



THEA
BELMONT

MADAME
HYDE



CHAPTER 1

The laundromat was in a leased space underneath her apartment block. Despite the upmarket area, it was a small, dingy room with flickering fluorescent lights. It *always* smelt damp and strongly of cheap detergent, but there was no way to avoid using it when your apartment didn't have space for a washer, let alone a dryer.

Checking the washing machine was both clean and empty of anything untoward, Lucy placed her clothes in, turned the machine on and then moved to sit on the bench in the middle of the room. Folding her legs underneath herself, laundry basket in her lap, she flicked through a cheap thrills murder-mystery.

She was two chapters deep when a woman yelled, loud enough to pierce through the noise-cancelling headphones, "Shit, fucking-fuck!"

A woman in her mid-thirties with dark hair slicked back from her face crouched before a washing machine, muttering to herself in between bouts of swearing. She kicked the washer and stepped back, before turning and facing Lucy.

There was something familiar about her, but it was hard to tell with the dark make-up around her eyes.

"Are you okay?" Lucy asked. "Do you need change?"

"Ah...yeah, probably," the woman said.

This time Lucy noticed her voice—an American accent, warm and gravelly. The kind of voice she could imagine husking against her ear.

"Could you spare a few?"

"Of course! This must be the only place that doesn't use a card," she said, lifting up the bag of coins she had sitting in her washing basket. Opening up the sandwich bag, she pulled out a few dollar coins and reached out to hand them over. "You can use my detergent if you need any."

"I'd appreciate that," the woman said, before she paused, frowning as if she wanted to say something before she held her tongue.

Lucy smiled, handing over her detergent, and then sat back in her seat. She picked up her book again, trying to read it as she pretended not to intrude on the stranger's space. But her gaze flicked over as the woman shrugged off her leather jacket.

Next she removed her shirt which had a red, oily stain on it. The woman rubbed some of the detergent on the stain and then tossed the shirt in the washer—crouching before it in nothing but her dark jeans and boots.

Her back was on display and underneath the sharp, fluorescent light were an array of tattoos on a very muscular body.

She could put superheroes to shame with how strong she looked.

Swallowing, Lucy turned her gaze back to her book as her cheeks heated up. She stared at the pages, unable to read anything. Out the corner of her eye, she saw the woman slide her jacket back on and then move to sit on the bench, sighing.

What Lucy would do to just feel—

"Thanks," the woman said.

"No worries. I'm sure she'll be right after a wash."

The woman gave her an incredulous look before laughing. "You Aussies, huh?"

Lucy smiled at her. "You're not from around here, then?"

"Nope. Born in Boston but live in LA, baby." The woman ran her fingers through her long hair before grinning. "You a local?"

"You mean Sydney? Ah, no. I only moved here a few years back after uni."

"Ohh, so a country girl, then?"

"Sorta. Coastal girl. Are you a city girl?"

The woman nodded, "Oh yeah, born and bred. Love it. But I'll admit, there is something nice about the country life."

Lucy frowned. Country life was a bit different for her than how people romanticised it. She'd grown up in a modest household, moving from rental to rental, wishing she lived somewhere with a few nightclubs to dance through instead of the choice between the local pub and the other local pub.

"I guess," she said. "Biggest news out there is usually the weather."

The woman nodded and then leaned back, exposing the tattoo that ran between her collarbones and down. It looked like a snake, but Lucy wasn't certain from this angle.

"Trying to get a look at my tits?" the woman asked.

Lucy's eyes shot up. "No! No, I was...I was just looking at your tattoos."

"Sure you were."

"I was!" she insisted.

The woman laughed. "No need to be so serious, I'm just messing with you, Laundry Girl." And then the woman turned to face her properly. There was an array of tattoos that were not hidden by the jacket. As well as the snake that slithered down her sternum, there was a set of what looked to be Nordic runes, a rose and a set of guns between her breasts, before Lucy's eyes trailed below to something peeking out underneath the jeans.

Lucy's gaze held around the navel, her mouth going dry as she felt her hand lift towards it before she curled it back, dropping it back in her lap, and looked away. "That's...a collection," she said.

"Did you want to touch them?" she asked.

"Your tattoos?" Lucy asked before she caught the glimmer in the woman's eyes. No, not the tattoos.

"Go on," the woman said.

Lucy bit the inside of her cheek, looking over the woman's face. The dark eyebrows arched, daring her, before Lucy reached out and touched her stomach. It was firm. Ridiculously so. A sudden intense, visceral image filled Lucy's head of what it would feel like to run her tongue over it. Quickly, she pulled her hand away.

The woman laughed.

Swallowing, Lucy laughed, too. "I bet you do that to all the girls."

"Guaranteed to work," she said. "Now, not that I mind, but what's a girl like you doing in a laundromat this late at night?"

"It's not even eight," Lucy pointed out. "And I'm washing some clothes for work. My boss has me doing overtime tomorrow, and all my workwear was dirty, so..."

"Ah, I see." She gave a solemn nod and then sighed. "Not real familiar with corporate life. I used to temp back in my late teens, and found out quickly that wasn't for me. Especially the clothes."

"I bet you clean up in a suit pretty nicely," Lucy said, holding the woman's eyes. "So what *do* you do, then?" She knew lots of friends with

tattoos and piercings with reasonably high-profile jobs, but the woman had an energy about her as though she wasn't used to sitting still.

"What do you think I do?"

Lucy paused, running her eyes over her as she considered the question carefully. "You've fiddled with those silver rings on your fingers the entire conversation, so whatever it is, I bet it's physical. You look strong, so I want to say something like construction? Maybe a labourer?"

The woman laughed. "I used to be a carpenter for a bit," she said. "Alright, fair assessment."

"What do you do?" Lucy asked.

"I get around." She shrugged. "Mostly I write music."

Lucy felt a few pieces click, and as she did the woman's expression shifted—as if she was expecting some kind of damning judgement. "Are you here for the concert, then? To see Madame Hyde?"

It was all her roommate, Katie, had been talking about since the tour had been announced. She'd sing praises about how they were one of the greatest bands of their generation—which, given that Katie's whole career was in music, was no small praise.

The woman blinked and then grinned, her dimples becoming all the more apparent. "You could say that. Are you going to see them, too?"

"No, they're not really my music. But my roommate is. She got premium seats, so if you see a silver-haired Japanese girl sitting on the shoulders of a six-foot white guy, that's Katie."

"I'll keep my eye out," she said, before smiling, "So if not Madame Hyde, then what is your music, then?"

Lucy's stomach squirmed, hoping she hadn't offended her. "Don't get me wrong, I think they're good, it's just that I don't click with their music. But I've only heard a few songs, so..."

"Don't deflect—what's your style, Laundry Girl?"

Lucy frowned. "I mean, you should call me Lucy since I've seen your tits at this point."

"Lucy, huh?" The woman stuck out her hand, "Pleasure to meet you, I'm Seph."

"Steph?"

"Seph. Drop the T."

Lucy nodded, tasting the name on her tongue, "Seph. I like it."

"I'm so glad to have your approval." Seph laughed, giving her an odd look.

Lucy flushed, shaking her head. "No, I-I'm sorry, I don't know why I said that out loud. That wasn't...of course I didn't mean that. I—" she cut herself off, drawing in a breath. "That's a really nice name, Seph."

"Thank you, *Lucy*."

Lucy allowed the moment to hold, the gravelly voice saying *Lucy* echoing in her ears. It was a lovely sound.

"You didn't answer the question," Seph continued. "What's 'your music'?"

"Oh, ah..." All at once, Lucy felt as if she couldn't remember a single song. She tried to think about what she'd been listening to—it'd just been her top rotation of songs in the last decade. "I really like Rainstorm?" She offered. "My dad's parents are from Sweden. Mum's Wiradjuri, though—hence the dark skin tone."

"Where's Wiradjuri?"

"Oh, it's Central New South Wales. It's the land that belongs to the Wiradjuri First Nations people."

Seph nodded. "How'd your parents meet?"

"Went to the same university. Nothing exciting."

"Nothing on meeting in a laundromat," Seph flirted, her fingers brushing against Lucy. "What other music do you like?"

"Edith Stark?"

"Good taste. Fine, you can take a pass for not liking Madame Hyde because of that. But if you do like that type of sound, you should check out *I Wanna Be A Rockstar* by Peri Queen. You might like it."

"Never heard of them, but if they've got anything on Madam Hyde, I'll check it out," she said.

Seph grinned, her dimple showing off.

Lucy's eyes fell to the woman's mouth, wondering if she could get her to say her name again, when the washing machine beeped. She quickly shot up, moving her wet clothes over to the dryer.

"You could chuck your shirt in, too," Lucy said, "If you wanted to. It's on a short wash, yeah?"

Seph glanced to her own washer, frowning at it. "Should be." She moved over and crouched before it.

Looking away, Lucy tried not to focus on how tight the jeans were on the woman's thighs as Lucy began putting coins in the dryer, and set it up to run.

Seph's hand grabbed at her waist and crouched beside her, adding her shirt to the machine before stepping back, allowing Lucy to put the machine on.

"So, do you usually keep such a watchful eyes over your laundry?" Seph asked, making no move to remove her hand from Lucy's waist as they stood.

"I had my laundry stolen a month ago, so since then, yeah," Lucy said, breathing in the woman's scent. She smelt expensive, the kind of masculine perfume you get with the salesperson talking about it like it's a wine: hints of smoke and honey.

Seph nodded. "Happen often?"

"No, first time."

"How long had you been doing your laundry here before the 'incident'?"

"Two years."

Seph nodded, moving closer and closer to her. "Where do you live?"

"Upstairs," she answered.

Seph's hand reached up, tucking a strand of Lucy's hair behind her ear as her eyes stared at Lucy's mouth.

Pushing forward, Lucy kissed her. It was a quick, sharp kiss.

But then Seph's hand reached up, curling against the back of her neck as she parted her mouth, drawing her tongue over hers.

That had Lucy pressing up on her toes, moaning into her mouth as Seph's fingers drew tight over her scalp, electrifying her.

There was a faint taste of whisky on her mouth, and something spicy. But as Seph's hand curled in her hair, Lucy felt a warmth spill low in her belly.

It had been some time since she'd gone out and met a girl. It'd been a *very* long time since she'd met anyone as confident as this woman.

As teeth grazed over her bottom lip, Lucy grasped at the woman's jacket, holding her close. "Do you," she asked, pulling back to pant for breath. "Do you wanna come up to mine?"

"I thought you'd never ask."

"You won't be late for the concert? I know those tickets cost a heap—even for general admin."

The woman laughed. "I'll be fine," she assured her. "Concert doesn't start for another hour and a bit; we've got some time to kill before my shirt dries. Besides, the band has a warm-up act first."

"Sometimes the warm-up is really good."

“Yeah, but I’ve seen them before and you’re a cute girl. So if you wanna invite me up, invite me up. But if you don’t, we can step back and pretend that I don’t want to see what happens if I curl my fingers inside of you.”

Lucy swallowed, steadying her breathing as she looked into the woman’s eyes. “You’ll have to ask me nicely,” she teased.

“I can ask nicely,” Seph said.

Lucy paused before she moved, collecting her belongings before she nodded for Seph to follow outside to the entrance of the apartment. She was on the second floor, and, as she opened the door and set her things inside, she tried to ignore the fluttering anxiety building in her chest.

It’d been a while. Over six months since she’d slept with anyone.

“It’s small,” Lucy warned.

Seph stepped in the apartment, shutting the door behind her. “Your roommate’s out, is she?”

“Yeah, at the concert—I think she’s at the pub near the stadium?”

Seph hands dug in her jacket pockets as she looked around, her gaze running over the art.

Closing her roommate’s bedroom door, Lucy then turned, feeling the excitement bubble up in her chest. “Did you want a drink of water or something else?” she asked.

Seph continued to walk around the room, looking over the decor as she shook her head. “No. I take it this is your room?” she asked, pointing to the open door.

Lucy nodded, quickly ducking over to it. The room was tidy, but her work laptop was still open. Closing it quickly, she shut off the monitor.

“Hiding your porn?” Seph asked.

“Hah, no. Protected documents—I doubt it’d be any use to most since it’s mostly just complaints but there’s a clause in my contract that says I have to protect it.”

“You do complaints?”

“Mm. Independent Review Office. Some insurance is underwritten by the government. I work as part of a team to ensure the people who manage the claims are following the legislation and State Insurance Regulatory Authority when they make decisions.”

“Sounds messy.” Seph’s eyes flicked over the room and paused at the art on the wall. She reached up to a shelf, touching over the miniatures Lucy had on display, before moving on. “Did you buy these?” She gestured to both the minis and the art.

"I did it," Lucy said. "All of it. Painting has always been a hobby of mine, but I...um, ended up studying other stuff at uni, instead."

"Do you regret not studying art?"

"No, the good thing about art is that it's pretty easy these days to find videos on the internet on techniques, but I actually used to be a member at a local art gallery. I'd do some classes there with different travelling artists and I think that was a bit more fun, to be honest, than learning art at university."

Seph nodded. "I get that."

"Did you study music?"

"In high school I did...for a while. But I became self-taught for the most part, learned from other musicians, similar to you."

Lucy stepped forward, shivering at the concentration on Seph's face. It'd been some time since anyone had taken an interest in her work. Most of her friends were familiar with it, and with her job being so busy, she hadn't had time to work on any large projects. She was busy trying to build her career.

"What's this?" Seph pointed to a poster.

"Oh, that's from my first web comic," Lucy said. "It's about a girl travelling around Australia and learning different stories from her culture. I had an offer to turn it into a graphic novel, but the deal fell through and it kinda of crushed me."

"What happened?"

"To be honest, I don't know. They retracted their offer and I never really found out why."

She let Seph explore the old pieces she had hanging up, ones she was particularly proud of, and then when Seph turned back to look at her, Lucy felt as if the air in the room had become thin.

The woman was stunning—all sharp angles and hard muscles.

"I can hang your jacket if you like," Lucy offered.

Her eyebrows quirked, but Seph shrugged off the jacket, handing it over.

Lucy took it, her gaze holding the other woman's as she hung it on a wooden hanger. She placed it on a hook on the back of her door then turned back to face her.

Touching Seph's bicep, Lucy felt the woman flex beneath her fingertips.

"How long were you waiting for me to do that?" Lucy asked.

"About as long as you were waiting to touch them," Seph responded, before leaning down to kiss her again. It was a soft, gentle kiss and she pulled back, looking into Lucy's eyes. "What do you like, Laundry Girl?"

"When people say my name."

Seph smiled. "We'll see. But my mouth will be busy."

Lucy smiled, humming to herself as she bounced on her toes. "*What do you like?*"

"Naked pretty women."

"Mm. I can do that," Lucy said, beginning to undress herself. She removed her shirt first, and then her jeans—before Seph reached forward.

She traced her fingertips over the softness of Lucy's belly and up her ribs before she undid the bra and dropped it to the ground.

Lucy stepped closer, kissing Seph to taste the whisky again as she pushed her onto the bed and climbed onto her lap.

The other woman's hands held Lucy's waist before she moved to palm her breast, gentle as she pinched the nipple between her middle and ring finger.

Lucy gasped, grinding on her thigh to urge her to do it again. It was a warm feeling, to have Seph take control—but Lucy didn't want to wait.

Kissing down Seph's neck, she moved over the clavicle, pressing her mouth over the tattoo as she snaked her way down. Lucy stopped briefly to lick over the nipple—her mouth sucking over it quickly in a tease—before she continued on her path down, climbing off her lap and slipping between her thighs.

"*Oh,*" Seph said, with a laugh. "Been a while since a girl went for that herself."

Lucy looked up at her, smiling as she undid the belt buckle and tugged Seph's jeans down. "I know what I want." She reached for the waistband of the briefs and pulled those down too.

Kissing over the hip bone, Lucy pressed her mouth quickly over the dark pubic hair and then slid her tongue between the woman's folds, parting them.

Seph sucked in a slow breath, her ribs expanding as Lucy did it again.

Lucy slid her mouth away, across to Seph's thigh, drawing her tongue over the crease where her joint met the hip.

Seph's hand curled in the blankets as Lucy continue to trace her mouth over her.

Going down on a woman had always felt like worship to Lucy. She could take her time and make it slow or she could quicken it and have it as a desperate, heated event.

Her mouth slid over the labia, drawing it over her tongue before she moved up, flicking over Seph's entrance to taste the spilling arousal.

Seph was growing wetter and wetter as she panted. She looked so good arching against Lucy, gasping as she ground her hips against Lucy's mouth, urging her on.

Lucy moved her focus up, over the clit, as she shifted her hand between slick folds, using two fingers to edge inside of her.

Seph tightened around her fingertips and, watching closely, offered Lucy a short laugh. "You're good at this."

"I know," Lucy said before flicking her tongue. She curled her fingers inside of her, finding the sweet spot that had Seph squeezing.

Satisfied she was on the right track, Lucy returned her attention to the woman's clit, flicking her tongue over her until the woman's thighs began to twitch, her hands curling tighter and tighter in the sheets.

Reaching out with her spare hand, she took one of Seph's hands and urged it to her own head as Seph stared down at her, her brows raised innocently.

Seph's mouth quirked in a smile before her lips parted and her eyes fluttered as she grew closer and closer. Her hand curled in Lucy's hair, dragging bluntly against the scalp as she urged her harder.

Lucy held her pace, continuing to stroke deep inside before Seph's thighs tensed, her back arching.

"Fuck, *Lucy!*" she said.

Lucy's body warmed from the top of her head to her toes as Seph squeezed and pulsed around her fingers, her hand tugging in Lucy's hair. And then, too soon, she was pushing Lucy away.

Obeying, Lucy slowly slid her fingers out as her lover sank back on the bed, panting, as a flush coloured her.

"Fucking hell," Seph panted.

Lucy hummed, popping her wet fingers in her mouth and grinned. "I knew I'd get my name from you."

Seph laughed. "Is that why you did it?"

"No, I wanted to know what you tasted like," Lucy said, smiling. "But it was nice to hear you say my name."

Rolling her eyes, Seph sat up and looked at her. "And what are we going to do about you?"

Lucy shivered at the darkened tone, a pleased hum running through her. She looked at Seph's lap and wondered what it would be like throw herself over it, ass in the air. But she held her tongue. Discussing something so personal as your kink preferences wasn't something you did with a random stranger you met at a laundromat. That was something you did with, maybe, a person you already knew was into that.

"You gonna answer me, Laundry Girl?"

"What happened to 'fuck, Lucy'?" Lucy asked.

The woman's eyes darkened.

Lucy bit her lip, enjoying the frustration that built there.

"I should spank you."

Her heart fluttered, the image pressing tight behind her eyes. "Promises," she found herself saying.

Seph stood and Lucy found herself dwarfed beneath her height once more, allowing her lover to help her to her feet before Lucy kissed her hard.

And then Seph slowed it down, drawing her mouth over hers, tasting her.

Lucy moaned as the woman's teeth dragged over her bottom lip, before Seph kissed down her neck, biting down until Lucy's knees weakened, her body relaxing beneath the skilled mouth.

Seph's fingers hooked over the waistband of her cotton underwear and all at once they were gone, lost around her ankles.

Cool air brushed over Lucy's sex. But before she could shift to the bed, Seph took hold of her hips and lifted her as if she weighed no more than a half-filled laundry basket, before throwing her onto the mattress.

The throw wasn't hard. Seph had been careful, more playful than anything else, and yet Lucy's chest rose and fell with heavy breaths. If Lucy wasn't completely aroused before, she was now. Every part of her felt like she was living a Viking sexual fantasy. Right now all she wanted was to let Seph do whatever she wanted to her.

Spreading her thighs, Seph settled between Lucy's legs, her teeth scraping over the pulse in her neck.

Lucy melted against the touch, exhaling a soft sigh before Seph's fingers slid between their bodies, coming to stroke over her vulva.

She was slow, until Lucy began to rock against her fingers, urging where she felt her nerve endings come alive.

Seph easily followed the non-verbal direction.

Lucy found herself panting already, holding onto the woman's shoulders. Between the mouth on her neck and the fingertips on her clit, she found herself edging closer and closer to orgasm. But Seph was holding her steady, drawing the pace back down before quickening it again.

Lucy had no idea how long she was suspended in pleasure for, as sparks ran up her spine, making her muscles twitch, before they were interrupted by an alarm.

"Wha—?"

"Ignore it," Seph said, continuing to fuck her.

The blaring died away and Lucy fell back into focusing on what the woman was doing to her.

The noise started up again.

"Fucking hell," Seph cursed, pulling away. "I'm sorry. I'll just..." She shifted off the bed to dig into her jeans and pull out her phone.

Lucy sat up, as Seph clicked the sound off and went to set it aside. Then she paused, scrolling through messages.

"Everything okay?" Lucy asked.

Seph made a hum, before glancing away from her phone, looking conflicted. "Look, I...I'm sorry. There's a problem that I need to deal with," she said, typing a quick message before sighing and setting the phone down. She paused, glaring at the wall, before dropping back on the bed beside her.

"It's fine," Lucy assured her, despite the disappointment sinking in her stomach. "I get it, things come up. Is it about the concert?"

"Yeah. Look, I feel like a piece of shit doing this but I have to run off."

Lucy nodded. "I get it."

Sighing before standing up, Seph began to get dressed.

Lucy swallowed back the disappointment and started dressing as well, despite the uncomfortable wetness between her thighs. "We should probably check on the dryer anyway."

Seph nodded. "Do you mind if I just wash up quickly?"

"No, go ahead. It's the door by the kitchen."

Seph left the room as she pulled her jacket on.

As her lover washed up, Lucy moved to her mirror to fix herself. As she looked closely at her reflection, a redness against the brown of her skin spread across her cheeks. Her long, dark hair was a mess, strewn out in a tangle.

An ache washed over her as she felt the absence of a body pressed against her all the more. Combing her fingers through her hair to tidy it up, she tried to ignore how her body felt wound up from all the teasing. And then she dressed, smoothing out her clothes just as the sound of water in the pipes ceased.

They were quiet as they left the apartment, heading back to the laundromat.

When they arrived downstairs, Lucy pulled out her clothes from the dryer and handed the shirt back to Seph, who pulled it on again, the stain now gone.

"What was so important about that shirt?" she asked.

"Superstitious, but I always wear it to the first night of a concert," Seph said. "Can't say the luck's worn off when I got to see you."

Lucy frowned. It seemed odd to wear a lucky shirt to a concert, but it wasn't her superstition. "Well, give me your phone. You can delete my number later but at least let me give it to you while you're here."

Seph paused before nodding. She pulled out her phone, opening it up to Contacts, and handed it to her.

Lucy adding her details in with the name as "Laundry Girl" and handed it back. "There."

"So I see," Seph said, giving a small laugh at the name before tucking it away. She stepped forward, wrapping her hand around Lucy's waist, tugging her close as she kissed her like their lives depended on it.

Lucy sighed as they stumbled backwards, against the dryer, her fingers curling against the cold metal to keep herself steady as kissed Seph back hungrily.

Finally, Seph pulled away, pressing a last, quick kiss to her lips. "I'll see you around, Laundry Girl."

Lucy hoped so. She'd never been kissed like that before. It might ruin kissing for her for the rest of her life.

CHAPTER 2

"Where the fuck have you been, eh?" Lionel snarled as Seph entered the room.

"None of your fucking business," she snapped back, looking over the band.

Nic was sitting back, his dark skin blending into the shadows as he sipped a scotch, looking like he wanted to pretend he wasn't even there. Jane was standing off to the side, hand cradled in her other arm.

When Seph stared at Lionel, he turned away, returning to fucking around with his off-stage guitar. "What happened?" she demanded.

"Jane's gone and fucked her hand again," Lionel said. "What the hell are we meant to do?"

Seph moved to where Jane was sitting, her hand cradled as she looked up at Seph, brow pinched. "It's all cramped up again. I'll need another cortisone shot before I can play again."

"We'll get you a doc, hey," Seph said, crouching before her. "Let me have a look."

Jane opened her hand, showing how it was cramping. She whimpered as Seph tried to move it.

"We'll play, don't worry about it," Seph said. "We'll switch it up; Nic can play keyboard and acoustics, I'll play lead—"

"Of course you fuckin' will," Lionel said.

Seph's eyes snapped to his. "Fine, you can play lead, I don't give a fuck. You play bass better than anyone fucking else can, but if you want to play lead, go for it!"

Lionel huffed before shaking his head. "It's fine."

Seph paused, before relenting. "You do lead the best in *Drop Deadless* and *Give It Up*; why don't you take those and I'll do the others?"

Lionel's shoulders eased and he gave a nod. "I'll give it a shot. But *Astro Girl* needs to get cut."

"Yeah, it does. We could do a cover of *Turf Wars* instead?"

"No," Jane said. "Remember last time? We could do one of Harley's stuff though. She won't mind us covering *Every Night*."

"Nope, needs to be a good finale. *Every Night's* a midrange song—no one tell Harley I said that." Sighing, Seph ran her fingers through her hair, taking a moment to breathe in the scent of Laundry Girl's detergent before her eyes flicked open. "What about *Sleepover*?"

"Rainstorm?" Lionel asked incredulously. "Fuckers not on brand, hey? That's A-class girlie pop."

"Yeah, but crowds love a good cover. Remember when we did *Kiss*, *Kiss* a year back? We sounded great. We'll do it like that. *Sleepover* is a basic four-chord song. Nic can do that in his sleep. You can smash it on bass and it'll be great." She paused, and everyone looked at her sceptically. "Look, pop-y as it is, it was number one for a *fucking* long time for a reason. It's a good song, we'll end on that and then say goodnight, hey?"

Everyone gave a nod, though Lionel made a noise that came out more like a grunt.

It would have to do.

"Five minutes," the band manager, Rick, called as he ducked his head in the room. "You got this?"

Seph nodded, fixing her clothes before she closed her eyes and took a breath.

"Woof, Seph. You *stink* of sex," Jane said.

There was a pause and then Lionel gave her an aghast look, "Fucking *hell*, were you off licking some girl's pussy while this disaster was happening?"

"No," she said. "I wasn't *licking* pussy," she said, glancing away as she fixed her jacket. "I spilled tabasco sauce on my shirt and went to the laundromat. She had no idea who I was. Ridiculously hot, though."

"How hot?" Lionel asked.

"Hot, like she got me out of my pants first."

"Ooh," Jane said as Nic gave a wolf whistle. "Must be special to top the one and only, Seph, huh?"

"Fuck off. Now you shitheads go and get your crap ready before we go on, hey? And Jane...relax. We'll get Rick to find a doc for you tomorrow, 'kay? You just go up and stand by vocals?"

"Easy."

They prepped quickly, with Seph drinking a bottle of water before she was signalled to head on stage. There was nothing like that moment. The high of knowing they were live before tens of thousands of people.

But as Seph got out on stage, everything faded away.

They sung through their setlist and as they came out to their final song, she looked behind her, checking on the band before she turned back to the crowd. "Got something a little special for you all. Thought we'd shake it up, for the one and only Sydney, tonight."

And then Nic brought the familiar beat rise and drop of the song and the crowd *screamed*. The exhilaration of it ran through her.

She could feel Laundry Girl's breath against her as she sang through the chorus.

They played through and when the encore was done, Seph wished the city a goodnight, her muscles relaxing as she walked backstage.

After fixing up a few things, the band went off to wind down. Lionel would likely go off and find a groupie. Nic would go out and drink at whatever bar had a private room for him; Jane was probably going to vape back in the hotel, reading a book until she went to sleep and then wake up and order room service.

Seph returned to the hotel with Jane, slipping around the back to avoid the crowds that somehow always discovered they were there, no matter what they tried.

Once in her room, she dug through her bag, looking for her prized possession. Seph had plans to finish what she started.

There, wrapped up in a satin drawstring bag, she found it.

Putting it on, she pulled out her phone from her jeans and dialled Laundry Girl's contact.

"'ho's this?" came the sleepy drawl.

"Hey, Laundry Girl. You up?"

There was a pause and then a laugh. "Concert over?"

"Mm-hmm. Crisis averted, too. If it's not too late for you, I thought I'd come and finish what I started. Feel a bit guilty leaving you high and wet like that... Thought I'd pick up where I'd left off?"

Laundry Girl gave a short laugh, before humming as she seemed to shuffle, material rustling against the phone. "Katie texted she was staying at Joel's. Buzz number twelve when you arrive and I'll let you up. But you should know that I did take care of myself after you left..." There was a soft sleepy purr to the voice that sent a thrill running down Seph's spine.

She wondered how Lucy dressed for bed. She seemed a T-shirt and panties kinda girl. Maybe a satin nightgown...or perhaps she slept naked? Wasn't that a thrilling thought.



Seph rang the apartment door and waited until she heard the intercom make a garbled noise before it buzzed, letting her in. Making her way up the stairs, Seph ran one hand through her hair as she knocked on number twelve and waited.

The door opened and there, in a matching T-shirt and drawstring shorts pyjamas set, was the beautiful woman who had given her the best orgasm she'd had in over a year.

"Hey," Seph said.

"Hey," Lucy replied before stepping aside and letting her in.

This time, Seph didn't take her time. As soon as the door was shut, she grabbed and pinned the woman to it, kissing her quick and hard just to feel her moan against her.

Lucy's hands tangled in Seph's hair and quickly pulled at her jacket, apparently eager to run her hand over Seph's body and feel her muscles. Seph flexed for her and Lucy hummed approvingly against her mouth.

Good. Grabbing her waist, she lifted her up.

Seph carried her back to the bedroom, careful to ensure she didn't hit her head on the doorway. Lucy gasped before making another approving noise. Seph sat on the bed, dropping her onto her lap.

Lucy's hips rocked before she paused, pulling away with a charming smile. "Is that an *oboe* in your pocket, perhaps?"

"No one has pockets that deep," Seph said.

Lucy sat up and wiggled her hips.

"We don't have to—"

"Oh, no, I love it," Laundry Girl said, looking at her intensely. "I'm just wondering when you had time to run and get it. Do you live nearby?"

“My hotel is.”

The woman gave a soft frown before smiling, disguising the shift in mood.

“I’m here for a couple of days, though, if you wanna chill?”

“Chill,” Laundry Girl echoed. “Sure, let’s see how good you are with this, first,” she teased, fingers tugging at the loops of Seph’s pants, undoing the belt before she reached for the button and fly.

Lucy’s fingers pulled the strap out before she shifted out of her pyjama bottoms.

“Hey, don’t make the rookie mistake of going in without lube,” Seph said. “I can warm you—”

But Lucy only smiled, leaning over to open the top drawer of her bedside table and pulled out a bottle of lube. “I’m well prepared for any occasion,” she said, going to push the drawer shut.

As she did, Seph’s eyebrows rose as the collection she saw peeking out. “Did I...spy a paddle?”

Turning back, the warm brown skin of Lucy’s face looked a shade warmer in its undertone. “Maybe. Maybe not. You’ll need to prove yourself first.” Lucy opened the lube bottle.

Seph nodded, grinning. Lucy had done enough work earlier. It was Seph’s turn. She took the bottle out of Lucy’s hand. “Allow me,” she said, drawing a fair amount of lube over her fingers, watching Lucy’s expression as she flicked the lid and set the bottle aside on the drawers.

Then, with her spare hand holding Lucy’s hips, she slid her lubed fingers between the woman’s thighs, running her fingertips over the vulva.

Laundry Girl’s hips rocked as she sucked in a sharp breath, her mouth parting.

Seph was careful as she then slid the remaining amount over the toy, rubbing her fingers over the phallus, ensuring it was slick. She dragged the length of the strap against the woman, cleaning her fingers against her own thighs before she slid her fingers underneath the woman’s pyjama shirt to hold her waist.

“How slow do you like it?” Seph asked, nudging against her, dragging the length of the strap-on over her.

“I don’t want it slow,” Lucy said, leaning close. “I want you to fuck me.”

“I can do that.”

She pushed Lucy back on the bed, pinning her beneath her before she began urging the toy inside of her.

Lucy's smile became a soft *O* as her eyes fell shut and her face became awash with pleasure, her body arching against the heavy movements.

She went quick and hard, thrusting long, firm movements as Lucy writhed beneath her.

Seph slid her hand down between them and stroked around her clit, listening to where the moans were cut off with a sharp gasp.

"Oh *fuck*."

There it was. Lucy's face squeezed tightly, her eyes squeezing shut as she held her breath, focusing.

"Told you I'd finish what I started."

Lucy nodded, her nails digging into Seph's back as she sucked in a breath and urged her touch faster and faster.

Her gasps were short and sharp in her ear and Seph *loved it*. The sound of her swallowing hard, humming as she urged her on, until all she could do was make brief gasps of "*Mm!*"

"Want me stop?" Seph teased.

"*No!*" came the urgent response.

Seph laughed against her, kissing her throat as she kept up the pace. Her fingers were on her lover's clit, keeping in rhythm, fucking her hard with the strap.

Lucy's nails dug deeper and her gasps became long, drawn-out cries as she arched...tensing until, "*Shit, fucking—I didn't mean—*"

Seph felt a warmth spill over her thigh and paused before she gave a short laugh, pulling away to look between them.

Lucy tugged backwards, pulling out the strap as she stared at the wet spot on the bed. "Oh no, no, *no*. Shit. Fuck," she said before covering her face with her hands.

Seph laughed again, only because she looked so damn adorable and all she wanted to do was kiss her again.

"Don't laugh!" Lucy squealed.

Seph's laughter ceased immediately. "Hey," Seph said, tugging Lucy's hands from her face. "Hey, you don't have to be embarrassed."

"How can you say that? I just...fucking hell, I just *squirted* on you."

"Yeah, you did." Seph smiled at her. "It's a good thing. Tells me I did my job right. I wasn't laughing at you," she promised, combing Lucy's hair back from her face. "Did someone tell you it wasn't okay?"

"Yeah, look—it's fine. It's..." She took a breath and exhaled. "I'm sorry."

"Don't apologise. If anything I feel like I deserve a 'Thank you, Seph for that fucking-A orgasm,' huh?"

Lucy looked at her, before giving a short laugh. Biting her lip, she still looked conflicted.

Seph frowned, leaning closer so her eyes held hers. "I mean it, you're okay. It's normal."

"No, it's not."

"Yeah it is. I do it too sometimes. Not everyone can, but it's normal, don't worry about it."

"Yeah, but—"

"Uh-uh, no buts. You're okay. You might need to wash your quilt cover, but there's not a single reason for you to apologise."

Laundry Girl shivered, before pressing forward and kissing her sweetly. "It's a little gross though, isn't it?"

"Not to me," Seph said, sincerely. "If you want to stop, we can stop. But if anything...for me...you doing that is kinda hot," she said, moving to kiss the woman's cheek, before nipping at her throat. "Let's see if we can do it again."

Lucy gave a short laugh, and then a sigh, her hands grabbing hold of Seph's shoulders. She shifted, moving to kiss her again and Seph felt the mood return as she tugged Lucy onto her lap, spreading her thighs so as to rub the toy between them.

The woman was *good*, really good, as she manoeuvred Seph onto her back on the bed and shifted on her lap, easing herself on the toy. And then as she began riding the strap-on.

Lucy appeared to lose herself in it as she was reaching euphoria, her eyes fluttering as she bit her lip and arched.

And there was nothing Seph wanted more than to see her lost in pleasure again. Running her hands up the woman's thighs, she held onto Lucy's hips and watched her. "You're stunning."

Lucy smiled. "So are you."

She rocked her hips, sliding long, quick thrusts into Lucy as the woman began panting, the short, sharp gasps returning.

Seph loved sex, loved the entirety of it. With women she could witness them coming undone, feel their muscles tighten and relax.

"Could..." Lucy said, before she stopped herself

Seph slowed down, pulling back to look at her as she asked, "Could I what?"

Lucy paused, her eyes flicking away, off to stare at the wall as she asked, "Could you talk to me?"

Seph grinned. "Do you want it dirty or do you want me to just talk to you?"

"Talk to me," she responded, her voice thick. "Maybe a little...not derogatory though. I liked...how you spoke before." She wasn't meeting her eyes.

Seph reached up, tilting Lucy's face back to hers and smiled. "I want you to watch me," she said. "I want you to see how turned on I am by this. By *you*, Lucy."

Lucy nodded, her eyes fluttering.

Reaching between them, Seph held onto Lucy's hips, rocking her over the strap as Lucy reached down to stroke herself.

"I want you to be louder, don't bite back the noise," she told Lucy, lowering her voice. "It's just you and me, and I want to hear you."

Lucy's fingers fumbling between them, as Seph's voice increased: "Tell me how badly you want this."

"God...*please*."

"Come on, you can do it. Tell me how badly you want it."

"I want it...I want it *badly*," she said, gasping. "Please, Seph."

"That's my girl. You can make a mess for me, Lucy. I won't mind. Just relax and show me how much you love it."

There was a soft cry, and a gasp as Lucy's hand grabbed at her shoulder, her teeth biting down.

Seph squeezed her eyes shut, certain that she could feel her own orgasm building up. But when Lucy relented, exhaling as she dropped her hands, letting go, the climax slid away.

Seph exhaled, dropping against Lucy on the bed.

"I didn't..." Lucy said. "I didn't do that again."

"I didn't think you would," Seph said, "Most girls only do it once."

Lucy nodded, her head resting against Seph's shoulder as she seemed to catch her breath. "The last time I did it, my ex asked me to buy new

sheets for her. She threw the sheets I'd done it on in the bin and said I owed her."

"You didn't owe her," Seph said, trying to not let her annoyance for the mysterious ex seep through. "Sheets are an easy thing to wash. I'll help you change the cover when you're ready. There's no rush."

A quiet followed and then Lucy shifted. "Thank you," she said. "You can crash here if you want. Better than walking the streets again so late at night with an oboe in your pocket."

"I don't think any sane person would try and pick a fight with me."

"Still," Lucy said. "You can sneak out early if you're worried about that. Promise I'll pretend to sleep through it so it's less awkward."

Seph smiled at her, pressing a quick kiss against her lips. "I could go for a glass a water, if that's alright?"

"Oh, too easy," Lucy said, before she pushed up, with a sudden burst of energy.

She left, returning quickly with glasses of water for them both, and quickly downed hers.

The light was still soft in the room, but Seph liked how the warm lights showed off the softness of Lucy's body.

Lucy smiled at her as she caught her eye. "I'm...gonna shower and wash off the lube, but, um, if you wanna join, there's plenty of room." Lucy shrugged.

Seph paused, sipping at her water as she watched Lucy leave. She was tired from the concert and then from fucking the woman, but damn it, an invitation from a woman that cute was enough to find the energy.

Lucy was using a wash cloth to clean between her thighs before she turned around to face her, smiling and pulling her into the shower.

When Seph entered, the warm spray washing over her, she was kissed sweetly, pressed against the cool tiles. Before she could even take a hold of the woman's hips to pull her closer, Lucy was kissing her throat, making her way down her body again.

It was a special kind of girl who could ride her strap and then lick her out like that, but as Seph closed her eyes, feeling the spray of the hot water over her body as Lucy curled and twisted her tongue over her clit, Seph found herself digging her hands into the woman's hair, urging her to the sweet spot and feeling herself melt into it.

Fuck, she was good with her tongue.

She came, calling out Lucy's name as she saw stars. And God, all she could think about when it was over, was that this whole night had felt so ridiculously surreal.

It had been months since she'd been able to write so much as a single line in a song, and now a whole symphony was rushing around in her skull, desperate to come out.

"You are like no one else," she told Lucy, panting as the shower spray washed over her.

"Neither are you."

CHAPTER 3

Morning light crept out from underneath the blinds. Lucy shifted, feeling the weight next to her. Slowly, she turned and smiled to herself as she saw the familiar, naked form of Seph. She'd half expected the woman to sneak out in the middle of the night.

After the shower, they'd returned to bed and Lucy had fallen asleep fast while she was listening to Seph talk about music. She hadn't meant to. The conversation *had* been interesting, it was just that she'd been exhausted.

Slipping out of bed, Lucy quietly dressed before going to the bathroom where she washed her face. Then, returning to the kitchen, she began cooking breakfast. Usually, ending up in bed with a strange woman meant that she'd be cooking a hangover cure, but there'd been no alcohol last night, only copious amounts of orgasms.

Lucy felt her face heat up as she remembered how *wet* that had been. She'd ended up changing the doona cover before they went to bed.

"Are you cooking for the both of us or is this a not-so-subtle hint that I should make myself disappear?" Seph asked as she came to sit on a stool by the kitchen island.

"How do you like your eggs?" Lucy asked.

"However you prefer, I ain't fussed."

Lucy nodded, cracking two eggs into the pan, but as she began shifting the bacon on the pan, she caught Seph's furrowed expression. "Something wrong?"

"Just admiring how thick your bacon is."

Lucy nodded. "You guys have super crispy bacon, don't you?"

"Sure do, and usually the egg shells are white where I'm from."

Lucy nodded, certain she'd read about that somewhere. It seemed strange to imagine eggs coming only in white shells. Brown eggs seemed more...organic to her.

"Sorry I fell asleep while you were talking last night," Lucy said. "I promise it wasn't because of what you were saying."

Seph laughed. "I know. Do you still have work, today?"

Lucy looked up to the clock on the wall. "I do, but I don't need to leave for a few hours. I'm going to make coffee. Did you want a cup?"

"Sounds good."

Lucy fussed around, pulling out mugs, plates, and cutlery before she served breakfast.

The apartment wasn't large, so she and Katie tended to use the island instead of having a dining table.

Seph had made herself comfortable, sipping coffee as Lucy took a seat beside her, setting the food down.

"This is good," Seph said after taking the first bite.

Lucy smiled. "I'm an expert at breakfast food. You want pancakes or an omelette, I'm your girl."

Seph returned her smile, finishing off her plate before she turned and faced her. "So, do you usually hook up with girls at your laundromat?"

"Depends if they're topless or not," Lucy teased. "Do you often get with strange girls in odd places?"

Seph blinked before smiling at her. "Yeah, I do. Travelling around doesn't leave much room for a long-term relationship."

Lucy swallowed her coffee, nodding as she set down the mug. "So you're a backpacker, are you?"

"No, I'm..." Seph frowned, before shrugging. "A wanderer. I go wherever."

"Where to next?"

"Brisbane."

"Is that where the band is going next?"

Seph gave a cough and nodded. "Perhaps."

Lucy laughed. It seemed so cheesy and yet as the other woman's eyes brightened, she couldn't help but feel a warmth in her chest flutter. It was ridiculous to let herself get all hung up over a cute smile from a woman who probably wouldn't be in the city come Monday. But when Seph leaned

back in the chair, showing off her biceps as she stretched, it was easy to remember how easily the woman had lifted her up.

And then it became very, very difficult to listen to any rational thought.

“You’ve got that look like you want to drag me back into the bedroom.”

“I do,” Lucy admitted, “but I have to get ready for work.”

“Ah, gotcha. I’ll get my stuff and get out of your hair,” Seph said.

The woman was quick. She got dressed, making the harness and toy disappear into her massive jacket pocket.

When Lucy kissed her goodbye in the doorway, Seph made a show of pressing her against the door frame, holding her hips until it became so very difficult to not call in sick.

“Maybe I’ll see you around,” Lucy said. “If you decide to stay in the city for a few days.”

“I’d like that,” Seph said, before giving her a last, quick kiss.

After she left, Lucy finished dressing, doing her hair quickly before pulling it in a clip and checking that any marks were appropriately hidden before she caught the light rail to work.



At her desk, Lucy ran over the systems checks as IT helped her to review the system for any errors to her usual work, before the new update went live. Dull work, but quiet work.

Later that day she returned home, sliding her shoes off to place beside the door as Katie looked up from the couch.

Her roommate’s face was tired but eyes alight. “Who did *you* have over, last night?” Katie asked. “Is that why you didn’t want to come to the concert? Too busy *coming* here.”

Lucy froze, wondering how her friend knew before her eye caught the kitchen bench, where two plates remained stacked with their cups next to the sink. Her throat tightened and Lucy made a strange noise.

All day she had thought of nothing else but Seph. It was difficult to get her out of her mind when her body *ached* from last night’s activities but, looking at Katie, she felt the ridiculousness of the situation.

After all, she’d met the stranger in a *laundromat*. It was absurd.

Katie quickly sat up. "Who is she?" Katie demanded. "Look at you! You're all—" And she made a gawking expression. "You *like* this girl!"

"It was random," Lucy said. "I met her downstairs, and—"

"You *met her* downstairs? What, like taking out the trash?"

"No, no, at the laundromat."

"Lucy!"

"Katie!" she shot back, staring at her friend. "It was nothing. But she had the biggest fucking arms, and lifted me off my feet. I've never...she..."

And then the meeting of Seph came spilling out, how the woman was some fan of Madame Hyde, how she'd been attending the concert too. How Lucy invited her up before she left suddenly, only to return after the concert when Lucy was already asleep.

"Oh, you're *bad*," Katie said, her eyebrows shooting up. "I can't believe you did that. Did you get her number, at least?"

Lucy went to say no, before remembering that the woman had called her. She pulled out her mobile phone and checked her calls. There, in all its glorious digits, was Seph's number. Her face warmed all the more. "I... guess I do?"

"You have to text her. Come on!"

"No, don't be ridiculous. If she was interested, she would have texted me."

"Bullshit! Text her. She called you last night so the ball's in your court."

"She's not even staying in Australia for long," Lucy reminded her. "She's just some 'wanderer'."

"Cool, no strings, do it. Not everything has to be looking for your soulmate. You're allowed to have fun, Luce. This is your *twenties*."

"Late twenties," she reminded her. "Half of our friends are getting married and having kids."

"Boo. Who cares? *Text her*. Maybe she'll want to stay longer," Katie said, wiggling her eyebrows.

Lucy couldn't help but roll her eyes. "Look, I haven't had lunch, so let me eat."

"*Text her*. Maybe she'll want to grab a bite."

Lucy huffed, biting the inside of her cheek before, *fuck it*, who cared? If Seph wasn't interested, she wouldn't respond and there was no harm. If she was, she'd respond. Easy.

Texting a short message, she briefly let Seph know that she'd finished work if Seph wanted to grab some lunch.

Instantly, three dots lit up and Lucy felt her heart speed-up.

"What?" Katie demanded.

"She's typing."

Katie squealed, jumping close and peering over the phone, before they watched the dots fade away.

"Oh." Lucy's shoulders dropped.

"Nah, she's just deleted her message. She's trying to work out what to say."

"Probably to say she's not interested," Lucy half-joked, but Katie just shrugged. Swallowing, Lucy looked away, avoiding her eye as she clicked off her phone. "Anyway, doesn't matter. I'm going to make myself lunch and—"

Her phone buzzed. Lucy peered at the lock screen as Seph's message appeared.

Know any good pizza places?

Katie laughed. "Classic. Go get her—and Luce? Don't worry about catching up tonight. Go get your brains fucked out."

"What! No, it's not like that."

"It should be," Katie said. "I'm beat from last night anyway so I would have pulled out after a few drinks."

Lucy didn't believe her for a moment. Katie was always up for another night out even if she was running on three energy drinks and two hours' sleep.

Katie's brows rose, giving her a serious look. "Get the fuck out of here, I'm serious."

"Alright, alright. Let me get changed and I'll get out of your hair."

It didn't take long for Lucy to switch out of her work clothes into more casual date-wear, though she took the time to pick out her nicest matching underwear.

Her eyes paused over at the side table, wondering if she should bring anything before she stepped away. No, she decided. Despite how much fun

it would be, she didn't want to ruin a good time by intimidating Seph with her kinks.

Though a part of her believed that Seph would be pretty hard to scare off.

As she left, Katie wolf-whistled from her spot on the couch, giving her a wink before she returned to her nap position as she turned the TV back on.



Grabbing the light rail, Lucy got off at George Street and walked the rest of the way to the underground pizza bar. It was big, greasy slices of pizza but Seph was American, so she was certain that the woman had eaten worse.

Waiting outside, she texted that she'd arrived and barely had time to flick through her phone before a familiar shadow spilt over her.

"Hey there, sweetheart."

"Hey there, yourself," Lucy shot back.

Seph's smile widened. She was dressed casually this time, with her hair pulled back and her face clean of make-up. She seemed different from last night's look, different enough that Lucy might not have recognised her. Though, she was the only tall, muscular woman she'd ever seen in person so that might not be entirely true.

"You look good," Seph said, her warm, gravelly voice sending a shiver through her.

Lucy swallowed, breathing slowly, and gave a small laugh. "So do you."

"Mm. This the pizza place? Looks like a music venue."

"It's a pizza place—there's music, too, but at this time it'll just be some small band."

Lucy boldly took the woman's hand and led her down the stairs, into the bar. It was dimly lit and the smell of pizza and bar food wafted through as they slid into a booth. Once they had looked over the menu, Lucy went up and paid for the food and drinks—not caring about Seph's insistence that she would pay.

"I have a rule," Lucy informed her as she set the beer down. "The person who asks the other one out has to pay."

Seph gave an appreciative look. "I suppose that's fair."

Lucy smiled, scooting back into the seat. A quiet fell over them.

Seph comfortably draped an arm over the back of the booth, behind Lucy. "What's on your mind?"

There was something comforting about her arm, despite the fact it didn't touch her. She bit her lip. Lucy didn't want to admit what she had been thinking about and instead asked: "I know you like pizza. What do you not like?"

Seph shrugged. "Not much. I don't dislike many things. I don't tend to like tinned food all that much, but I don't have any freshly made foods I hate. Do you?"

"I don't like cake or pastries much at all."

"Cake. All cakes?"

"Pretty much." Lucy shrugged. "Except ice cream cake, but that's ice cream and therefore an entirely different type of food."

Seph smiled at her. "Alright. I'll remember that. What else?"

"Food wise? I mean, I'm sure there's other stuff, but I tend to eat most things—or at least try them once."

"I get that," Seph said before taking a sip of beer. "What else can I learn about you?"

"What would you like to know?" Lucy tilted her head. She felt bold in that moment, with Seph's eyes on her. She liked how she looked at her. "I'll tell you the truth about anything if you ask the right question."

"*Anything?*" Seph said, smirking. "Bold promise."

"Anything, *within reason.*"

"So not really anything, then."

"Semantics. Ask your questions and see what happens. I'll try not to judge you."

Seph laughed, leaning back in her seat as she thought about it.

Lucy tried to ignore the feeling warming through her as she flicked her eyes quickly over Seph. She was truly a stunning woman, there was something about the way she leaned back, the way she smiled that had Lucy's heart in her throat—so much so that there was a tiny, insecure voice asking why Seph would pay any attention to her. Another voice rose in her head, sounding a lot like Katie, that quickly shut that insecurity down, reminding her that she, *too*, was a woman worth getting to know.

Something her mother had always pressed as well. Reminding her that anyone worth sharing a life with would judge her on her actions, not her job, her class, her education or, especially, how she looked.

"What do you like?" Seph asked.

"In what context?"

Seph smiled, as if about to say something before her mouth shut when the waiter came. He set their food down, his eyes glancing to Seph a little longer before giving a hard nod, before he left.

Looking at the meal, Lucy realised that pizza was probably not the sexiest of foods. It was heavy, oily, and their ridiculously large sized slices had onion and garlic on it, not exactly kissing food.

"Last night you said you didn't like Madame Hyde. So what *do* you like?"

Lucy paused, considering the question. There were a few bands she liked, but there was nothing she *loved* the way that Katie loved music. "I like a wide range, depending on what I'm doing. When I'm at work, I tend to listen to orchestral music. I have a fitness playlist that has more pop on it. A few musicals, too."

"What musicals?"

Lucy stumbled. There were a few. "*Phantom Dreams*. Not its sequel, though I did like a few of the songs. I used to watch *The Underbelly Project* with my mum. But...actually the first musical I saw was *Nevermore*."

"*Nevermore*?" Seph asked, raising her brow. "I don't think I know it."

"You don't? I don't know how to explain it, but I really love it. It's so transportive. You know, like synth-based music, with a theme of horror and war, polarised by the upbeat music. I think it's one of the most clever musicals, but it almost never runs in Australia. I think the last time was nearly two decades ago."

"That's a shame."

"It is! But look, I get it, it's not one of the best-known musicals." Lucy buried herself in her drink as she tried to ignore the feeling creeping up in her that she was being too nerdy.

"What's it about?" Seph asked.

"There's a narrator throughout it, and his voice is in every song and the music is...very eighties laser show, I guess? But it's one of the few musicals my dad could stand watching. Mum used to take me to them all the time when I was a kid. She loved the story that music told."

"I get that. Music can speak to the soul."

Lucy smiled. "It can be transformative, too. Just...takes you somewhere else. I think that's why I don't really have any favourite songs or bands. I like to fall away into the music. But you get that, you're a big fan of Madame Hyde."

Seph gave a small laugh, like there was a joke there. "And yet Madame Hyde doesn't do that for you?"

Lucy gave a short shrug. "I know they're probably your favourite band, but I don't vibe with it. I mean, in fairness, my roommate's always having sex to it, so I probably associate it with wanting to *leave* the house, if that makes sense."

Seph laughed. "Yeah, that makes sense. Well...have you listened to Feloney?"

"Is that a band or a song?"

Seph gave a short smile, "You should check out the music."

"What are they about?" Lucy asked, and Seph gave a shrug. "Text me to remind me and I'll check it out."

"I will," she assured her. "Tell me what else you like, outside of musicals?"

The conversation drifted away from music, to TV, art, food and American versus Australian beer before they spoke about their experiences with school. Easily, Lucy found herself drawn to the woman, having to remind herself that as fascinating as she was, Seph would be leaving soon and Lucy couldn't set her heart on anything but a potential pen pal.

But it was hard to not let her heart run on its own.

Seph's hand dropped to the denim on her thigh and began running circles that were making her all the more aware of the seam of her pants.

It'd been an hour and they were only on their first beer, having both half-eaten their slice of pizza as they drew closer and closer in the dim light.

More people were coming in and the acoustic band was starting to play louder music, making it difficult to hear each other.

And then Seph was leaning in, her breath brushing against her ear as she asked, "What do you like?"

"You," Lucy said.

Seph looked at her, the blue of her eyes catching the light like two sapphires. She fingered the collar of Lucy's shirt with one hand, the other sliding higher up the thigh.

It was intoxicating. All Lucy wanted was her to slide those fingers a little higher and see how far she could get, but it wasn't appropriate. It wasn't *quite* late enough.

"Maybe we should get out of here?" Seph smirked, rising to leave.

Lucy nodded, following her out of the door into the afternoon air. The smell of beer and cooking oil faded away and Lucy blinked up into the light. It seemed strange for a moment, being underground and forgetting that it wasn't night yet.

"Is your roommate back?" Seph asked.

"Yeah, she is."

Seph smiled. "Did you want to come back to my hotel?"

"Hotel, hmm? It's not a room you share with a bunch of other 'wanderers' is it?"

"No, it's by myself. A decent room. It even has a minibar."

Lucy agreed. She'd been to a few cheap hotels before—Sydney certainly had enough to keep each other in competition at the very least, depending where you needed to be.

As Seph led her through the streets of the Central Business District, asking questions, talking about her own home city, Lucy felt the excitement fill her chest. It had been some time since she'd felt like this—of getting to know someone while feeling the prickling sensation of anticipation.

Right now, she didn't care if they fell into the sheets or lay awake talking the night away, all she wanted was to squeeze out every moment she could with this woman.

"We'll need to go the back way, if that's alright," Seph said. "Some celebrities are staying at the hotel and the front area gets crowded."

Lucy frowned. She couldn't imagine what celebrity would be staying at some cheap family hotel, but as they crossed the street, through the back of the hotel, she realised that Seph wasn't staying at some random low-budget place. It was one of the top-rated hotels in the city.

"Are you in the penthouse, or whatever it's called?" Lucy asked.

"No," Seph laughed. "It's just a room."

"Are you rich?"

"Maybe I'm a secret billionaire who's got her eye on you," she teased, opening the back entrance that read *Staff Only*.

That settled Lucy at least. Likely, Seph either knew someone who worked here, or worked here herself. There was no way that she would otherwise be 'wandering' around Australia, seeing some band. If she really was wealthy-wealthy, she'd just book Madame Hyde for some private event.

They stepped into the hotel elevator and, as the door closed on them, Lucy's eagerness rose again. She was in a hotel with a hot girl like some Hollywood rom-com character.

"You okay?" Seph asked.

Lucy made a small noise, biting the inside of her cheek. There was a very primal part of her that wanted to scream and jump out of excitement, but she buried it down, watching the elevator rise.

The hotel looked like any other. The halls even smelt the same as the ones she stayed in, but then Seph opened the door to her room.

Lucy stood in a master suite that was far more beautiful than any she'd been in. It was a large space, with a bed, television, two armchairs to one side of the room, and a corner table between them. It had *real* artwork on the wall (not prints) and a balcony.

In front of the wardrobe sat a collection of bags, one of which was a suitcase, but there was also a laptop case, a large guitar case, and an overnight bag where a collection of wires were spilling out.

"Oh, ah, mind the mess."

"You have a lot of stuff," Lucy said. "Do you write music?"

Seph gave a short laugh, nodding. "I do. I can play something for you later."

There was something in the way that she said it that felt awkward. It made Lucy think of all the times her friends and acquaintance had found out how well she could draw, only to then ask her to sketch something for them.

"Don't worry about it," Lucy assured her, smiling. "If you want to show me something, I'd love to hear it. But don't feel like you have to. I don't need anything that you're not ready to show yet."

Seph's shoulders eased, a genuine smile tugging at her lips. "Maybe I'll play you something later."

"Whenever," Lucy assured her. "Today, tomorrow...never, I don't mind. Really."

"Mm, well perhaps there's something else I can show you," Seph said as she stepped closer, grabbing at her hips to tug her closer. "You never told me what you liked."

"I believe I answered honestly," Lucy said, wrapping her arms around Seph's shoulders. "Not my fault you weren't specific."

"Will you tell me now?"

"I like flowers. The ocean. I like eating hot chips covered in chicken salt."

"I have no idea what chicken salt is."

"Really? We'll have to change that."

"Mm, another time. Firstly, I want to know what you like once I get you out of these clothes?"

Lucy shivered, pressing closer. "Why don't you tell me what *you* like, and maybe we can come to an accord."

"Oh, I see how it is," Seph said and then all at once she was hoisting her up in her arms.

Lucy's heart raced as she wrapped her arms around the woman's neck. It was borderline absurd how much her brain melted when she did that.

"Lucy, you can tell me. I promise I won't judge."

"You can't promise that. Judgement is instant."

Seph's face softened. She stepped back, sitting on the edge of the bed and pulling her firmer onto her lap. "Firstly, I think there's very little that could shock me—secondly, if there was something I didn't like, I would tell you. There doesn't have to be judgement."

Lucy's heart fluttered at the words. There were things she wanted, things she would love to explore with her. "I don't know you well enough," she admitted. "I don't know who you are or what you like."

"I like music," Seph said. "I like meeting cute girls in the laundromat."

Lucy rolled her eyes. "What do *you* like?"

"Bondage," Seph said, and there was a pause there, a silence that held as Lucy felt her brain pause for a moment.

"Bondage," she echoed. "Like..."

"Rope, cuffs, silks scarves," Seph confirmed. "There's an intimacy. A vulnerability between the both of you. It requires a lot of trust so perhaps not yet."

Lucy swallowed. She'd done a few classes on rope. She didn't have the patience to tie someone up but she loved watching the couples fall into one another, melting in each other's arms.

"You can tie me up," she said, before her brain could jump in and warn her that *maybe* that was a bad idea; she didn't know how experienced Seph was after all. But as Seph's spine straightened, her eyes darkening, Lucy's own desire pooled. She wanted to be tied up. She wanted to be at the mercy of Seph's touch.

"I...wish you lived in America," Seph said, swallowing. "I don't have any rope here."

Lucy laughed. "But you have a strap?"

To that, Seph shrugged. "I take that everywhere."

"Everywhere?"

"*Everywhere*," she said, her voice low.

Lucy stilled on her lap, her fingers tightening on the shirt.

"*Ohh*, did you like that, sweetheart?"

Lucy nodded, her mouth going dry.

"Do you want me to do it again?" she asked, leaning in close.

Her breath was hot on her throat and Lucy shivered as the touch drew near her. As Seph's fingers slid underneath her shirt, over her skin, she melted into it, feeling her own hands curl against Seph.

"I can feel you rocking against me," Seph said, her voice low. "Do you need help fixing that?"

A strange whine pulled from Lucy and it was all the permission Seph needed. Suddenly her mouth, hot and sharp, was on Lucy's throat, fingers sliding over her skin and tugging her pants undone.

Lucy wanted to say something—warn her that maybe she should shower, but Seph had flipped them, throwing her onto her back and already unzipped her pants. She tugged them down Lucy's thighs as she kissed her throat in a dizzying scald of heat.

Lucy knew that if she asked, Seph would slow down, would tease her or stop entirely—but she didn't want any of that. She wanted this hard and fast. She wanted to burn beneath her touch until there was nothing else that she could feel.

"Don't hold back," Seph told her. "I want to hear you."

That was hard. Harder than it should be, but she eased into letting the moans escape.

Seph's fingers slid underneath the band of her underwear. Each gasp, each moan and whine was rewarded with the fingers stroking over her until Lucy could feel the wetness slick in the underwear.

"I want you inside me," she whispered.

Seph paused, and for a hot second Lucy wondered if it'd been too much, but when her lover pulled back to look at Lucy, her pupils were wide and her mouth parted.

Then Lucy realised the truth: She'd somehow hit a primal part of the woman. "*Please,*" she said.

Seph's mouth pressed to hers. Lucy drank her in as those heated fingers stroked down, sliding inside her, slowly, at first, edging, before she slid deeper.

Rocking her hips, Lucy rode the fingers, grinding up against Seph's hand as they kissed. There was little else that Lucy could want, except to be filled by her. Her thighs ached, as she tightened and squeezed around Seph and with each breath she sucked in she felt the vibration of Seph moaning against her.

Never had she felt so entranced, so aware of every sensation and yet have the world feel so narrow. It was as if there was a spotlight on them and nothing existed outside of it. And then that spotlight shrunk down until all Lucy could feel was the orgasm building low in her belly.

Pulling her mouth away, she clutched at Seph, digging tighter as she felt the edges of the orgasm.

"Want me to stop?" Seph whispered. There was a tease to her voice.

Lucy shook her head, gasping. She was close. So close.

"Tell me."

"Don't..." she said, her voice straining. "*Don't stop.*"

Seph's fingers were deep inside of her, stroking firmly, beautifully, electrifying her from the inside out as Lucy ground down on her palm.

And then with a gasp, she came, crying out as she shook against her lover until her muscles nearly burned with the intensity.

Seph slowed down and then pulled out of her, her hand dropping wetly against Lucy's thigh.

Lucy stared up at the ceiling. She was somewhat aware of the weight against her. Of her pulled up shirt. Her bra was still on. She was still technically wearing underwear, though they had moved awkwardly down, caught around her thighs with her jeans.

"Would you look at that," Seph said.

Lucy turned, catching her eye. "Look at what?"

"I think I can see a flush running over your cheeks."

Lucy laughed, shoving her away as she sat up. "Just you wait until I have my way with *you*, then we'll see who's blushing."

"I look forward to that," Seph said, her voice low a growl that had Lucy's body humming. "But I don't think I'm done with you yet."

And before Lucy could fix her pants, Seph was tugging them off her, kissing her thighs with hot, open-mouthed kisses until she was melting back on the bed.

Then Seph stripped her from the rest of her clothes.

CHAPTER 4

Seph lay awake, watching as Lucy slept. The woman's expression was soft, her mouth parted as she exhaled each breath.

The band would be packing up tomorrow, leaving near midday to get to the next city on their tour. A part of her wanted to take Lucy with her, but the groupie life wasn't for everyone and from what she knew of her, Lucy was too focused on her career to be content with sitting back.

It'd been a while since a woman had her enamoured so quickly. For a while, Mira had eclipsed her world, and then she left as she always did—following her heart wherever it took her. Which was currently pursuing an acting career.

The last time she'd spoken to Mira had been nearly six months ago. They'd ended on bad terms. Though "ended" was a strong term. Mira had thrown down an ultimatum and left her, refusing to answer her phone calls or text messages when Seph had refused to comply.

Eventually, Seph took the hint.

Lucy rolled away from her, and Seph moved onto her back, staring up at the ceiling. The city cast a haze in the room. She thought about closing the curtains, but there was something familiar about seeing the lights. It reminded her of where she started, in a two-bedroom apartment shared with four people, lying on a mattress on the floor, dreaming about becoming a rockstar.

The hotel bed might be more comfortable, but that apartment had been the closest thing to a home she had. Now, she wasn't so sure what home was, anymore. The apartment in LA, maybe. It was the most familiar to her, at least.

In truth, she spent more time in hotels than any one place. The place she felt happiest was often in the lead-up to making music with the band.

Sitting in a room, sharing and jamming until something came out of it... She loved those moments because they made her feel free.

The last few months, though, it'd felt like she'd lost her ability to create anything new or original. As if her muse had also left to Rome.

"Serious face," Lucy's voice whispered, voice husked by sleep.

Seph turned, watching the sleepy expression cross the woman's face.

"Did I wake you?"

"You look sad," Lucy said. "Can I do anything?"

"Just thinking about the past."

"Dangerous," Lucy said, throwing her arm over Seph's waist. "Are you leaving tomorrow?"

"I am."

"Do you have time for breakfast?"

"I'll make time," she assured her.

Lucy snuggled closer to her and, after a few moments, her breath evened deep and slow against Seph's throat. It was a nice feeling.

Mira had never liked sleeping close, complaining that Seph ran far too warm. But Lucy felt cool against her heat.

Shifting the blankets over them both, Seph closed her eyes and fell asleep at last. It seemed only a few moments before sunlight was rousing her awake again.

Then she heard the floor creak.

"Sneaking off?" Seph asked, peering over to where Lucy stood.

"Showering. I was trying to let you sleep in," she said. "I'll be out soon."

Seph smiled, watching as she stepped into the ensuite. There was a bittersweetness to it, remembering that these were their last moments. And while Lucy wasn't a groupie, Seph knew that one way or another (likely through her roommate), Lucy would eventually work out who she was and whatever *this* was would evaporate.

When Lucy stepped out of the shower, Seph stepped in, washing herself quickly. She dressed, towelling off her hair as she moved to where Lucy was sitting on the bed, doing her heels up.

"You look nice," Seph teased.

"I look like a woman who spent the night," she said with a smile. "Luckily I brought a change of underwear and my toothbrush. I borrowed some of the teeny hotel toothpaste by the way. I hope you don't mind?"

"No," Seph scoffed. She got those everywhere she went. Stretching, she looked at the time. "I'll pack and then we can head down to breakfast, if you like."

"Sure," Lucy agreed, smiling. "I don't think I've had a hotel breakfast in a while. Last time I went they had these tiny condiments."

"They still have those. I usually stuff a few in my jacket," Seph said as she checked over her possessions.

With her bags packed, she led Lucy downstairs, sneaking in a quick kiss in the elevator before the doors opened on a lower floor to let another couple in.

There was something *tender* about the way Lucy kissed. Seph wasn't sure if it was the way she could feel her pressing up on her toes, or if it was the way she'd snake a hand against the back of Seph's neck, as if trying to pull her in as close as possible. Whatever it was, it had Seph's heart thudding in her chest, warning her how easy it would be to fall for a girl like this.

Lucy looked at her with purpose, like they were sharing a joke as they stood behind the other couple.

Seph was certain she could see a blush in the warmth of her brown skin as she smiled. And then, as the doors opened to the ground floor, Lucy's hand grazed the back of hers.

Seph's fingers twitched to reach back for her, only to miss.

They were shown to a breakfast buffet where Lucy eagerly went for the fluffy pancakes, grabbing cream and syrup before the berries. She glanced to Seph, a mischievous look in her eye like there was something naughty about how many pancakes she'd stacked.

They grabbed coffee and then took their seats, with Seph's plate filled with eggs, toast, and tomatoes.

"I know you're leaving, so don't misunderstand my intentions," Lucy said as she began eating. "But I like talking to you. Is it okay if I text you or would you prefer for this to naturally end with this breakfast?"

"It doesn't have to end after breakfast, I have another hour after this, at least until checkout."

Lucy rolled her eyes, smiling as she sipped at her coffee. "After checkout then."

Seph smiled, but the ache of reality struck her. "It could be some time before I return to Sydney," she said. "But I've enjoyed your company, too."

"I know you mentioned that you're going around the country and then will return back to the US in a few weeks. I'm not trying to be your girlfriend or anything serious. I like you, genuinely. So if you'd like to get rid of my number, I would understand, but if you'd like to be friends after checkout, you have my number," Lucy said, finishing with a shrug.

The way her words ran at the end, Seph knew came from a sudden moment of vulnerability. She found herself wondering how she could squeeze in a last-minute trip back to Sydney. It was selfish to want another moment with Lucy before everything came undone.

So, totally, completely selfish.

"It's okay if all this was just a fling," Lucy assured as the silence held for a beat too long. "I'm only asking so I know what happens next."

"I'll be busy a lot," Seph explained. "It takes me a while to respond to messages and I'll sometimes go days without responding but that doesn't mean anything. I get wrapped up in my work."

"I promise not to take it personally when it happens," Lucy said. "But just so you're aware, you may come back to the worst jokes I've found on the internet."

Seph paused. "How bad are these jokes?"

"Well, did you hear about the restaurant on the moon?"

"Oh, no."

Lucy's smile split wide as she finished the joke, "I heard the food was good but it had no atmosphere."

"Oh, that's...that's really bad. I don't know if I can handle that," Seph teased. "Maybe I need to re-think this."

"Don't worry, I have more: What did the grape say when it got crushed?"

"Are they all questions?"

"It let out a little wine."

Seph cringed, shaking her head as she laughed at the absurdity of it. "That's...so bad."

"Don't worry," Lucy said as she pulled out her phone. "I also draw visual jokes!" And with that, she clicked open a photo before showing it to Seph.

There, on the screen was what looked to be black and yellow USB stick with wings. She stared at it, blinking before it struck her. "A USBee?"

"Exactly," Lucy said, putting her phone away. "And there's plenty more of that, if you were to text me."

"Not sure how I feel about that," Seph said, unable to disguise her smile.

"New tactic: there's plenty more of that if you *don't* text me," Lucy teased, winking. "Though if you block me then I guess we'll never know."

Seph knew that she could lie. Firmly state that she didn't think it was a good idea, that she wasn't interested. It wouldn't be easy, especially when Lucy looked the way she did, her head tossed back laughing, her eyes glittering in the morning light. The truth was she didn't want to.

Not ending this could be a terrible, awful disaster. It could lead to messy feelings and messier fights down the line, but right now, these past few days, the sex, the laughter, and conversation with this woman had supplied her with almost as much joy as her music did. And Seph had learned a long time ago to run with her heart, not her head, regardless of how many times it led her into trouble.

"Here," Seph said, pulling out her own phone. "I don't tend to text much because I lose my phone too often to count, but that's my Pop! account. You can message or call me on there." She texted her account details to Lucy.

"Easy. I only have my art on there, so don't judge the account too much," she said. "I mostly use it as a wannabe portfolio."

A notification pinged to let Seph know of a new follower. Clicking it open, she pulled up Lucy's portfolio page and briefly looked at the pictures before she clicked it shut. There would be plenty of time to look at her art later. Right now, she wanted to spend her time focused on Lucy.

"So...what time's check-out?" Lucy asked.

"In an hour and a half."

"Did you want to do something in the city...or return to your hotel room?"

Seph smiled, already thinking about how much she enjoyed listening to Lucy pant in her ear. "I've heard goodbye sex can be especially good."

"Let's find out," Lucy said.



This was bliss. This moment of vulnerability between them. Seph wanted nothing more than to hold in the feeling for another hour, another day. Never had she felt such a wash of connection with another...not like

this. She couldn't look away as Lucy cried out, trembling against her until she was squirming away from the too-sensitive touch.

Seph drew herself up the woman's body and kissed over her until her mouth pressed against Lucy's.

"Mm, you taste like sex," Lucy teased, humming playfully.

"Did you get a good taste? Maybe you need it again," she said, kissing her over and over before Lucy was laughing, turning her head away.

Seph began trailing kisses down her throat.

There was a moment's pause, as the laughter softened and Seph stared into Lucy's eyes, an ache tugging at her chest.

She didn't want it to end. Not yet. It felt too soon.

"It doesn't have to be goodbye," she whispered. "You could come with me."

Lucy blinked, swallowing as she seemed to consider it. "My life is here," she said. "I enjoy this, and if the stars align right in the future, I'm sure we'll see each other again. Until then...we'll have to be content being friends."

"I don't know if I'll be content with that," Seph said, kissing her again. "But I would cherish it anyway."

It would have to be enough.

"Well, for a little while longer, we don't have to just be friends," Lucy said. She was moving, a mischievous look on her face as she began slipping down Seph's body, pressing kisses to her flushed skin. "In fact, the way I see it, I need to leave an impression."

"And what will that involve?"

They fucked until Seph's phone was going off as her last-*final-final* alarm blared, warning her to get out, and then they quickly dressed and wished each other goodbye.

It left a sharp pain in her heart, as if she was saying goodbye to someone she cared deeply for instead of a woman Seph had met only a couple of days prior. But it was a sweet goodbye nonetheless.

She kissed her, hand curling in Lucy's hair as if she could just hold on long enough to make time stop.

And then they were pulling away and Lucy was blinking as she shyly stepped back. "I guess you've got to make like a tree and...leaf."

Seph laughed, kissing her again. "What did the buffalo say when his son went off to college? Bi-son."

Lucy laughed, and the sound was the most beautiful song Seph had ever heard

"See, it catches on," Lucy said. And then there was the last, awkward pause.

Seph reached up, placing her hand on Lucy's cheek. "Until next time," she said.

"Until then," Lucy agreed.

Seph headed out of the hotel to where the band was waiting in the car. It was a black Mercedes AMG 4MATIC+—one of the newer models. Nice, sure, but ridiculously overpowered for the city.

When Seph slid into the car, Lionel snarled, asking why *she* was allowed to be late.

Giving her a knowing look, Jane raised her eyebrows. "How was Laundry Girl?"

Seph exhaled, feeling the past few days wash over her. It wasn't only the sex, but the conversations. The empathy Lucy had. The way she'd smiled at her. The wit, intelligence, and ridiculous puns.

"Holy shit, Seph. Why don't you bring her along?"

"She's got her life here," Seph shrugged, shifting in the car. "If the stars align...I'll see her again."

"Did you get her number at least?"

To that, Seph gave a grin. "Think I should send a cheeky text?"

"Wait," Lionel said. "Drives them mad when you don't respond for a few days and follow up with a quick 'What you up to?' text."

Seph frowned. That wasn't her style. But it wasn't usually her style to text a girl to begin with. She got by with a string of one-night stands, and had a few girls who would answer her call if she rang, but the only person she ever *texted*-texted was Mira, and...

She didn't want to think or even compare Mira to Lucy.

Seph looked out the window and watched as the cityscape passed. Perhaps that's all it would be for them. Memories to recall when she needed. There was no need to draw out the heartbreak any further by growing attached to a girl via some app.

And yet, Seph couldn't help opening up *Pop!* and checking out Lucy's profile. The truth of the matter was, the woman had a brilliant eye for composition and colour, and her character scenes were beautiful. Even if Seph wanted to let go and move on with her tour, she had a feeling that this was going to be hard.

She sent an emoji in the message box and watched as Lucy responded with a bee emoji.

Seph closed her phone, sliding it into her pocket as a melody began stirring in her head.

La-la-laundry girl.

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MADAME HYDE
BY THEA BELMONT

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