

ONE

RUBEN

Almost plummeting to my death before a stadium full of screaming people is a warning sign, in an endless parade of warning signs lately, that I need more sleep.

We're performing the last concert for the American leg of our Months by Years tour when it happens. I'm about fifteen feet above the stage, on a raised platform illuminated to look like a city skyline. It's time to gracefully lower ourselves to sit on the edge to croon the start of our last song, "His, Yours, Ours," but instead of gracefully lowering myself, I overshoot my step, overcorrect, then start lurching over the edge.

Before I can lean too far into thin air, a hand clasps my shoulder and steadies me. Zach Knight, one of the other three members of Saturday. His hazel eyes widen the tiniest bit, but otherwise he acts unruffled. *Nothing to see here.*

I don't have the luxury of pausing to acknowledge or thank him, because stage smoke—intended to represent either clouds or city pollution, I never did figure it out—is engulfing us, and the opening chords of the song have started. Zach keeps his hand on my shoulder while he sings, as though it was all part of the choreography, and I lean into my off-balance pose, totally collected. At least, outwardly.

2 SOPHIE GONZALES & CALE DIETRICH

After twenty-seven and a half consecutive shows this year alone, this isn't exactly the first time one of us has had to smoothly cover up a trip or choreo mistake. It *is* the first time one of those mistakes almost caused me to plunge fifteen feet onto solid ground, though, and my heart's probably never pounded *quite* this hard, but we're a show.

To be clear: we aren't *giving* a show: we *are* the show. And the show doesn't take two minutes to compose itself after almost breaking its neck.

The show is suave, and in control, and it meant to do that.

When Zach's lines are over, he gives my shoulder a quick squeeze—the only acknowledgment the whole ordeal is likely to get for now—then drops his hand while Jon Braxton chimes in for his verse. Jon always has the most solo parts. I guess that's what you get when your dad also happens to be the manager of your band. We don't really have a leader, but if we did, it would be Jon. When we have eyes on us, anyway.

By the time Jon's finished and it's my turn to sing the song's bridge, my breathing's more or less steady again. Not that it matters—every song, without fail, I get given the simplest solos without a high note in sight. Frankly, I could pull them off with a sock stuffed in my mouth. They don't care that I have the highest range out of all four of us. For reasons they'll never care to explain to me, they prefer me bland. "They" being our management team and, to a lesser extent, our record label—Chorus Management and Galactic Records.

And god forbid I push against those cramped boundaries with a vocal run or tempo change. We're meant to sound just like we do on the master recording. Planned, packaged, and neatly presented.

Still, inhibited vocals or not, the crowd seems to explode with energy when I sing—the blinding camera flashes that dot

IF THIS GETS OUT 3

the vast blanket of the crowd become frenzied, the technicolor glowsticks are waved with more abandon, and the hundreds of MARRY ME, RUBEN MONTEZ posters are raised up higher. It's only my perception, I'm sure, but when I'm singing solo, everything locks into place. It's just me and the crowd, vibrating at exactly the same frequency.

Right now, I could stand here forever, singing the same, safe line on repeat, hearing the same screams, seeing the same signs, and forever would feel like a moment.

Then Angel Phan takes the song's pre-chorus line in his husky, breathy tone, the backing music drops to a whisper, and the stage is plunged into darkness. Like we've done dozens of times before, we get up in unison and stand on our assigned glow-in-the-dark X's as the skyline platform is lowered back down to the stage. As soon as I step off and my feet are back on level ground, I relax.

It's short-lived. Suddenly, laser lights rip through the darkness as the chorus instrumental, with its upbeat tempo change, booms. They illuminate us and the audience in crisscrossing lines of fluorescent green and blue, and we launch into the chorus half-dazzled. In a cruel joke to us, this final song has the most demanding hip-hop-inspired choreo of the night, which we're expected to nail while also holding a four-part harmony. I was in shape to begin with, pre-tour, and it still took me two weeks of singing on the treadmill last year to get my lung capacity up enough to pull this one off.

We make it look easy, though. We know each other to our bones. Even though I'm not looking at them, I know what they're all doing.

Zach's got his serious-face on—even after all these years he gets nervous during the more intense choreo—and shifts straight into concentration mode.

Jon's closing his eyes for half the chorus—his dad's always

4 SOPHIE GONZALES & CALE DIETRICH

lecturing him for that, but Jon can't help getting lost in the emotion of everything.

As for Angel, I'd bet anything I own he's eye-fucking the audience, adding in little pelvic-pop movements and half-kicks at the end of his steps, even though he's not allowed to. Our choreographer, Valeria, is constantly calling him out in our post-show notes meetings for that. "You're standing out too much," she says. But we all know the real problem is that our management team has spent two years branding him as the virginal, innocent guy girls would want to take home to their parents, when really he's anything but.

After the chorus, we move into our next positions, and I catch a glimpse of Zach. His chestnut-brown hair is plastered to his forehead with sweat. They have me and Zach both in jackets, a bomber for me and leather for him. Let me tell you, with the lights bearing down on us and the smoke clogging the air and the body heat from the audience packed into the enclosed stadium, it's over a hundred degrees up here at the best of times. It's a miracle our onstage mishaps haven't included heatstroke yet.

Zach catches my gaze and shoots me a brief smile before turning back to the audience. I realize I'm staring, and I quickly tear my eyes away. In my defense, our hair and makeup artist, Penny, a curvy woman in her mid-twenties, has him growing his hair out for this tour, and it's the kind of length that's *made* to scream sex when it's slick with sweat. I'm only noticing what most of the audience has already noticed. In fact, the only one who *doesn't* seem to notice how good Zach looks is Zach.

I let my mind go blank and allow the music to sweep me into autopilot, spinning and stepping and jumping in a dance my body knows by heart. The song finishes, the lights sign off in a blaze of orange and yellow, and we freeze, panting, as

IF THIS GETS OUT 5

the crowd leaps to their feet. Zach takes the chance to push his damp hair off his forehead, tipping his head back as he does so to expose his throat.

Shit. I'm staring again.

I force myself to focus on Jon making his way center stage, where he directs the crowd to thank the musicians, and the security team, and the sound and lighting team. Then it's *Thank you so much, Orlando, we've been Saturday, good night!* and we're waving, and the cheering is so loud it drowns itself out into near silence, and we're jogging backstage.

And that's it. The American leg of the Months by Years tour is done, just like that.

Erin, a tall woman in her forties with a rounded figure and long auburn hair, meets us as we step off the stage onto the gray concrete of the backstage area. "Congratulations, guys!" she says in her booming voice, holding a hand up to high-five us all in turn. "I am so proud of you! It's a *wrap!*"

As our tour manager, Erin's kind of the stand-in for our absent parents when we're on the road. She's responsible for our schedule, our rules, disciplining us, congratulating us, remembering our birthdays and allergies, and making sure we're where we're supposed to be all day, every day.

I like Erin enough as a person, but, as with all Chorus Management employees, I never let my guard down around her completely. Chorus Management might be the team that markets, promotes, and organizes us, but they're also the team that molded us into the shape we take today. The team that strictly enforces who we speak to, and what we say, and what freedoms we have.

As far as freedom goes, there isn't a whole lot of it. So, I try not to give them reasons to limit it further.

We all do.

Zach falls into step beside me as we pass various stage

6 SOPHIE GONZALES & CALE DIETRICH

crew. His hair's fought its way free again, hanging in unruly waves over his still-damp forehead. "Are you okay?" he asks beneath his breath.

My cheeks warm. I'd forgotten about slipping. "Yeah, fine, I don't think anyone noticed," I whisper.

"Who cares if people noticed, I just wanna know you're okay."

"Yes, forget about it."

"Why wouldn't he be okay?" Angel asks, forcing his way between us and throwing his arms around each of our shoulders. Given Angel's half a head shorter than me, while Zach clears six feet, this isn't an easy task for him. "We're done. We're going *home tomorrow!*"

"For four days," Jon says wryly as he falls into step with us.

"Uh-huh, thank you, Captain Obvious, I can count," Angel says, side-eyeing Jon. "A, I'll take the four days of downtime if I can get them, and B, within those four days will be the biggest event of your lives."

"Oh, is your birthday party bigger than the Grammys, now?" I ask.

"And the Billboard Music Awards?" Zach adds, throwing me a smirk.

"Both," Angel says. "There's gonna be peacocks."

Jon snorts, and wipes the grin off his face when Angel shoots daggers at him. "I can still withdraw your invitation," Angel says.

"No, please, I can't miss the *peacocks*." Jon flips around so he's walking backward, clasping his hands together toward Angel.

"Thin. Ice. Braxton."

We reach the dressing rooms, where our team is waiting to undress us. Surrounding us are four portable clothes racks, and as we're systematically stripped, the clothes get

IF THIS GETS OUT 7

tagged and placed in the right order on the hangers to be dry-cleaned. It's on them to keep meticulous track of the dozens and dozens of outfits, which of the four of us wears what outfit, and when. They make their jobs look as easy and seamless as we do ours, but I don't envy them the headache.

As someone who grew up performing in musical theater, I'm used to stripping off costumes after a show. The difference here is that while we're on tour, it's out of one costume and into another: we don't get to dress ourselves anytime a camera can see us. Chorus Management chose our roles years ago. When our stylists aren't juggling the conveyor belt of ensembles for the shows, they're compiling and purchasing casual outfits for us to keep us on-brand whenever we're on duty. And we're always on duty.

Essentially, our clothes—our costumes—tell the story of our personalities. Just not our real ones.

Zach's something of a bad boy: leather and boots and ripped jeans and as much black as they can cover him in. Angel's the fun, innocent goof, which means lots of color and prints, and nothing too tight-fitting or remotely sexy—much to his chagrin. Jon's the charismatic womanizer, so the golden rule of dressing him is *show off those muscles on pain of death*.

As for me, I'm the inoffensive one with the pretty face, approachable, safe, and unremarkable. Most of my wardrobe is filled with crew-neck sweaters and cashmere in warm neutrals designed to make me seem soft and huggable. And, of course, there's no point looking safe and unremarkable if you don't act it, so my guidelines are clear. No mention of my sexuality in interviews, no showing off onstage, no strong opinions, and *definitely* no public boyfriends. I'm the blank canvas that fans can paint their dream personality onto. The wild card option for those whose tastes weren't satisfied by the other three.

8 SOPHIE GONZALES & CALE DIETRICH

The opposite of everything I was raised to be.

As curated as we are, though, the interesting thing is our most devoted fans often see straight through it. The ones who watch and consume everything involving the four of us. I've seen them describe our personalities online in a way that's much closer to the truth—referring to a sensitive, sweet Zach, or a type-A, cautious Jon. A wild, hilarious Angel, or a perfectionist, darkly sarcastic me. I've seen them get into arguments with other fans online, as both sides insist they know the *real* us. None of them know the real us, of course, because they don't *know* us at all, no matter how much they wish they did. But some see us more clearly. They see us, and they stay. They *see* us, and yet they seem to like us more than anyone does.

Go figure.

Erin's scrolling through her iPad as we're undressed, a steady anchor in the middle of organized chaos. "Once everyone's ready, I want to meet with you all about next week," she says. We groan in unison, and Zach initiates a competition with me over who can groan the loudest. The winner is unclear, because Erin shushes us before either of us reaches our max volume. "I *know*, I know," she says. "You're all tired—"

"We're zombies," Angel corrects, before taking the lid off a water bottle with his teeth.

"Yeah, Ruben almost *fainted*," Zach pipes up, and I kick his shin as Erin looks at me sharply.

"I didn't faint, I just . . . got clumsy."

"It'll only be a few minutes," Erin says. "Ten, tops."

Jon hands his button-down gray shirt to our stylist, Viktor, revealing a broad, hairless chest that, like the other two's, is almost as familiar to me as my own by now. While Jon's standing topless, Angel shakes his water bottle to spray icy cold water on him. Jon gasps and yelps, jumping on the spot while Zach cackles. "Angel! You *suck*, *why*?"

IF THIS GETS OUT 9

“Bored.”

“Are you *kidding me?*”

Zach, still laughing, tosses Jon a hand towel, which he rubs over his brown skin to mop up some of the water, muttering to himself. Even though Jon’s undeniably handsome, and is standing only feet away from me, half-naked and dripping, I’m not especially distracted by it. Stripping around each other is a daily routine for the four of us, so it takes more than a good-looking guy with a six-pack and no shirt on to catch me off guard these days.

Of course, when Zach moves to take off his T-shirt, I make sure I’m looking anywhere *but* at him, just like I’ve done every concert for the last few months now. Because whatever indefinable “more” it takes to spark my attention, Zach’s got it in spades, and as hard as I try to kill this feeling, I can’t quite shut it off. In other words, until I manage to squash whatever practical joke my brain’s playing on me lately, I have to treat a shirtless Zach like Medusa. No looking, on pain of death.

Angel has his back to me, so I snatch up the nearest water bottle and splash it over his head, soaking his black hair and sagging it into limp tendrils. He gasps and whips around. “Betrayal,” he declares. I run to crouch behind Zach, who’s got his shirt on now, and is therefore safe to acknowledge again.

“Guys, guys,” Penny says, darting in front of the table housing her vast makeup kit like a desperate mother throwing her body in front of her only child. “No water fights around the makeup. Enough. Ruben, you need a makeup wipe, come on.”

Angel lowers his water bottle and holds up his hands in submission, then uses one to push his dripping hair out of his face. I emerge from behind Zach, and, with a flick of his wrist, Angel splashes water my way. It doesn’t quite make it.

10 SOPHIE GONZALES & CALE DIETRICH

I dodge past him to take a handful of wipes and start on my eyes first. Over the last couple years, our eye makeup has gotten less and less subtle, to the point where neutral-but-obvious eye makeup has become part of our brand. These days, Penny goes through about one brown eyeliner per week. She has a way of smoking out the liner with soft shadows and a light touch to make our eyes pop. I tried to replicate it once and I ended up looking like I was auditioning for a *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie. Since then, I've left the liner to her.

Finally, fresh-faced and clean-clothed, we traipse into the green room after Erin. I throw myself onto the couch, lay my head on the armrest, and close my eyes, while Zach, who sits in the armchair next to me, amuses himself by rhythmically poking my head. I hide my smile behind the armrest and wave a hand in his general direction to halfheartedly buzz him off as Angel and Jon cram in beside me.

Angel kicks at my feet until I lower them to give him more space, forcing me to sit up straight where Zach can't reach me anymore. I stop myself from giving Angel a petty nudge back in revenge, but only barely. Mostly because I don't have the energy for it.

Angel wasn't kidding when he said we're zombies. We haven't had a break in weeks. Every single day has been the same. An early start, followed by publicity events—interviews, TV show appearances, waving to crowds from building windows like we're the freaking royal family or something—followed by dinner, then warm-ups and getting ready, a concert, getting un-ready, then either going to our hotel rooms or straight to a private jet to get flown to the next state to do it all again.

But not tomorrow. Tomorrow, we get to go home.

Personally, I'm not exactly overflowing with anticipation—my mom's passive-aggressive on her best days and garden-variety aggressive on her worst, and Dad might as well live at

work. I'm looking forward to the chance to sleep past sunrise, though.

"Okay," Erin says, and I open my eyes, but don't lift my head. "I wanted to gather you here to make sure we're all on the same page for next week, and to give you the chance to ask last-minute questions while we're together."

Next week. Next week we're getting on a plane and kissing the home of the brave goodbye for months while we go on the international leg of the tour. First stop, London.

I've never left the country before. Over the past couple years, I've gotten used to leaving my parents for weeks—and sometimes months—at a time, but it's never felt as serious as this. Until now, I've always been in the same country as them. Even though I've technically been *farther* from them before in terms of flight times, somehow, flying to Europe feels bigger. Honestly, it's all kind of overwhelming to think about, and I haven't given myself the chance to dwell on it yet. It's been easier to think of it as something that future-me would face.

Problem is, future-me is about to become present-me.

I knew there was a flaw in the plan.

I raise a sleepy hand as I remember there is *one* question I have. Well, two. "Can I triple-clarify you're not surprising me with tickets to a West End show?" I ask.

"Wouldn't be a very good surprise if she told you," Jon points out.

"No, it wouldn't," Erin says. "But just so you don't get your hopes up, I can confirm we definitely don't have time for a West End show. Sorry, Ruben."

I can't muster up the energy to be disappointed. "I figured. But you said we might be able to check out the Burg-theater in Vienna . . . ?"

Erin smiles. "I did, and we will. I promise, I've made

12 SOPHIE GONZALES & CALE DIETRICH

a point of getting it on our itinerary. We should be able to spare an hour.”

I perk up at this. My family is made up of theater geeks. I was raised on Andrew Lloyd Webber and bred on Sondheim. My mom threw me into private singing lessons to perfect my vibrato and belt in kindergarten, and I started touring with professional theater companies in elementary school. I’ve seen everything America has to offer in terms of musical theater history, but I can’t go to Europe without at least doing *something* touristy, and I’ve always been in love with the vibe and history of the Burgtheater. That, and we don’t have time to visit the Globe, to my disgust.

Jon, who’s the only one of us not slumping in his seat, speaks up now. “We’re still visiting the Vatican, right?”

“Yes, absolutely.”

Because of course, we couldn’t put aside four hours for a West End show, but we’re spending a whole morning at the Vatican for Jon. It’s not surprising, I guess: Jon’s super Catholic, like his mom, and even though his dad, Geoff Braxton, isn’t, Geoff’s obviously going to make sure we have time to do whatever’s important to Jon. It’s how things have always been.

Erin nods at Angel. “Anything you need to clarify, hon?”

Angel pretends to think about it. “Um, is the drinking age in London still eighteen?”

She sighs. “Yes.”

Angel grins. “No further questions, Your Honor.”

I lift my head to look at Zach, who’s resting his chin on his palm. “You’re quiet,” I say.

“Hmm?” He blinks. “Oh, no, I’m good. No questions. Theaters and drinking and, um . . . Jesus . . . all sound good.”

“Bedtime, huh?” I ask, and he nods, his eyes heavy-lidded.

Erin takes the hint. “Okay. The minibus’s out front. Email

IF THIS GETS OUT 13

me or text if you have any questions, otherwise I'll see you bright and early on Sunday.”

We all scramble to get out of there before Erin remembers any more items on the agenda. “I know all of you follow the law and don't drink underage!” she calls to our backs. “But just remember hangovers and transatlantic flights don't mix, all right?”

Zach and I take the back seat in the minibus, while Angel and Jon sit in front of us, in separate seats. Usually we're chatty on the way back to our hotel, but today I'm a special kind of tired. Like I've just finished running a marathon: the final reserve of energy used to propel me over the finish line finally exhausted. We haven't had four whole days off in . . . a really fucking long time.

Even though our hotel's barely five minutes away in night traffic, Angel curls up and naps on his seat, and Jon puts his headphones on to wind down with some music.

Essentially alone, I glance at Zach. “I can't believe it's over,” I say.

Zach raises an eyebrow. “We've still got all of Europe left.”

When Zach whispers, his voice barely changes. That's how soft-spoken he is. His voice is a fawn's pelt. A soft bed of moss. You could fall asleep to its lull.

“True. It feels different, though.”

“It'll be the new normal in no time.”

“I guess. Like how all this”—I wave a hand around vaguely—“feels normal now.”

“Right.”

“That's kind of a depressing thought.”

He tips his head back, exposing his neck. “What?”

“That it doesn't matter how big or exciting something is, it just becomes average after a while.”

14 SOPHIE GONZALES & CALE DIETRICH

The minibus goes over a bump, and Angel snuffles as he's jolted. How is it possible he's already asleep?

Zach considers this, pensive, then gives a surprised "hmm" of agreement. It's never failed to amuse me that Chorus Management *insists* on branding Zach as the dark, brooding type with a bit of an edge to him, when his real personality couldn't be further from it. Zach isn't quiet because he's brooding or tortured. He's just thoughtful, and careful—the type to evaluate what you say for a beat too long while he decides what answer you most want to hear. He might not be the type to dominate a conversation or enthusiastically work the room, but he's dark in approximately the same way a puppy is dark. Whatever the media may claim to the contrary at our publicity manager David's behest.

He puts his feet up on the back of Jon's seat, his knees against his face. Somewhere in the back of my mind, a voice tells me that if the minibus crashed, his legs would drive right through his head. The concern is going to keep niggling at me if I try to ignore it, so I place my hand on his shins and gently press his legs back down. He gives me a crooked half-smile, and grudgingly obeys. "The canals in Amsterdam," he says out of nowhere.

"The Alps in Switzerland. I love Mad Libs!"

"No." He elbows me in the side. "That's what I want to see. You guys all have your things, and I didn't want to say it in front of everyone, but if I get to do anything over there, I hope it's that. Just . . . sit by the canals for a while."

"Why didn't you want to say it in front of everyone? It's not exactly scandalous. If you'd said the red-light district, maybe . . ."

"Oh, I wanna do that, too," he jokes.

"Naturally."

His grin fades, and he presses the toe of his shoe against

the seat in front of him again. “It’s stupid. Just, that’s where my dad proposed to my mom. I want to see what it was like. I know it won’t magically bring them back together or anything, I just . . . I dunno.”

“It’s not stupid,” I say. “We’ll make sure we do it.”

The smile returns. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. I mean, we’re letting Angel loose in Europe, so I’m sure Erin’s scheduled in some blocks to go to the police station at least twice. If we’re making time for that, we can make time for the canals.”

“I can *hear you*,” Angel grumbles in a muffled voice.

I kick his seat in response, and he yelps in protest.

Angel’s the kind of person who has no business being called Angel. In fact, his legal name is actually Reece, but no one’s called him that since we formed the band. In our initial publicity meeting David got all paranoid about the media confusing “Ruben” and “Reece,” and Angel happened to come with a long-established nickname already. He got it from his dad as a toddler, because Mrs. Phan took offense to the original, more accurate nickname of “devil child,” and Mr. Phan had a well-developed sense of ironic humor.

Beside me, Zach slumps back to close his eyes, and his arm presses against mine with the shift in posture.

I don’t think I breathe again for the rest of the drive.