

“Tomorrow is Sully’s birthday,” I tell Michael when we meet for drinks after work.

He takes a careful sip from his scotch and raises one eyebrow.

“He’s having a birthday celebration.” The other eyebrow raises too, but so far, he’s letting me dangle. “Here...in town.”

Now he laughs and turns to fully face me. “And you want to celebrate. If I accompany you, you can tell yourself we’re all just a couple of old friends getting together.”

I grimace. “I hate you.”

He nods. “Why don’t you take Ethan?”

“I double-hate you.”

“I mean, aren’t you afraid of ‘blowing your cover’? You don’t want anyone to know you even know Sully.”

“Nobody in that world knows who I am, and besides, I’m dating Ethan.” Now, I hate myself.

“I see,” he scratches at his stubble as he takes a deep drink. “He’s your beard.”

“No—he’s not!”

“O.K., if you want to go with that.” He shakes the ice in his glass while giving me the stink eye. “Is there any chance this is a thinly-veiled plea for help and you want me to talk you out of going?”

I sigh. “I wish I had the willpower for that.”

He pats me on the back. “I’ll go with you—for entertainment value only and not because I condone this kind of behavior.”

I bump my shoulder into his. “We’ll only stay for a few minutes, and thanks for supporting me even when I’m awful.”

“You’re not awful, Ev, just human.”

I decide to go full glam for the event double-billed as a movie wrap/birthday party. Sully mentioned a number of cast members and possibly the producers or director might be attending, and I wanted to blend in as best I could. He mentioned his co-star, Liam Hemsworth, would definitely be there. I’d always had a teeny crush on him, and I really wanted to meet him. Maybe meeting Liam would knock Sully out of my head for good.

It’s a mild March evening as Michael and I take a town car to the club. After we produce our ID’s that are checked against the guest list, we are shown into the private VIP party room in back. I’m wearing my silvery chain-metal Michael Kors dress that ends mid-thigh. The front and back of the dress drape softly from delicate satin spaghetti straps that just barely hold up the dress. I have my hair down in soft waves and dialed up my make-up to include smoky eyes and pale, glossy lips. Michael swore under his breath when he saw me, accusing me of taunting the beast. I shushed him by assuring him I would be the least flashy woman at the party.

As soon as we enter, Sully spots us and comes dashing over. He practically runs into me, and I actually have to put my hand out to stop him from body-tackling me.

He grins sheepishly as he takes me around with one hand while whispering into my ear. “You look delectable. You’re not fair.”

“And neither are you,” I whisper back. I notice a well-preserved woman with round, turquoise glasses and a sleek-white bob eye us with a smirk. I ignore her and spend the next few minutes drinking in Sully and all his amazingness.

“So...that’s what this is all about?” he asks, waving his hand up and down over my body. “You want to make me suffer for choosing Hollywood over you?”

I'm momentarily taken aback by his words because I'd been thinking the same thing for years, but Sully had never copped to it. "You invited me—I didn't want you to feel embarrassed in front of your glitzy, West Coast friends."

"Evie, besides for you and Michael," he nods in my brother's direction, "no one here is my friend."

After a few too short minutes, I reluctantly shoo him away to tend to his other guests with a promise not to leave without saying good-bye.

"You want something to drink?" Michael asks me after Sully walks off. "Because I could sure use one." He shakes his head. "I haven't met Ethan yet, but I can't imagine he's any sort of competition for Sully. Self-sabotage isn't your style—what are you doing, Ev?"

I have an answer for his first question, but not for his second. "You can get me a whiskey sour."

I watch him walk away and hate myself a little bit more than I did yesterday. The room is comfortably full and the women and men are beyond stunning. As a New Yorker, I see lots of toned and fashionably-turned out people on the streets, but this group makes it seem as if looking perfect is the goal of their day. I'm standing next to a platinum-blonde who is keeping careful balance on her crystal-studded stilettos while chatting with someone who looks like he could be Zac Efron. Even in the muted lighting, I can see his eyes are a brilliant blue, and his stance is pure confidence.

I briefly wonder who Sully's love interest is in the film. A super buff, ridiculously good-looking guy who isn't Sully walks my way. I straighten and realize it's Liam Hemsworth. He makes a beeline for me, gently shaking off a man who tries to get his attention. He comes right up to me as Michael finally makes his way back with my drink.

“You must be Evie!” he says, grabbing me into his enormous, rock-hard body.

I hear Michael snort next to me. “So much for anonymity.”

He cocks his head toward Michael and says, “Don’t worry, buddy, what goes on at a shoot is sacred stuff. No one dares talk about it afterward.” He turns to me with a whisper. “Your secret is safe.”

Michael rolls his eyes as he hands me my drink. I take a sip of the icy sourness and feel it hit my empty stomach. Liam asks me what I do, which prompts him to tell me he’s just purchased a large property in Holmby Hills. He generously offers to fly me out to design the place and offers up such an obscene budget for the job that it has me rethinking all the times I’d turned down Sully’s suggestion to go out West for work. Regretfully, I decline, and as he’s tapping my number into his contacts should I change my mind, I see the woman with the turquoise glasses staring at me.

“Liam,” I say, my hand on his arm. “Do you know who that woman with the glasses is over there?” I tilt my head slightly.

He glances over. “That’s Camilla Lawson; she’s Sully’s PR guru.”

“I see.” A shiver runs up my spine, but I don’t know why. “It was fantastic meeting you Liam, and I promise, should I ever find my way over to your side of the country, I will let you know.”

“You do that.”

I tell Michael I’m just going to find Sully and say good night. As I work my way through the crowd that has doubled in the last thirty minutes, I feel someone tap my shoulder. I turn and see Camilla Lawson.

She speaks as soon as I turn around. “Now I understand why Sully attends every premiere alone and is never linked with any of his female co-stars who all pant after him while trying to get in his pants. Did you know that Arianna Bonet is spreading rumors that he’s gay?”

I actually did know that, but I stay silent.

“But now I know what that’s all been about.” She leans into me. “I saw his reaction when you walked in—you’re the secret lover.”

I flinch from her breath, which is heavily-liquored, as much as from the truth.

“I can get you the cover of *People*—this will be fabulous. I’ll time it for the same week as the film’s release and get you on the morning shows looking all lovey-dovey.” She’s practically salivating. “A Social Register gal and our poor orphan—everyone will eat this up.”

I feel my toes go numb. I grip my elbows with my hands to keep them from shaking in a feeble attempt at armoring myself against this formidable woman’s onslaught. I want to ask how she knows anything about me, except I saw her pointing and whispering in my direction earlier. There must’ve been at least one New Yorker in the room who recognized me.

“I’m dating Ethan Brandt,” I say pathetically. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t worry, sweetheart. I’ll take care of everything. You don’t worry your gorgeous head about a thing. You’ll be the new Brangelina...but something catchier.”

She’s still murmuring as she does an about face and stalks off. I frantically look around for Sully. He’s laughing with Michael Bay, his director, and I have to keep myself from yanking him out into the hall and dramatically wailing that my life is over. I take a few calming breaths and manage to smile as I walk over to the two men and ask to steal Sully for a couple of minutes.

We take a few steps into a dark corner. “Did you tell Camilla about us?” I try hard to keep the panic from voice.

“No. Why?”

“She wants to turn us into a PR stunt.”

He runs his hand through his hair. “She’s paid handsomely to look for opportunities. I guess she saw us together.”

“Is it that obvious?”

“Only if you’re paying attention. She’s grilled me relentlessly about my love life—even accused me of being a monk, at one point,” he says with a laugh.

My heart is beating double-time, and my palms are clammy. There is nothing remotely humorous about this. I stare at him. It’s not the first time I realize the stakes are vastly different for us if our relationship gets discovered.

“As I see it, we have two choices,” he says. “We can either just rip off the band-aid and never again look over our shoulders, or I can shut it all down right now. That way we’ll be able to continue cowering in corners,” he says with a grimace.

I close my eyes and try to block out the hum of the party, and the expectations coming off of Sully.

“I vote for dark corners,” I squeak.

He seems disappointed in my decision. “You know it’s just a matter of time.”

“Not necessarily.” I shake my head. “I’m with Ethan; I don’t want to hurt him.”

He moves in closer. “If you’re with him, then why didn’t you bring him?”

I don’t feel the need to explain myself. “I have to go.”

I turn away abruptly and make my way over to Michael. He seems to be in a pleasant conversation with someone who is somewhat recognizable. I look at the room teeming with glossy people and wonder who amongst them would welcome tabloid intrusions and paparazzi-

stalking just for the momentary rush of fame. My guess would be a whole lot of them. This was so not my world that I mentally chided myself for coming tonight at all.

I tap my brother on the elbow. “Let’s get out of here.”

He shoots me a quizzical look. “I was actually just beginning to enjoy myself.”

“Please?”

We step out into the brisk evening, and I look around furtively for anyone ready to jump out from behind a bush and snap our picture. I hail down the first cab that comes by, and we climb inside. I give our addresses to the driver, and after a harrumph on his end, he pulls away from the curb.

“What’s wrong?” Michael asks.

“Sully’s PR guru wants to reveal us as the new ‘it couple’ when the movie premieres.”

He shrugs. “Sounds like she’s doing her job.”

“Traitor.”

He shrugs. “Give it up, Ev...the longer you hide the more carnivorous the tabloids will be. You know what that’s like.”

I do. When I was twelve, there had been a major chemical dumping story at DuPont Industries. Instead of replying to the allegations, my grandfather had chosen to hide out at his estate in Connecticut. It had been the one rare occasion when he had taken me and Michael out for ice-cream and looking back on it, I realized he had set up a positive photo-op starring the three of us. What he hadn’t count on was a rogue reporter following us from his estate and harassing us while we tucked into our sundaes. He’d shot a barrage of questions at my grandfather that I didn’t understand at the time, but were no less terrifying. Watching my

normally unflappable grandfather grow flustered and agitated is a memory that has long stayed with me.

Looking out the window of the cab, I shudder. The last thing I want is to be ambushed on my way to work or the corner deli. My complicity, my utter impotence about this situation is paralyzing. Some days I feel like I can't make a sound decision about Sully, which makes me feel more lost than ever.

When I get home, I pull out my grandmother's tea set and make myself a cup of chamomile. As I take a soothing sip, I accept the fact that Sully is a riddle with no easy solution. I finish the cup and set it in the sink. I may disagree with Sully about going public, but he is right about the need to do something. Now that I know what needs to be done, I just have to suck it up and do it.

