feet, the perpetual wedgie from my booty shorts, and the long strands of my pink wig sticking to the sweaty sides of my face.

Because I could do this choreography blindfolded, with two broken legs. I'd done this performance hundreds of times. At a certain point, my body moved on its own, as if on autopilot. Sometimes when

I finished performing “Heartbeat,” my head hanging at an odd angle because of how the dance ended, I would blink and wonder where I had been for the last three minutes and twenty-four seconds.

When my body took over like that, I knew I got the job done. I was rewarded for the absolute precision with which I executed my performances.

And today was no different. I finished the song and looked out into the crowd, the screams of the fans piercing through me as I returned to my body with a *whoosh*.

I was finally done with this tour.

Backstage, I was immediately surrounded by people: my makeup artist, stylist, and head of security. I plopped down into a chair while my wig was adjusted and teased and my face dabbed with oil papers.

“Don’t get rid of that dewy glow, though,” I cracked to Lonni, my makeup artist.

Lonni pursed her lips. “You’re seventeen, you don’t need to be dewier. Also? Oil slick is not ‘dewy.’”

Hmph. I let her continue mopping up my grease-face.

The back-up dancers stumbled backstage, a group of men and women in nondescript, sexy black outfits. I jumped up from my chair—making Lonni tsk in exasperation—and bent at the waist.

“Sugohaess-eoyo!” I said as I bowed. “Thank you so much.” I always made sure to thank them in both Korean and English because the dancers came from all over.

They had suffered with me during every single practice and stop and never got any of the glory. My appreciation was genuine, but it was also expected. K-pop stars always had to be gracious.

They bowed and thanked me in return, sweaty and exhausted. “You

killed it, Lucky,” one of the dancers, Jin, said with a wink. “You were almost able to keep up with me.”

I flushed. Jin was cute. He was also off-limits, as were most boys in my life. “I’ll land that turn one of these days,” I said with nervous laughter. They all shuffled off, going to their hotel together. I watched them with envy. Would they be hanging out in someone’s room, eating cup ramen together?

No matter. My feet were going to crumble into dust. I plopped back into the chair.

A hand patted my back. “Hey. You too. Sugohaess-eo,” my manager’s assistant, Ji-Yeon, said. Ji-Yeon always told me I did a good job after performances, like a proud but stern older sister. She was a tiny rabbit of a young woman, her full-cheeked face obscured by edgy blunt-cut bangs and giant glasses. But she was a powerhouse who got things done.

She scrolled through her ever-present phone. “We’re going to do a meet and greet for about an hour, so be sure to drink some water.”

“What? A meet and greet?” I had stopped doing those a couple years ago. They were more for beginner pop groups. Once you reached a certain level, it got unwieldy.

“Yeah. Since it’s your final show, we thought it would make a good photo op.” She handed me a bottle of Evian.

“So, I’m going to be here for another hour?” I tried to keep the whininess out of my voice.

“It’ll be fast. In and out. Do you not want to do it?” Ji-Yeon asked, peering over her glasses.

Don’t be lazy. I shook my head. “No, it’s fine.”

“Okay, good. Now, let’s get you out of this outfit and into something more comfortable for the fans,” Ji-Yeon said with a slight twitch

of her nose, making her glasses shift up and down on her pale face. “Except the shoes, of course. Gotta keep those on.”

Of course.

Minutes later, I was sitting behind a table signing albums, posters, whatever the fans had brought with them. And even though I had wanted to crawl into bed mere minutes before, the excitement of the fans zapped me with a familiar energy. Interaction with them was so rare lately.

“Can I get a selfie?” I looked at the girl with braces and a pixie cut and was about to say yes when my head bodyguard, Ren Chang, stepped in front of me and shook his head.

I threw the girl an apologetic look before the next fan approached me with a poster to sign.

In the early days, I had wanted to give a hug and speak to everyone who had waited in line to see me. But the bigger my fan base grew, the more nebulous and faceless they became. I battled the instinct to give canned and wooden responses. “Thank you for coming,” I said with a smile at the older man as I signed his poster with a fat black Sharpie.

He nodded, not making eye contact with me. But his hand grazed mine when I returned the poster, and he got in close. I could smell the meal he’d had, feel the heat of his body. Without missing a beat, Ren pushed him back with a firm hand. Again, I smiled apologetically at the man, even though my entire being recoiled. Most of my male fans were perfectly fine—but there was an overeager, sweaty subset that approached me with an intensity that frightened me. In those moments, I still had to act gracious. Always grateful for what I had.

The line was cut off eventually and I stood up and waved and bowed to the crying and cheering fans. They roared when I threw out a peace sign and I was whisked away through the back door.

The second I stepped outside, the paparazzi and fans descended. Camera flashes, voices yelling out my name, a crush of humanity. Ren and a few other bodyguards closed in around me like a protective membrane. When people pushed against them, the force made the circle of security undulate as we moved through the narrow alley toward the van.

“*Lucky, I love you!*” a girl screamed. My instinct was to look toward the voice, to say, “Thank you!” But doing that would open the floodgates. I learned my lesson a long time ago.

Instead, I looked down, watching the steps of Ren in front of me. Keeping my eyes on his firm footsteps slowed my racing heart, gave me focus. I liked having something to focus on. Otherwise, I would spiral into sheer panic at the thought of being trampled, enclosed by a million people who all wanted a piece of me.

My guards slowed down, and I glanced up. The car was near, but people were blocking it. The police had arrived and the energy was feeding on itself—that stage of mania where absolutely no one had control. Where grown men with huge arms fought back teenage girls with dazed expressions, helplessly watching as the girls climbed over them as if they were trees, feral and hungry.

My heart raced, my palms grew sweaty, and a wave of nausea came over me.

“Stay close,” Ren said in a low voice, stretching a thick arm across my torso.

“Like I have a choice?” I asked, my voice raspy from overuse. Feeling annoyed at Ren for no reason.

“Or you could get trampled,” he replied mildly. Ren was my dad’s age but had the fitness level of an Olympian. And the sense of humor of a Triscuit.

So I kept close—and within seconds, fresh air burst through the circle, breaking through the wall of bodies to reach me.

My heart resumed beating back to normal and I lifted my face up to the bright Hong Kong skyline. It flashed at me for a second before I was tucked safely into the van.

The first thing I did was take my freaking boots off.

CHAPTER TWO

JACK

I WATCHED THE PRESIDENT OF HONG KONG CONSTRUCTION Bank wax on about quarterlies or something equally boring until my eyes started to water with general eyeball ache. Human eyeballs were not meant to be fixed on one thing for this long. I glanced at the time on my phone. Oh my God. It had been thirty minutes? *Thirty minutes!* How long could a person talk about bank stuff for?

“Dad,” I whispered, nudging him with my elbow.

Keeping his dark eyes fixed on the guy talking on the ballroom stage, my dad didn’t respond. His square jaw was set stubbornly, and his meticulous hairline met the starched white collar of his shirt. Sitting up straight in his hotel banquet hall chair, an uncomfortable one covered with a cream-colored satin fabric.

I poked him until he finally looked over at me with exasperation, furrowing his brow. “What?” he whispered.

“At what point will this be . . . you know, fun?” I asked in a whisper.

“Kid, did you actually think a bank anniversary dinner would be fun?” he asked with a chuckle.

Good point. I looked around at the hotel ballroom full of banking people eating scallops in their formal wear. This was probably the most depressing Friday night of my life.

“Well, I thought the food would be good, at least,” I muttered.

“Hey, it’s free.” He glanced over, squinting at me under sparse, straight eyebrows. “You have to stay.”

I sighed and leaned back into my chair, smiling grimly at the other people at our table who had started to stare at us.

“You know, I had a very different gap year in mind. One that involved more backpacking, less ballrooms,” I said.

“No kidding.” His mouth twitched, holding back a smile.

When I announced that I had wanted to take a gap year in lieu of college, my parents had agreed to it—but only if I started interning at my dad’s bank the fall after my high school graduation. It was October now, and the part-time work was already killing me with boredom.

The man onstage finally wrapped up his speech, and everyone clapped politely. Thank God. People rushed the dessert table, and I was about to get up and grab some cake when my dad stopped me.

“Jack, I want you to meet a few people,” he said, waving a couple over. I groaned inwardly. He shot me a warning glance. “This internship isn’t about going through the motions. You’re supposed to be networking. Some of these people have great connections to the best colleges in the US.”

Great. I put on my finest schmoozing smile. It was a good smile.

A tall Asian woman wearing dark red lipstick reached her hand out

to me. “Jack! We’re so glad you were able to make the event tonight. Shows initiative.”

“Thank you, Caroline,” I said. Her eyebrows rose with pleasant surprise. I was good at remembering names. “But let’s be honest, I’m here for the cake.”

She threw her head back and laughed, as did her companion—a burly Indian man in an expensive suit. Nikhil, if I recalled correctly. “Make sure you try the tiramisu,” Nikhil said in a polished British accent. “So, how are you enjoying your gap year, Jack? I have fond memories of mine—backpacking through Europe and all that.”

I shot my dad a very deliberate look. *See? Backpacking! It’s a thing!*

But I said, “Oh, it’s been great. I think there’s so much you can learn outside of college, and I have the privilege of doing that.” It was a subtle in-real-life subtweet, and I’m sure my dad picked up on it.

Nikhil snapped his fingers then. “Oh! I have a question about cameras, Jack!”

I startled. “You do?”

“Yeah, I’ve seen you in the office with that fancy camera of yours,” he said. “You’re a camera guy, right? I need a recommendation for one.”

My dad shifted next to me, and tension crept up my back. “Oh, sure. What kind of camera are you looking for?”

Nikhil went on to describe what he wanted, and I tried to maintain a neutral expression. Yes, I knew a thing or two about cameras. I’d been hooked on photography for years, ever since I got my first fancy camera as a Christmas gift from my parents—a Canon Rebel that I took everywhere. As far as my parents were concerned, it was a hobby. They made that very clear when I went digging around into various art programs. They had reacted with extreme skepticism, pushing me toward business and engineering programs instead.

It had been what killed my enthusiasm for college. Why I had asked for the gap year. The idea of studying business or something instead of photography sent me into a literal panic.

The bigger thing I didn't tell my parents was this: I wasn't sure if I wanted to go to college. That college was something that felt far away now. So far away that I didn't know if it would ever be a part of my life. I saw where it got you. In a ballroom eating tiramisu while wearing an overpriced suit.

I glanced at my dad in that overpriced suit. This wasn't the life he wanted, either. My dad had studied creative writing in college. Even got an MFA. But life and circumstances had landed him here.

The conversation veered into financial stuff after I gave Nikhil some camera recommendations, so I made my way over to the dessert table. But everything looked unappetizing. My shirt collar was stifling, the buzz of the ballroom deafening. Existential dread filled me every moment I was here. Feeling time pass, feeling my actual cells grow older. I took a deep breath, my mind already whirring with how I could get out of this. Illness? My dad was a germophobe, so it might work.

I headed back to the table, sitting down next to my dad and coughing so hard he recoiled. "I don't feel good," I croaked out, laying it on thick.

"It's because you're perpetually cold," my dad scolded. "Do you even have heating in that hovel of yours?" My parents hated my apartment in Sheung Wan. As soon as I graduated, I had moved out with almost zero cash, and my current accommodations showed it. While my neighborhood was hip and fairly expensive, I had chosen one of the old walk-up apartments. They were tiny and usually above storefronts selling things like dried fish and medicinal herbs. But because

the area was up-and-coming, it was still more than I could afford on my own, and I needed a roommate. In a one-bedroom. It was stressful, having to make rent and scrape by. My parents refused to help and I would rather die of starvation than ask them, anyhow. I wasn't sure how much longer I could keep it up, though, and I was trying everything I could to avoid the undergrad experience my parents were hoping for me.

"We do have heating," I lied easily. "Anyway, my throat is starting to hurt, too."

Dad leveled a penetrating stare at me. "Are you pretending to be sick to get out of this?"

I sniffled a very realistic snuffle. "Why would I do that? You know I've been pumped. My first bank banquet. Thing."

While skepticism lined his face, I could sense his phobia overriding his dad BS meter. "All right, this is wrapping up anyway. Go home and get some rest. Do you need Mom to send you some food?"

Most easily won victory ever. "Nah, that's okay. I can grab congee around the corner from my place."

He made some mumbly comment about Korean porridge being better than congee before I slipped out of the ballroom and into the lobby of the fancy hotel.

My family wasn't from Hong Kong. Both my parents immigrated to the US from Korea when they were kids, and I was born and raised in Los Angeles. And then a year ago, my dad got this enticing offer at the bank that he couldn't turn down. Hong Kong being the financial and banking capital of Asia.

It was always about the money. My dad had put aside his dreams of writing the Great American Novel when my mom's family put

pressure on him to get a “real job.” Which led him to a bank. And then he had kids. Which further entrenched him in the banking world. And that’s how we landed here.

Two doormen opened the double doors for me and I ducked outside with a nod of thanks. I glanced up at the hotel from outside, a sleek, dizzying tower of glass surrounded by other tall skyscrapers. Many of them lit up with pink or green trim. A light fog had settled in from the water, giving everything a dreamy, futuristic feel. I rubbed my arms for warmth through my jacket. It was unseasonably cool. Summer heat usually lasted well into winter here.

Even though the homesickness almost killed me at first, I’d started to like it in Hong Kong. Sometimes you can go somewhere new and it feels weirdly familiar, as if you once saw and moved through it in a dream.

Not to romanticize it or anything.

I walked alongside the curved hotel driveway. Luxury cars lined the drive, and I narrowly missed getting hit by one of them—a black Escalade that screeched to a halt at the entrance. The valet guys sprinted to open the back-seat door, and a white guy in sunglasses with a shock of red hair got out.

I recognized that red hair. It was Teddy Slade, American action star. Holy crap, was he staying here? A preternatural sense of knowing someone was up to no good had me pause and follow him back into the lobby. He strode straight into an elevator being held open for him.

A woman in sunglasses and a dark coat stepped in right after.

The woman had the distinct profile of Hong Kong superstar Celeste Jiang. I couldn’t believe it. I immediately texted Trevor Nakamura: **I have eyes on Teddy Slade at the Skyloft Hotel. Celeste Jiang’s with him.**

Trevor was the editor-at-large for the biggest, sleaziest tabloid website in Hong Kong, Rumours.

And I worked for him.

He immediately texted back: **Everyone's been trying to catch this affair. Can you get a photo?**

For the past four months, I had been moonlighting for Trevor, getting him photos whenever I could. My parents, of course, had no idea I was doing this.

I texted back: **I can get it.** Then I watched the numbers on the elevator. They didn't stop until the penthouse floor.

Gotcha.

I received a warm welcome when I stepped up to the front desk. Fancy hotels treat everyone well because you never know who you are *really* talking to. I could have been Jackie Chan's son for all they knew.

"Good evening, sir, how may we help you?" A tidy young woman with a slight accent to her English greeted me. I assessed her—I knew at hotels like this they didn't let people go up into the hotel rooms if they weren't guests. There was a reason why celebrities stayed here. It was a small boutique hotel, and the staff probably recognized most of their guests. Everything was about discretion.

I shot her a quick grin and glanced down at her name tag. "Hi, Jessica. I'm meeting a friend who's staying here. Can I hang out to wait for him?" I let my gaze linger on hers for a beat too long.

She flushed and smiled back at me. "Oh, sure, the lobby by the elevators is probably best. That way your friend can spot you right away."

"Thanks, Jessica." I tapped her arm gently before walking into the lobby. Aware that she was still watching me, I sat down in one of the velvety blue-gray armchairs and pulled out my phone, as if texting my

friend. I was actually researching the hotel—was there more than one room on the penthouse floor?

Yes. There were two. Easy.

I gave it a few seconds before I peeked over at Jessica again, who was busy helping another guest. I took a quick look around the lobby—dimly lit and filled with sleek furniture. And flowers. A lot of flower arrangements.

The elevator dinged, and I glanced up. A white couple speaking loudly in Australian accents stepped off the elevator, and an Asian woman wearing a patterned scarf stepped on. I got up and swiped one of the large flower arrangements set on a coffee table and slipped into the elevator after the woman, moving back into the corner.

The arrangement was more massive than it had looked sitting on the table, and it practically smushed the lady in the elevator. I couldn't even see her. I heard her huff as she moved around me and selected her floor. Peeking behind the foliage, I saw "17" light up after she tapped a card against the sensor.

Right. You needed a stupid key card to select a floor. "Bloody hell. Can't reach for my key card with this monstrosity I have to deliver," I said in a practiced British accent usually sported by boarding school-bred Hong Kong kids. "Would you mind hitting the penthouse floor for me?"

The woman let out a long-suffering sigh, and I heard the swipe of her card before she pressed the button.

"Endless thanks," I said from behind the giant flamingo lilies and pink-streaked leaves. She didn't respond.

Cool, lady. Who cares if you might have let Korean Ted Bundy into a hotel?

The woman got off on her floor, and I let out a tortured breath. “Good night!” I said as she walked out. She still didn’t respond, and the doors closed behind her. “Good riddance.”

The elevator shot straight up to the penthouse floor.
Time to get that photo.

CHAPTER THREE

LUCKY

“DO WE SERIOUSLY HAVE TO WATCH THIS NOW?” I stared at my manager.

Joseph Yim’s gaze didn’t waver from mine. “You’re on *The Later Tonight Show* in three days. If there’s any room for improvement, we have to know now, don’t you think?”

His icy-blue button-up was crisp and tucked neatly into navy trousers. With his high cheekbones and steely eyes, Joseph was an imposing figure. He was only in his late twenties but was something of a wunderkind in the K-pop scene. So many number-one singles on the K-Pop Hot 100 came from his management label. People said that he had an uncanny knack for knowing who would be the next big thing. A jaeneung, a gift. And at the moment, his big hit maker was me.

If all went according to plan, in a few days I wouldn’t only be the reigning queen of K-pop. I’d be an international pop star. *The Later*

Tonight Show was supposed to launch me into a bona fide household name in America.

America. The final frontier. Not many K-pop artists had conquered it successfully. K-pop was indisputably gaining popularity in the US, but there was yet to be a female K-pop star who was on American mainstream radio next to Beyoncé or Taylor Swift.

At this very moment, I was the star with the chops. My name didn't disappoint—Joseph considered me his lucky charm. Not a small army of vixens who could dance in sync to lush harmonies. Or beautiful moppy-haired boys who danced with the athleticism of gymnasts while rapping.

It was me. Lucky of the one name. Lucky of the angelic voice that made Joseph's eyes tear up when I auditioned. Lucky of the "naturally" small face and wide eyes that launched a thousand beauty products. Lucky of the blessed height that made her tower over her girl-group counterparts. Lucky of the precise and girlish dance moves that never deviated. Lucky with the flawless English.

I was lightning in a bottle, and the management label was pinning all their American mainstream hopes and dreams on me.

No pressure or anything.

A couple hours after the concert, Joseph and Ji-Yeon were still annoyingly in my hotel room, a laptop propped up on the marble coffee table between us. Joseph wanted to rewatch my performance from today, and both he and Ji-Yeon were staring at me expectantly.

I could go to bed. I'd gotten far enough in my career that I had way more freedom than in the past. But their expectant gazes further inflated the balloon of pressure inside of me.

"Sure, let's do it," I said with a tight smile.

With a quick tap on the space bar, Ji-Yeon started the video.

From my reclined position on the plush sofa, I watched myself hop, spin, and gyrate across the stage—my hands precise in their undulating motions around my face as I sang. My voice was tinny through the lousy laptop speakers.

We watched the entire thing from beginning to end. I could barely pay attention, blinking to stay awake. At one point, the image of myself on the screen turned into a dancing hamburger. Mm. A hamburger.

At least I'd performed perfectly. A tiny burst of confetti went off in my head. Joyless and feeble. The inability to get excited made me feel guilty, and I straightened up.

The video ended, and Joseph clapped his hands. "Good girl," he said with a low chuckle. "This is why you're going to make it. You're reliable."

Reliable! Truly, music to an artist's ears. I coughed into my fist to squelch the bubble of laughter rising in my throat.

Joseph's head snapped up. "I have an idea." Oh, God, not another one. "Let's watch your very first performance of 'Heartbeat' to compare with today's." He grinned at me. "Play them side by side. To see how far you've come."

"Well, this is *my* idea of a smashing Friday night!" I declared. Although Joseph and Ji-Yeon were fluent in English, they didn't quite grasp the finer points of sarcasm.

Ji-Yeon knelt down and pulled up a tablet to prop up next to the laptop, perusing through YouTube until she found it.

The video was from two years ago. My hair had been dyed a light brown and cut into a wavy bob. That bob would be copied by thousands of teenage girls shortly after this performance aired. The first three bass notes signaled the beginning of the song, and the camera panned down from the glossy waves of my hair, swaying hips, and farther down down

down my legs. I was wearing flat black ankle boots back then. I liked those.

As the performance went on, I found myself leaning more forward on the sofa until I was literally on the edge of my seat. I couldn't help but notice the wideness of my smile, the buoyancy in my steps. The sparkle in my eyes. When I glanced over at today's performance playing simultaneously, I saw the vacant look in my eyes. Two dark pools of nothingness. I stared hard at the Lucky from two years ago.

At thirteen years old, after I auditioned at the LA satellite studio of my current K-pop management label, I moved from Los Angeles to Seoul, alone and six thousand miles away from my family, and was put into a training camp immediately. My managers waited a couple years until the plastic surgery—giving me natural-looking ssangkeopul, the double eyelids that had become so commonplace in South Korea that it was strange for any pop star not to have them. Then a discreet lil' nose sculpting. What people called the "K-pop combo."

It took about two years in a girl group, Hard Candy, before I shot to stardom. My managers plucked me out from the group to groom me into a solo artist. In the blink of an eye, I toppled every record, sold out every show, won every award you could win. And one of the keys to my success was that I had zero scandals. Not one photo of me drinking. Of a boyfriend. Of bad manners.

I was always humble, gracious, and contained.

Perfect.

And the media loved me for it. I was treated like some princess, protected fiercely by my public. The stories about me were always focused on my good deeds and success. In that order. Because my music wasn't particularly different—instead, it was the best version of

what was always popular: catchy, upbeat dance tunes paired with sweet, soulful ballads.

“See that?” Joseph said, pointing at old Lucky. “You messed up that step there. You’d never do that now. You should be pleased with how much you’ve improved.”

I didn’t feel pleased. I felt unsettled. I remembered old Lucky. The joy I felt in my performances. How excited I was before every show, every photo shoot, every single release. Back then, I *had* felt like an actual artist from the sheer joy of loving what I did. For being able to do it at all.

I thought I still felt that joy when onstage. But watching old Lucky side-by-side with current Lucky made the contrast crystal clear. Goodness.

There was just no comparison to old Lucky.

CHAPTER FOUR

JACK

BALANCING THE SAINT BERNARD-SIZED FLOWER arrangement in one arm, I pulled out my phone as I walked down the hallway, the sound of my footsteps completely swallowed by the plush carpeting.

A quick search on Teddy Slade: The movie he was shooting here in Hong Kong was called *Endless Night*. I dodged a fancy credenza in the hallway as I scrolled through the list of cast and crew. I locked in on one name.

Okay, there were two rooms on this floor. I had a fifty-fifty chance. If it wasn't one room, I'd try the other. I stood outside the first door and took a deep breath. I set the flowers down and shrugged off my suit jacket, rolling it into a ball and tossing it down the hall. Then I tucked my phone deep into the foliage until it was shrouded by the colorful leaves and flowers.

My white button-down was wrinkled and sloppy, but I tucked it into my black pants and hoped that this mutant flower arrangement would hide me. My black sneakers couldn't be helped.

I hoisted the flowers back into my arms with a groan, then knocked on the door—three strong, assured raps. The blood rushed to my head, the familiar adrenaline kicking in.

Four months ago, I had snuck into a VIP party to impress the girl I had a crush on, Courtney. We were at a restaurant and spotted a few celebrities being ushered upstairs. “Oh my *God*, I would *die* to go up there,” Courtney had said breathlessly, clutching my arm. Some caveman part of me puffed up, and I had taken the challenge.

Using some phony contact names that didn't exist, combined with dickish entitlement, I got us upstairs. And then managed to get Courtney close enough to her favorite actors to sneak a few photos.

A hand had grabbed me mid-photo. When I turned around, completely freaked out, a long-haired Asian guy was looking at me with a shrewd expression. “Hey kid, how did you get in here?”

I was ready to lie my ass off and run, but I hesitated when he grinned and said, “I know you snuck in.”

Something about that smile made me relax. “Oh, yeah?”

He nodded. “What if I paid you for those photos?”

Since then, I picked up freelance work for Trevor now and again. And lately, the assignments were more frequent. I was gaining his trust. It wasn't my dream job or anything, but I knew that the more I did it, the better the money would get. And it used, in some marginal way, my actual photography skills. Had to compose those shots of celebrities getting into cars *just right* and all.

A few seconds after I knocked on the hotel-room door, I heard some

shuffling on the other side. “What is it?” a gruff male voice called out from the other side.

“Flower delivery from Matthew Diaz.” The executive producer of *Endless Night*, according to the Internet. I spoke in the heavy non-descript Asian accent used by racist stereotype movie characters since forever. The less we were able to communicate, the better.

There was a low-voiced exchange. My arms started to tire from holding this monstrosity in a basket. Come on, be trusting and slightly stupid, Teddy.

The door opened and there was Teddy Slade in all his affair-having glory. Red hair disheveled with a furry chest peeking out from a loosely tied robe. He was shorter than me, but sturdy, like a man who often had to be on-screen intimidating criminals.

“Flowers from Matt?” he asked, one hand on the doorknob, obscuring my view of the penthouse. I could hear some music. Music with saxophones. Really?

I was hoping for a quick shot of some kind of physical evidence—women’s shoes that I could later trace to a photo from an event earlier today, anything. But first I had to get inside.

“Yes, sir. Please let me put on safe surface,” I said, already inching my way through the door. My accent was offensive to my own ears but I knew Teddy wouldn’t think twice about it. Most Westerners who visited Hong Kong spoke to me in slow, loud English, assuming I could barely understand. This assumption made people let their guard down, underestimating me.

“No, no, let me take them,” Teddy said, reaching for the flowers.

I sidestepped him. “Sir, no. It’s very heavy and delicate. Very rare flower from an ancient rain forest. It will injure if you try.” Gotta love saying “ancient” reverently with a fake Asian accent.

So I pushed forward, almost knocking Teddy over with the floppy leaves. I didn't know where I was going, trying to find any spot for this thing. As expected, the penthouse was huge, with a giant wall of windows showing off the dazzling skyline. When I turned to place the flowers on a side table, I almost fell on my face when I noticed Celeste Jiang sitting on a nearby sofa. Clad in an oversized T-shirt, drinking a glass of water. Glamorous, poised, and deathly hot.

Holy crap. This was better than I could have imagined. I slipped my hand in the flowers, feeling around for the phone. I had about five seconds before this got weird.

Teddy walked up behind me, and when I glanced up, I saw my own reflection in a huge mirror. Also reflected was Teddy Slade standing beside the flowers and Celeste Jiang sitting on the sofa.

My phone tilted up and I snapped a burst of photos.

"Okay, you need to leave now," Teddy declared, all irate bluster. I glanced at Celeste before I left, noticing her bemused expression.

I pocketed my phone and Celeste caught me doing it. Her heavy-lidded eyes flicked down toward my hand, and one corner of her mouth lifted. "You know you could ruin a lot of lives with that photo?" Her expression was neutral, the words said in a low and unhurried voice.

For a moment, I froze. I'd been yelled at, chased down streets, but this was the first time someone looked me in the eye and said something so . . . straightforward. Was she asking me not to publish the photo?

But then Teddy was standing over me, and I bolted out of there. "Have a nice night, Mr. and Mrs.!"

The door shut behind me forcefully, and my heart was pounding in my ears as I grabbed my blazer off the floor and flew toward the elevators.

You guys ruined your own lives, Celeste.

CHAPTER FIVE

LUCKY

“STRAIGHT TO BED TONIGHT. YOU ONLY HAVE A DAY OF practice before our flight to LA,” Ji-Yeon fussed as she tidied up the hotel room. Joseph had left for the night, and I was changing into pajamas.

“Yeah, yeah,” I said, pulling on my sweatpants.

Ji-Yeon tsked. “Don’t complain.”

“Okay, but can I *eat something* at least?” My stomach grumbled at the words. I’d subsisted on coconut water and granola bars today because of the hectic tour schedule.

Ji-Yeon leaned against a wall and squinted, thinking about it for a second. Thinking about whether or not I should *eat!* Finally, she nodded. “Okay, I think I remember seeing some juices and salads on the menu.”

I couldn’t reply because a cartoon hamburger was twerking in front

of Ji-Yeon's face. I would kill for In-N-Out right now. Sometimes the homesickness for LA hit me so hard. I pushed it down deep into the recesses of my rib cage like I always did. If I let it overpower me I would never be able to keep doing this. Homesickness, like so many other things, was a luxury I didn't have at the moment. It would have to be dealt with later. Always later.

Ji-Yeon ordered the food, then popped out into the hall to alert Ren to the coming room service. Ren usually stayed at my door all night. There were more security guards in the lobby and in the car, too, just in case.

It would seem over the top, except there was that time one of my *sasaeng* fans (superfans who were essentially stalkers) was waiting for me in the back of my car.

The Hong Kong skyline was colorful and dramatic and filled my hotel room, the wall of windows making me feel like I was floating in the sky. The buildings were massive and so close together that they looked like overlapping, neon-lit pieces of paper within reach. But when I moved closer to the windows to gaze at it, Ji-Yeon shut the curtains briskly. With finality. And even though I was so tired I could sleep for a hundred years, the old nighttime anxiety set in.

As a kid, I hated dusk and the impending rituals of bedtime—brushing my teeth, putting on pajamas, shutting off lights. A sense of dread always followed me as the day grew closer to ending.

“Here you go.” Ji-Yeon placed a small dish next to my bedside table. Two sleeping pills and one Ativan. The sleeping pills were standard, everyone took them. But the Ativan—that was top secret. Mental illness was still taboo in South Korea, and if anyone found out I was taking medication for anxiety, well . . .

K-POP PRINCESS POPPING PILLS

The Korean press would eat me alive. The rest of Asia would follow. And then my career would collapse into itself, like a star that finally gave in to gravity.

I scooped them up in my palm, my long peach nails scraping the plate, and tossed them back with some water.

After setting up my dinner of salad greens with a light olive oil dressing and a side of almonds, Ji-Yeon went into her own room off my suite. Although I coveted my privacy, I also had a terrible time falling asleep alone. Having Ji-Yeon close was comforting, and it was one of the few diva cards I pulled.

But, tonight, as I fretted about my impending American debut, I needed a little more comfort than usual.

I pushed my salad aside and FaceTimed my mom. It was early in the morning for my family, but they could deal. My parents always made time for my calls since they were so few and far between lately on my tour.

On the third ring, my mom answered—the screen dark and fuzzy for a moment before it adjusted on her face, eyes set far apart from her button nose, strands of wavy hair framing her smooth face.

She squinted into the screen. “Is something wrong?” My mom’s typical greeting.

“Hi, Umma. No, nothing’s wrong. I’m just calling,” I said, my voice choking up. It had been three weeks since we talked, and I hadn’t felt the distance until *right* this moment. Seeing and hearing my mom’s voice instantly stripped me bare of my pop star confidence. I was normal me again.

My dad’s face popped into the screen then, shoving hers out of the way. His salt-and-pepper hair was disheveled, and he pulled his

black-framed glasses on. “Oh! Why are you still awake?!” My dad always looked like a flustered professor at a wizarding school.

“It’s only like, ten o’clock here,” I said with a laugh, watching my parents jostle for prime screen space. “Did I wake you?”

My mom waved her hand dismissively. “Not me. I wake up earlier than your dad now.”

“Yah, in what world?” my dad said, mixing Korean and English as he always did. “Only this week because—”

“He’s watching that *Game of Thrones*,” my mom interrupted. “I don’t know how he can watch that before bed.” She shuddered. “Horrible.”

“You’re watching that?” I asked with my eyebrows raised. “Appa, that is like, so violent. Also, can you even follow the storyline?”

My mom burst out laughing and my dad pushed up his glasses in agitation. “Wow, wow. Okay, you think your appa is a total babo.” The Korean word for “fool” never failed to make me giggle.

“No, I don’t!” I protested. “It has so many characters and like, complicated fantasy world-building—” I stopped talking when a puff of cream with black eyes suddenly obscured the screen. Fern, their Pomeranian. She yelped loudly, and then it was chaos for a few seconds as my mom tried to hold her up to the phone while in selfie mode. Her nose pushed into the camera and I started laughing when I heard a voice screech in the background.

“Oh my *God!* Why are you guys being so loud this early?”

Ah, the unmistakable sounds of an irate fifteen-year-old.

“Your sister’s on the phone! Say hi!” my dad said, moving the phone around until I was staring at my sister’s face. It was like mine, but not—fuller cheeks, wider mouth, bigger eyes.

“Hey, Vivian,” I said.

“Hi,” she muttered. “I hate FaceTime.”

“What are you up to today?” I asked, fully knowing what her answer would be.

“Nothing.” She avoided looking at me, but I saw her shoot me a furtive glance. “Did you microblade?”

I touched my naturally full eyebrow. “No.”

“Hm. Looks weird.”

Nothing like a younger sister to bring you down a peg.

My parents interjected, talking about their plans for the weekend. The regularness of it was so nice—a conversation separate from my job, my schedule, my fans.

When I yawned, my mom frowned. “Hey, you should go to sleep now. You had a long tour and now you have to prepare for *The Later Tonight Show*, right?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Monday. You’re going to come watch, right?” They would be waiting for me in the greenroom right after the taping.

“Of course!” my dad said. “We’ll make sure you eat well so you have lots of energy.”

The worried expressions that crossed their faces made me teary again. I pasted on a bright smile. “Oh, I’ve been eating *so well* on this tour. A lot of dumplings and noodles and stuff.”

They nodded, pleased to hear it. It was a lie, of course. One of many to keep my parents from freaking out. If they knew how little I ate and slept—well, I wouldn’t be able to do this. I knew the sacrifices my family was making to get me here. The least I could do was keep them from worrying about me.

We hung up and the homesickness still weighed me down. Or was that the sleeping pills? My limbs felt heavy, but my mind was racing.

I crawled into bed without washing my face or brushing my teeth, like a monster, the fluffy white comforter swallowing me up. The luxurious sheets slid against me, cool on my cozy pajamas. I was dressed warmly for bed, a habit I picked up while living in Korea.

The first night I spent at the training room dorms, I had gone to bed in a tank top and underwear and the other girls had ridiculed me within an inch of my life. Like, calm down, it's just undies. Or as I had called them, ppanseuh, the word my parents had used for underwear. Another faux pas that made my Americanness more clear. Apparently that was an old-fashioned Japanese word that only grannies used. The cool kids said "paenti." Like panty. Straight-up panty, a word that gave me the creeps. And no one slept in *just* their paenties.

You know, my boots were annoying the heck out of me lately. It's like, don't let Lucky wear flat shoes, God forbid she's only five-ten! FIVE! TEN! THAT! IS! TALL!

When I thought in all caps, the pills were definitely kicking in. I tossed around in bed, punching my pillow to fluff it up some more. But whether it was from hunger or annoyance or what, I couldn't fall asleep for the life of me. I had an early wake-up call for practice. I couldn't flub on *The Later Tonight Show*, no sirree.

Mm. Hamburgers.

That was the problem. I was still freaking hungry. I kicked off my blankets and cracked open my suitcase. I kept my thermal shirt on but wriggled out of my sweatpants and into a pair of ripped black jeans. I pulled on my favorite baseball cap—a plain olive-green one that drew absolutely no attention to itself. My pink wig was being carefully guarded by Ji-Yeon and off my head, thank God. Then I threw on a camel-colored trench and looked for my sneakers but couldn't find them anywhere.

“Note to self,” I mumbled. “Someone is stealing my shoes.” I glanced down at the white hotel slippers by the bed. Those would do.

I was about to open the door and breeze outta there when I realized who was outside. *REN!* I shook my fist at the door and bent my knees in dismay.

Then I straightened up, my hair whipping back from the swift movement. No, I could do this. I was smart. Everyone said so, even if it was because my management label claimed I got into Harvard.

HA HA HA.

Yeah, cool, I was applying to Harvard while subsisting on sweet potatoes and learning how to pirouette counterclockwise.

Okay. Think, Lucky. Think.

After a second, I rapped on the door. “Ren?” I called out in a thin, pathetic voice.

“Yes? Everything okay?” Ren’s voice rumbled through the door.

“Nothing huge, but, uh . . . Ji-Yeon’s sleeping and um, well. I need medicine. For my period cramps.”

I could feel the revulsion through the heavy door. “Sorry,” I added sweetly.

“What kind do you need?” he asked, all huff and puff and gruff.

“Midol. Or the Chinese equivalent. Tell them the problem, they should know at the front desk.”

I heard him grumbling and waited until the heavy footsteps receded. A few seconds after that, I cracked the door open to peer down the hallway. I was on the penthouse floor for privacy and there wasn’t a soul in sight.

Closing the door gently behind me, I sped down the corridor, switching from a run to a creeping gait, to a run again. What was the best way to sneak?

The elevators were at the end of the hall, and there was one open and waiting for me. I ran inside and hit the button that said “1,” feeling myself relax, when a hand gripped between the doors and pushed them open. Shoot. I stepped back into the corner and hid my face.

“Thanks,” a guy’s voice said. I glanced up. It was some young Asian guy clutching a jacket. I shoved myself farther into the corner, as far away from him as possible. But he wasn’t paying attention to me.

The dude was grinning and pulling on a wrinkled blazer. Then he untucked his shirt and fluffed up his hair.

I couldn’t help but look at him. What a weirdo. Cute weirdo. Incredible hair. Tall. Broad shoulders coupled with long limbs. But totally giving off the strangest vibes. A kind of manic euphoria. I inched closer to the wall when he started chuckling as he looked through his phone. Okay, sir.

I tried to calm my racing heart, praying for no more passengers. Luckily, there weren’t any, and I barely breathed until the elevator stopped on the first floor.

When I stepped out, I was in a carpeted hallway, not the lobby. I glanced back at the elevator in confusion.

“If you’re looking for the ground floor, that’s level ‘G,’” the guy said, barely looking up from his phone.

With as much pride as I could muster, I said, “No, this is it,” and strutted away. Despite not knowing where the heck I was. In hotel-room slippers.

Hotels. I knew hotels. I would go in the lobby and ask, low-key style, where the best burger was. So I took the stairs one flight down.

Piece o’ cake! I got this! I stepped in rhythm to my cheerleading. *This is nothing. Remember that week when you slept for eight hours total and*

had to be hospitalized for dehydration during the MTV Asia Awards? This sneaking around is freaking nothing!

The impeccably designed lobby was no-frills. My managers always booked me in discreet boutique hotels, hoping they would be better hideouts than big showy ones.

Two of my security guards were chatting idly by the valet stand and I hid behind a giant potted palm next to the front desk.

“Hi, there,” I greeted the front desk staff with what I hoped was a chill, very normal voice. “Would you mind pointing me to the nearest delicious hamburger?”

One of the young men behind the counter smiled serenely. “Of course, miss, there’s an American-style restaurant in the mall that is connected to the hotel.” His head was turned in the direction of the door but then he slowly looked back at me, recognition dawning on his face.

Blast. Even without the pink hair, I might be recognizable. I lowered my cap. “Thank you very much!” I called out over my shoulder as I slipped through the glass double doors into the mall.

Hong Kong malls were no joke. This one was a giant, endless maze encased in glass and light gray granite, with infinity floors and sculptural light fixtures shining everywhere.

I stood frozen in place as I found myself surrounded by people. Mostly young people. What was everyone doing out this late at a mall? Looking around, I saw a few bars and posh lounges open. A city that never slept.

And I didn’t know if it was the anxiety meds or what, but the usual panic that came over me in large crowds didn’t surface.

Maybe it was also because visions of hamburgers still danced in my head. So I kept walking, keeping my head down and the collar on

my trench popped up. Was this more or less conspicuous? I felt like the freaking Pink Panther.

I reached a mall directory and stared at it. What in Sam Hill was this? Everything was digital. I touched the screen a few times, but the thinking required to figure this out was going to melt my face off.

All right, Lucky. Follow your nose. Yeah, great plan. I had a very sensitive nose.

The mall was endless. I walked by luxury store after luxury store. And fancy restaurants, but nothing that looked like it would promise a good, greasy burger. A few minutes later I ended up near some escalators leading out of the subway station. Navigating a Hong Kong mall while fighting against sleep and anxiety medication was a grand idea. My head felt a bit woozy, and things started to blur together into soft lights.

Trying to orient myself in this state, I missed the giant group of people coming out of the station and was swept up into the crowd.

Worried about being recognized, I kept in step with everyone until I felt a rush of cool air.

When the crowd dispersed, I found myself standing outside on the streets of Hong Kong. Alone.