Paige came out in a pair of jeans and a plaid shirt, carrying a large red plastic bucket. They started singing the song, and Paige immediately got into character. Olivia grinned and tried to act into it, too, by giving Paige pencils and rolling up pieces of paper to fix the hole in the bucket. The audience chuckled and applauded.

Olivia looked out and forced a smile. The familiar face from the imaginary crowd was there again. She sat in the front row, her hair in its perfect bun, eyes shining.

"Go away," Olivia wanted to yell. "Why are you here?" Instead she opened her mouth and sang through her fear. She looked at the audience again as Paige introduced the next song. The woman was gone, but shadows of the memories of the last night they'd spent together stirred in the back of Olivia's mind.

Chapter Two

Sometimes, she heard music in everyday noises. Horns honking on the street, the sounds of people laughing and talking, the clanking of glasses and silverware in the diner where she'd worked for the last six months, they could all sound like a symphony. Today, she was serving a woman who looked about her age at Table Four. "Hi." She walked over to the table. "My name's Olivia. I'll be your server today. Can I start you off with something to drink?"

The woman pushed some of her red hair away from her face, making the bracelets on her wrist jingle. "Hi. I'll have a diet Pepsi, please."

"We have Coke products. Is that okay?"

"Sure."

"Do you know what you'd like to order, or would you like some more time?"

"Um, can you give me a minute, please?" She smiled sweetly.

"Sure. Our soup of the day is chicken and dumpling. I'll give you a few minutes." As she walked away, she wondered why they still served soup and had a soup of the day in the middle of June. A gust of hot air blew in as a couple left. Today, the bell on the door was just an annoying bell, and the sound of silverware against plates didn't sound like a tiny percussion section.

Olivia jumped when she heard brakes screech outside the only window in the shoe box-sized apartment she shared with Paige. She fingered the ballerina charm on her bracelet, took a deep breath, and forced herself to think of something besides the imaginary face in the audience at Douglas's and the memories screeching brakes still occasionally triggered. She glanced at the chipped red polish on her toes and wondered if she should apply a fresh coat before tonight. Her head turned when she heard the doorknob rattle.

"Guess what?" Paige came in wide-eyed and carrying two brown paper bags full of groceries.

"What?" Olivia stood from the couch, straightened the skirt of her sundress, and took one of the bags from Paige. She started unloading groceries.

"There was a ton of fruit on sale. I thought we could make that fruit salad Mom used to make during the summer." Paige smiled and held up a carton of blueberries as she opened the refrigerator.

Olivia reached into the bag and pulled out a carton of strawberries, a bunch of bananas, an orange, a few kiwis, a pair of large red apples, and a whole pineapple. "This all looks so good. We haven't even started making it, and I'm already excited." She smiled and handed the carton of strawberries to Paige. At the age of twenty-four, she loved strawberries as much as she had when she was small. She smiled again, thinking of how she'd pick out the strawberries and refuse to eat the other fruit the summer after kindergarten. "Thank you for not getting watermelon." They'd both always picked out the watermelon. She set the bananas on the counter beside the sink.

Paige plopped the kiwi beside the bananas, taking up the rest of the counter space, and smiled at her. "You're welcome. It just gets mushy too fast anyway. Do you think we have time to make it now?"

Olivia glanced at the time on the microwave above the tiny stove. "Probably." She washed her hands at the sink and started washing fruit while Paige finished putting away the groceries.

After dinner, Olivia concentrated on the wonderful sweet taste of the fruit salad as she sat on the stool across from Paige at the counter that doubled as a table.

"Liv?"

Olivia blinked and realized her sister was waving a hand in front of her face, trying to get her attention.

"Sorry. What?"

Paige sighed and narrowed her brown eyes. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Do what?"

"The show."

"Of course. I'm positive. Why? Are you having second thoughts?"

"No. You know this is what I've wanted my whole life."

It was true. Olivia thought back to a night that felt light-years away. It was the summer before Paige entered seventh grade and the summer before Olivia's sixth-grade year. Paige's best friend, Nancy Shermer, Paige, and Olivia lay in the grass in the Lawrence's backyard, looking up at the stars. "What do you want to be when you grow up, Liv?" Nancy asked.

"I don't know. Maybe an astronaut, or a writer." She could hear her mother inside, doing dishes and singing along to Judy Collins on the stereo. Crickets sang their own song on the other side of the yard.

"What about you, Paige?" Nancy asked.

Paige answered without hesitation. "A singer."

"That sounds like fun," Olivia chimed in. "I want to be a singer, too."

"Okay," Paige replied. "We can do it together. We'll be an act."

After they graduated from separate universities, a semester and a thousand miles apart, it was Paige who had remembered that summer night and honored her word when she'd said, "Let's go to New York and start our act."

Olivia finished her bowl of fruit, rinsed it in the sink, and stacked it with the dirty dishes on the counter. "Then why are you asking me this?"

"It's just that, almost every night we've played at Douglas's the audience was, well, there weren't even twenty-five people in that theatre."

"So what? You really want to give up this easily? That's not the Paige I know. You know we're good enough to make it. We just have to give it more time. And Mr. Douglas asked us to perform for the rest of the next two weeks. That's something." Olivia didn't tell her sister she agreed with her at that moment, knowing she needed to be the encourager.

"Maybe," Paige said.

Olivia looked at her sister. Paige's face was serious as she brushed her bangs away from her eyes.

"Why are you being so doubtful all of a sudden? You're the one who said we should do this. You're the one who won first prize at that talent competition when you were twelve, and you were the lead in the musical your last two years of high school." Olivia tucked some of her darker brown locks behind her ears.

"I just want to make sure that I didn't force you into this-- that it's what you really want."

"I already told you, it is what I want." Olivia looked at her calloused fingers and displayed them to Paige. "Would I have paid for guitar lessons with my own money in high school or written songs during my last semester at BoCo if I didn't want this?"

"I guess last night just freaked me out a little," Paige admitted.

"There'll be good nights and bad nights," Olivia said. "I'm going to go change. We have to be at the theatre in an hour. Am I doing it alone tonight?"

"No." Paige replied, smiling.

Olivia looked at Paige that night as she sang the Judy Collins song. Whatever fears or concerns she'd had earlier melted away. This was one of the things Olivia admired about her sister: she never let the audience see anything they weren't supposed to. She put her heart and all her energy into every song, no matter the size of the audience or what was going on in her personal life.

The audience was a little bigger tonight. Olivia looked at the people sitting in the first row and stopped. Suddenly, she couldn't breathe. She was back. The woman with the perfect bun, ballerina posture, and smiling green-gray eyes sat in the third seat from the right. She was wearing a skirt over her leotard, and she smiled and clapped after the song was over. Shadows stirred in the back of Olivia's mind again.

Olivia glanced towards the opposite end of the row, where the woman with the long red curls was sitting. When she looked back, a thin, blond man sat in the third seat from the right. She tried not to look confused or frightened as she strummed the chords to the last song. She looked towards the end of the row again. The woman with the long, loose, red curls was still eyeing Olivia the way she had for almost the entire second act. Why did she look familiar?

"Thank you very much, everyone. Have a good night." Olivia set the microphone back in its stand and took a final bow with Paige.

"I wish we had more to sell than just photos," Paige murmured as they walked to the back of the room to a table where they greeted audience members after every show. Most of the time people ignored the glossy photos of Paige and Olivia for sale and just stopped by to say hello or that they liked the show. Sometimes they said they particularly enjoyed the Hole in the Bucket number, which Paige and Olivia had decided to keep in the act after its success that first night. "Look at how many people are leaving." Paige said.

"There are some people staying, though." Olivia noticed that, in particular, the red-headed woman was standing by the table looking at the pictures. Thank goodness, the ballerina was gone.

She took her place beside Paige behind the table.

"You girls were wonderful," a pudgy, balding man standing in front of Paige said. He pointed to Paige. "I especially loved it when you sang 'Who Knows Where the Time Goes.' My sister and I loved that song growing up."

Paige smiled. "Thank you. We did, too."

Olivia looked up and saw the red-headed woman standing right in front of her. She was wearing dark jeans and a white baby-doll tee, and she had big silver hoops stuck in her ears. She was holding pictures, but Olivia couldn't see which ones they were.

"Hi," Olivia greeted her.

"Hi," she said, smiling shyly. "I-- I really enjoyed the show."

That smile. Olivia recognized her now: the woman from the diner a few days ago. She'd left a very generous tip. Olivia smiled. "Thank you. I'm glad. Means we're doing our job." She motioned to the pictures the woman was holding. "Would you like me to sign any of those?"

The red head's green-gray eyes widened a little. Olivia blinked and looked again. No, her eyes were a soft forest green, not gray at all.

"Oh, um, please." She handed Olivia an 8x10 photo. In the photo, Olivia was wearing dark jeans and a burgundy blouse, and she sat posed on the ground with her back against a tree. She had a dreamy look on her face and in her crystal-blue eyes.

Olivia picked up her Sharpie. "Who do you want me to make this out to?"

"Nicki, N-i-c-k-i."

Olivia nodded and wrote, TO: Nicki, LOVE: Olivia.

"How many of those do you have," Olivia asked, gesturing to the other photos Nicki was holding.

"Oh, um, that one that you just signed, and then these two." Olivia thought she felt a small electric current pass between them as Nicki handed her another 8x10, this one of she and Paige, and a smaller photo. Olivia glanced at the smaller photo; it was her headshot. The background was black, and she wore a yellow shirt similar to the one Nicki was wearing.

She admired the big butterfly sitting on Nicki's right ring finger. "I like your ring."

"Thanks." Nicki smiled and touched the ring briefly.

"That'll be fourteen dollars, please. See, we charge you five for the bigger ones, but since this one's smaller,”--she held up her headshot--"we charge you a little less."

"Keep the change." Nicki handed Olivia a twenty.

"Thank you," Olivia said, beaming.

"You're welcome." Nicki returned the smile.

Later, Olivia and Paige stood outside waiting for a cab. Down the street, someone laid on their horn, and Olivia jumped. She closed her eyes for a second and swallowed hard.

Paige put her hand on her shoulder. "That girl with the red hair was, like, really into you."

"Nicki? No, she wasn't." A siren wailed a few blocks away.

"I know it's been a few years, but you can't possibly not know when someone's into you."

"Fine, so what if she was?" Olivia asked casually, adjusting the guitar case on her shoulder.

Paige continued speaking. "She bought some pictures. I stole a peek. You were in all three of them, and in two of them you were alone."

"So what?"

"You were into her, too, weren't you?"

"Stop."

"I kind of thought that thing with Lena in college was a phase, or some experimental thing. But, hey, if you'd rather hang out with Nicki than Nick, I don't care."

"How could you possibly think that? Lena wasn't a thing," Olivia said sharply, putting emphasis on the word 'thing.' "We were in a relationship. It's not something you get out of your system, and it's not a phase." She crossed her arms over her chest. Heat still radiated from the sidewalk, and she felt her back break out in a sweat. Her shoes pinched her feet, and she could feel a blister forming on the ball of her left foot.

"I didn't mean to upset you. I'm sorry. You know I just want you to be happy."

Olivia was grateful when a cab pulled up.