

Chapter One

As I sit here with one foot on either side of the ledge, looking down from twelve stories above the streets of Boston, I can't help but think about suicide.

Not my *own*. I like my life enough to want to see it through.

I'm more focused on other people, and how they ultimately come to the decision to just end their own lives. *Do they ever regret it?* In the moment after letting go and the second before they make impact, there has to be a little bit of remorse in that brief free fall. Do they look at the ground as it rushes toward them and think, "*Well, crap. This was a bad idea.*"

Somehow, I think not.

I think about death a lot. Particularly today, considering I just—twelve hours earlier—gave one of the most epic eulogies the people of Plethora, Maine, have ever witnessed. Okay, maybe it wasn't the most epic. It very well could be considered the most disastrous. I guess that would depend on whether you were asking my mother or me. *My mother, who probably won't speak to me for a solid year after today.*

Don't get me wrong; the eulogy I delivered wasn't profound enough to make history, like the one Brooke Shields delivered at Michael Jackson's funeral. Or the one delivered by Steve Jobs's sister. Or Pat Tillman's brother. But it was epic in its own way.

I was nervous at first. It was the funeral of the prodigious Andrew Bloom, after all. Adored mayor of my hometown of Plethora, Maine. Owner of the most successful real-estate agency within city limits. Husband of the highly adored Jenny Bloom, the most revered teaching assistant in all of Plethora. And father of Lily Bloom—that strange girl with the erratic red hair who once fell in love with a homeless guy and brought great shame upon her entire family.

That would be me. I'm Lily Bloom, and Andrew was my father.

As soon as I finished delivering his eulogy today, I caught a flight straight back to Boston and hijacked the first roof I could find. *Again, not because I'm suicidal.* I have no plans to scale off this roof. I just really needed fresh air and silence, and dammit if I can't get that from my third floor apartment with absolutely no rooftop access and a roommate who likes to hear herself sing.

I didn't account for how cold it would be up here, though. It's not unbearable, but it's not comfortable, either. At least I can see the stars. Dead fathers and exasperating roommates and questionable eulogies don't feel so awful when the night sky is clear enough to literally feel the grandeur of the universe.

I love it when the sky makes me feel insignificant.

I like tonight.

Well . . . let me rephrase this so that it more appropriately reflects my feelings in past tense.

I *liked* tonight.

But unfortunately for me, the door was just shoved open so hard, I expect the stairwell to spit a human out onto the rooftop. The door slams shut again and footsteps move swiftly across the deck. I don't even bother looking up. Whoever it is more than likely won't even notice me back here straddling the ledge to the left of the door. They came out here in such a hurry, it isn't my fault if they assume they're alone.

I sigh quietly, close my eyes and lean my head against the stucco wall behind me, cursing the universe for ripping this peaceful, introspective moment out from under me. The least the universe could do for me today is ensure that it's a woman and not a man. If I'm going to have company, I'd rather it be a female. I'm tough for my size and can probably hold my own in most cases, but I'm too comfortable right now to be on a rooftop alone with a strange man in the middle of the night. I might fear for my safety and feel the need to leave, and I really don't want to leave. As I said before . . . I'm comfortable.

I finally allow my eyes to make the journey to the silhouette leaning over the ledge. As luck would have it, he's definitely male. Even leaning over the rail, I can tell he's tall. Broad shoulders create a strong contrast to the fragile way he's holding his head in his hands. I can barely make out the

heavy rise and fall of his back as he drags in deep breaths and forces them back out when he's done with them.

He appears to be on the verge of a breakdown. I contemplate speaking up to let him know he has company, or clearing my throat, but between thinking it and actually doing it, he spins around and kicks one of the patio chairs behind him.

I flinch as it screeches across the deck, but being as though he isn't even aware he has an audience, the guy doesn't stop with just one kick. He kicks the chair repeatedly, over and over. Rather than give way beneath the blunt force of his foot, all the chair does is scoot farther and farther away from him.

That chair must be made from marine-grade polymer.

I once watched my father back over an outdoor patio table made of marine-grade polymer, and it practically laughed at him. Dented his bumper, but didn't even put a scratch on the table.

This guy must realize he's no match for such a high-quality material, because he finally stops kicking the chair. He's now standing over it, his hands clenched in fists at his sides. To be honest, I'm a little envious. Here this guy is, taking his aggression out on patio furniture like a champ. He's obviously had a shitty day, as have I, but whereas I keep my aggression pent up until it manifests in the form of passive-aggressiveness, this guy actually has an outlet.

My outlet used to be gardening. Any time I was stressed, I'd just go out to the backyard and pull every single weed I could find. But since the day I moved to Boston two years ago, I haven't had a backyard. Or a patio. I don't even have weeds.

Maybe I need to invest in a marine-grade polymer patio chair.

I stare at the guy a moment longer, wondering if he's ever going to move. He's just standing there, staring down at the chair. His hands aren't in fists anymore. They're resting on his hips, and I notice for the first time how his shirt doesn't fit him very well around his biceps. It fits him everywhere else, but his arms are huge. He begins fishing around in his pockets until he finds what he's looking for and—in what I'm sure is probably an effort to release even more of his aggression—he lights up a joint.

I'm twenty-three, I've been through college and have done this very same recreational drug a time or two. I'm not going to judge this guy for

feeling the need to toke up in private. But that's the thing—he's *not* in private. He just doesn't know that yet.

He takes in a long drag of his joint and starts to turn back toward the ledge. He notices me on the exhale. He stops walking the second our eyes meet. His expression holds no shock, nor does it hold amusement when he sees me. He's about ten feet away, but there's enough light from the stars that I can see his eyes as they slowly drag over my body without revealing a single thought. This guy holds his cards well. His gaze is narrow and his mouth is drawn tight, like a male version of the *Mona Lisa*.

“What's your name?” he asks.

I feel his voice in my stomach. That's not good. Voices should stop at the ears, but sometimes—not very often at all, actually—a voice will penetrate past my ears and reverberate straight down through my body. He has one of those voices. Deep, confident, and a little bit like butter.

When I don't answer him, he brings the joint back to his mouth and takes another hit.

“Lily,” I finally say. *I hate my voice*. It sounds too weak to even reach his ears from here, much less reverberate inside *his* body.

He lifts his chin a little and nudges his head toward me. “Will you please get down from there, Lily?”

It isn't until he says this that I notice his posture. He's standing straight up now, rigid even. Almost as if he's nervous I'm going to fall. *I'm not*. This ledge is at least a foot wide, and I'm mostly on the roof side. I could easily catch myself before I fell, not to mention I've got the wind in my favor.

I glance down at my legs and then back up at him. “No, thanks. I'm quite comfortable where I am.”

He turns a little, like he can't look straight at me. “Please get down.” It's more of a demand now, despite his use of the word *please*. “There are seven empty chairs up here.”

“Almost six,” I correct, reminding him that he just tried to murder one of them. He doesn't find the humor in my response. When I fail to follow his orders, he takes a couple of steps closer.

“You are a mere three inches from falling to your death. I've been around enough of that for one day.” He motions for me to get down again. “You're making me nervous. Not to mention ruining my high.”

I roll my eyes and swing my legs over. “Heaven forbid a joint go to waste.” I hop down and wipe my hands across my jeans. “Better?” I say as I walk toward him.

He lets out a rush of air, as if seeing me on the ledge actually had him holding his breath. I pass him to head for the side of the roof with the better view, and as I do, I can’t help but notice how unfortunately cute he is.

No. Cute is an insult.

This guy is *beautiful*. Well-manicured, smells like money, looks to be several years older than me. His eyes crinkle in the corners as they follow me, and his lips seem to frown, even when they aren’t. When I reach the side of the building that overlooks the street, I lean forward and stare down at the cars below, trying not to appear impressed by him. I can tell by his haircut alone that he’s the kind of man people are easily impressed by, and I refuse to feed into his ego. Not that he’s done anything to make me think he even *has* one. But he is wearing a casual Burberry shirt, and I’m not sure I’ve ever been on the radar of someone who could casually afford one.

I hear footsteps approaching from behind, and then he leans against the railing next to me. Out of the corner of my eye, I watch as he takes another hit of his joint. When he’s finished, he offers it to me, but I wave it off. The last thing I need is to be under the influence around this guy. His voice is a drug in itself. I kind of want to hear it again, so I throw a question in his direction.

“So what did that chair do to make you so angry?”

He looks at me. Like *really* looks at me. His eyes meet mine and he just stares, hard, like all my secrets are right there on my face. I’ve never seen eyes as dark as his. Maybe I have, but they seem darker when they’re attached to such an intimidating presence. He doesn’t answer my question, but my curiosity isn’t easily put to rest. If he’s going to force me down from a very peaceful, comfortable ledge, then I expect him to entertain me with answers to my nosy questions.

“Was it a woman?” I inquire. “Did she break your heart?”

He laughs a little with that question. “If only my issues were as trivial as matters of the heart.” He leans into the wall so that he can face me. “What floor do you live on?” He licks his fingers and pinches the end of his joint, then puts it back in his pocket. “I’ve never noticed you before.”

“That’s because I don’t live here.” I point in the direction of my apartment. “See that insurance building?”

He squints as he looks in the direction I'm pointing. "Yeah."

"I live in the building next to it. It's too short to see from here. It's only three stories tall."

He's facing me again, resting his elbow on the ledge. "If you live over there, why are you here? Your boyfriend live here or something?"

His comment somehow makes me feel cheap. It was too easy—an amateurish pickup line. From the looks of this guy, I know he has better skills than that. It makes me think he saves the more difficult pickup lines for the women he deems worthy.

"You have a nice roof," I tell him.

He lifts an eyebrow, waiting for more of an explanation.

"I wanted fresh air. Somewhere to think. I pulled up Google Earth and found the closest apartment complex with a decent rooftop patio."

He regards me with a smile. "At least you're economical," he says. "That's a good quality to have."

At least?

I nod, because I *am* economical. And it *is* a good quality to have.

"Why did you need fresh air?" he asks.

Because I buried my father today and gave an epically disastrous eulogy and now I feel like I can't breathe.

I face forward again and slowly exhale. "Can we just not talk for a little while?"

He seems a bit relieved that I asked for silence. He leans over the ledge and lets an arm dangle as he stares down at the street. He stays like this for a while, and I stare at him the entire time. He probably knows I'm staring, but he doesn't seem to care.

"A guy fell off this roof last month," he says.

I would be annoyed at his lack of respect for my request for silence, but I'm kind of intrigued.

"Was it an accident?"

He shrugs. "No one knows. It happened late in the evening. His wife said she was cooking dinner and he told her he was coming up here to take some pictures of the sunset. He was a photographer. They think he was leaning over the ledge to get a shot of the skyline, and he slipped."

I look over the ledge, wondering how someone could possibly put themselves in a situation where they could fall by accident. But then I

remember I was just straddling the ledge on the other side of the roof a few minutes ago.

“When my sister told me what happened, the only thing I could think about was whether or not he got the shot. I was hoping his camera didn’t fall with him, because that would have been a real waste, you know? To die because of your love of photography, but you didn’t even get the final shot that cost you your life?”

His thought makes me laugh. Although I’m not sure I should have laughed at that. “Do you always say exactly what’s on your mind?”

He shrugs. “Not to most people.”

This makes me smile. I like that he doesn’t even know me, but for whatever reason, I’m not considered *most people* to him.

He rests his back against the ledge and folds his arms over his chest. “Were you born here?”

I shake my head. “No. Moved here from Maine after I graduated college.”

He scrunches up his nose, and it’s kind of hot. Watching this guy—dressed in his Burberry shirt with his two-hundred-dollar haircut—making silly faces.

“So you’re in Boston purgatory, huh? That’s gotta suck.”

“What do you mean?” I ask him.

The corner of his mouth curls up. “The tourists treat you like a local; the locals treat you like a tourist.”

I laugh. “Wow. That’s a very accurate description.”

“I’ve been here two months. I’m not even in purgatory yet, so you’re doing better than I am.”

“What brought you to Boston?”

“My residency. And my sister lives here.” He taps his foot and says, “Right beneath us, actually. Married a tech-savvy Bostonian and they bought the entire top floor.”

I look down. “The *entire* top floor?”

He nods. “Lucky bastard works from home. Doesn’t even have to change out of his pajamas and makes seven figures a year.”

Lucky bastard, indeed.

“What kind of residency? Are you a doctor?”

He nods. “Neurosurgeon. Less than a year left of my residency and then it’s official.”