

Chapter 1

Masks

Black mascara was smeared across the white sink, and a thick layer of hairspray coated the mirror. I heard Madison's heels click, click, click down the hallway as I sat down to pee.

"Come on Kylee, come dancing with us. It's going to be so fun!" she yelled.

"I can't. I'm not twenty-one yet, and I feel bloated."

"We're going to Stoney's—it's eighteen and over," she yelled.

"I still think it's weird you go line dancing," I said with a biting sarcasm. "No thanks."

"You're so lame!" she said.

"Let's go!" Lindsey, our other roommate, shouted from downstairs.

"I'm coming," said Madison. Click, click, click. Her heels disappeared down the steps.

I stared at my bland face in the mirror—high cheekbones, thin lips, big cat-like eyes. All the girls hated how I didn't "have" to wear makeup because my lashes were thick and already curly. "You're so lucky," they'd say. I pulled out my phone and played

["Chained To The Rhythm"](#)
by Katy Perry.

Then I took out a sponge and scrubbed the makeup-coated sink. My life had become predictable. I knew when I finished cleaning I'd go read, flip through Tinder, masturbate, and go to bed. I sprayed the clouded mirror with vinegar water and wiped it clean. When am I going to stop waiting for my life to start?

People thought I was a saint because I was still a virgin—a twenty-year-old virgin—and this was no small task. I came close to having sex once—okay, maybe twice—but I didn't feel ready. I was leaving San Diego for Nevada State, and I refused to get attached to anyone. So I cut it off with my “serious” boyfriend at the time.

I found it easiest to make friends in college if I fit into a box they could identify with. My persona was “the good girl from California,” and as long as I played that role, they could rely on my motherly instincts to be there when they became “the drunk girls” or “the emotional girls” or “the stupid girls.” It was my junior year, and a couple of girls in my psychology class became “the engaged girls.” I'll never forget the sudden overwhelming incompleteness I felt without a man. I became overly aware of how behind I was. I didn't own my own car, I didn't have any prospective men I was dating let alone ready to marry, and I was a barista studying to be an art therapist.

Madison said if I wasn't going to put myself out there in real-time I'd have to get serious with online dating, so I tackled OkCupid and Tinder. One of the girls in my class met her fiancé on OkCupid, so I figured it couldn't be that bad, but the guys I met there were bizarre. They were complete strangers, and trying to get to know them in a couple of hours was like visiting another country with no map. Tinder was like window shopping for guys. With one simple swipe, I was free to indulge. Yes . . . no . . . yes . . . no . . . Those hours spent deciding who was attractive and who wasn't were a waste. I never met up with any of them, but I did find the occasional hot guy who would fulfill my fantasy for the night.

I became the one on the outside looking in, observing the emotional ups and downs my girlfriends experienced because of guys, and questioning why they continuously put themselves through the turmoil. I watched as they spent two hours a day getting ready, perfecting their hair, makeup, and clothes. I never wanted to care that much, but my uninteresting appearance stood out, and the longer I stayed in Vegas, the more I cared about how I looked on the outside.

Sure, it was entertaining watching them get ready and hearing their stories, but I was ready to join in.

I pulled out Madison's eyeliner, put the cleaning supplies away, plugged in the curling iron, and decided it was time to switch up my routine. I changed the song to

“Bad Intentions,”
by Niykee Heaton.

I thought about how fun it would be to fall in love. I needed to meet someone the old-fashioned way—in person. I dug through Madison's clothes. She's going to be so excited I'm finally doing this. I checked myself out in the full length mirror: long brown curls, tight jeans, black boots, and a semi-revealing blacktop. I snapped a photo and texted Madison.

K: I'm on my way!

M: OMG!

I got to Stoney's, and there was a line out the door. People were dressed mostly in jeans, lots of cut off shorts, plaid tops, and country hats. I paid the Uber driver.

Madison came rushing over to me. “I can't believe you're here!”

“Neither can I.”

“Follow me.” She ran ahead and showed the guy at the front her stamp. “She's with me.” She touched his buff arm. “Will you pleeeeeease let her in?”

“Let me see your ID.” He flexed his bicep as he held out his hand, and I did as I was told.

Seconds later, Madison was yanking me past a long line at the bathrooms and a bar crowded with people and onto the dance floor. The band of the evening was playing

“Friends in Low Places,”
by Garth Brooks.

Lindsey handed me a drink, but I shook my head no, holding my arms tight to my sides.

Madison grabbed the drink. “I’ll take it.”

We all sang along as I stumbled over my feet and a few drunk people stepped on me.

Chapter 2

Experiments

The next morning, Lindsey emerged from her room with mascara smeared under her eyes and joined Madison and me downstairs. She said, “I can’t believe you actually came out.”

“I know,” I said as I poured another glass of water, knowing they both had hangovers.

“And you were dancing all over that hot guy,” Madison said. “No I wasn’t!” I looked away.

“Oh, stop with the good girl act. You were grinding all over him. Tell me you gave him your number.”

“No, I got his number.” I put the water down in front of Lindsey.

“What? Why?” Madison wrinkled her forehead.

“I don’t know. He was all over me. I didn’t want to give him my number. What if he’s a stalker?”

“Everyone’s a stalker these days,” Lindsey said.

“True,” Madison agreed.

“I saw some guy videoing you riding the mechanical bull.” Lindsey looked at me.

“What? No way!” I covered my face, thinking of when I got whipped off and landed on my back. “That’s so embarrassing . . .and that’s creepy. What about all those girls whose thongs were hanging out? Do you think he videoed them too?”

“Probably,” Madison said.

“Oh my God.” Lindsey turned to Madison, wide-eyed. “You’ll never guess what Tom asked to do last night.”

“What? Did he ask to do anal?” Madison scrunched up her face and ate the last bite of Cheerios.

“Eww.” Lindsey pushed Madison’s arm. “How did you know?”

Madison giggled. “I don’t know. Some guys have a thing about the back door. It turns them on.”

“Does it turn you on?” Lindsey asked. She looked back and forth at us.

I stared out of the kitchen window at the sidewalk, suddenly missing my ex-boyfriend Jonathan and how our hands and mouths explored each other’s bodies. Then I remembered how those same hands explored my best friend’s body when I was at the hospital with my sister.

Lindsey said, “Don’t tell me you’ve tried it!”

“Me?” I snapped out of my daze and looked over my shoulder at the empty living room, hoping a distraction would appear out of thin air. “Uhhh . . .”

“Oh please!” Madison abandoned her cereal bowl, walked over to me, and put her arm around me. “You know Kylee is Little Miss Virgin Mary.”

“Oh that’s right. Little Miss Saving-Herself-For-Marriage.” Lindsey touched her chest to imply what a dainty gesture it was to be me. She seemed happy to have the conversation turned away from whether or not she liked it from behind. “Yeah.” She picked at her cuticles. “You have more self-control than anybody I know.”

“Thanks.” This had become my permanent response anytime someone commented on my sexual restraint. I was proud of my image, but I was done being a prudish mom.

Madison said, “Let’s go get our nails done!”

“Yeah!” I said with more enthusiasm than I anticipated. I’d never gone with them before. I was too frugal with my income. Plus, I didn’t understand the point of having nice nails if they were just going to get messed up at work.

“And a spray tan,” Lindsey added. “You’re pasty.” She pointed at Madison’s ivory arms.

“Yeah! Let’s have a girls’ day.” I poured myself some coffee. It felt good to let my guard of perfectionism down and join in the fun.

Madison and Lindsey taught me all their tricks for affordable shopping and showed me how to enhance my naturally stunning eyes. Before long, I was handing out my number to more guys than I knew what to do with.

I turned 21, and we went out every weekend. Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays were spent at parties or bars, and on Sundays we went to Rehab at The Hard Rock Hotel. Every frat party was the same. Red party cups, loud music, lots of bodies, big houses, screaming girls, beer pong, kegs, people throwing up, and body shots. The only differences from party to party were our clothes, the location, and the jocks who were either happy drunk from winning or pissed-off drunk from losing. Oh, and the guys I kissed changed from party to party too.

There was one that tasted like cinnamon and beer, and I figured out where the cinnamon flavor came from after we were done making out and his gum was in my mouth. His tongue was stiff like a hockey stick, and it was as if he was trying to get the puck, my tongue, into a goal.

Another guy I made out with slobbered everywhere. I had to wipe off my face with my forearm in between kisses, and his spit smelled like old cheese. The next guy had a scratchy tongue. I imagined kissing gravel would feel better.

If that’s what it was going to be like, I was ready to sign up for summer classes and stay my celibate self. But my days remained packed with friends, and life revolved around shopping and getting spray tans,

mani-pedis, and new clothes. Even though I was going into serious credit card debt, I was having a blast! So I kept exploring.

Rehab was my favorite place to let loose. Madison made friends with the DJ, so he'd get us in for free. The water slide was my go-to. Sometimes I'd talk to guys at the swim-up bar, but most of the time we'd dance in the water and lay out. People were always drunk, and since I never had more than one drink, I usually couldn't relate. I met people from all over the world, though, whenever we'd go to the strip. It was a melting pot of diversity.

I don't know if I was getting better at kissing or the guys were, but I started to meet some very attractive, non-slobbering, good-smelling, soft-skinned men. They were skilled with their tongues, and I was excited to find "the one" and take my research to the next level.

Chapter 3

Tight Rope

Over the next month, I had the same conversation with the few good kissers I found. It went something like this: “I have no intention of sleeping with you anytime soon. I’m a virgin, and I’m saving myself for marriage.”

One of the guys was shocked I was a virgin in my twenties and appalled I was saving myself. “What are you, Christian?” He wasn’t going to be my happily ever after. I felt no need to explain myself to him. I got up, walked past a girl vomiting on the lawn, and took an Uber home.

I felt more alone surrounded by people than I did by myself at home, but I kept going out anyway because I wanted to meet someone special. At night though, I’d lay in bed listening to

“Here,”
and the rest of [Alessia Cara’s Know-It-All album](#).

The next guy looked at me with a crooked smile that sent chills down my spine. Not the good kind. He took my hand and tried to walk me upstairs to one of the private bedrooms. I’d watched other girls disappear up those stairs, some carried over guys’ shoulders, some half-walking, half-crawling, and some willing participants. I yanked my hand back.

Now don’t get me wrong—I was into kissing him, and I was dying to know more about how it felt to be with a guy, but I had standards and a terrible gut feeling. “I’m not going upstairs with you,” I said.

He said, “Why not? You’ve been making out with me all night.”

“So? I’m not interested in doing anything else,” I said.

“Oh, so you’re a tease?” he whispered in my ear, tequila on his breath.

“No.” I spoke firm and assured. “I’m not a tease.”

He got too close and said, “I’ve seen you at other parties. You’re always making out with guys, getting them turned on, and then leaving.” Then he pulled me on top of him. “I’ve seen you straddle them too, like this, and then you always leave.” He held my thighs down. “Not this time.”

My body went numb as I leaned down, put my mouth to his ear, and said, “Okay. Take me upstairs.”

He took his hands off my legs and pushed me upright. “Let’s go,” he said.

He set me on the couch beside him. I felt weak. Is this how some guys get girls to go up the stairs with them? I stood up with shaky legs and walked toward the front door. He reached for my arm, but I slipped away from his grasp as a familiar face walked toward me. Oh my God, it’s Zack!

“Hey,” the clean-cut white guy said. “Don’t you work at the Starbucks in Anthem?”

“Yeah.” I stared, dumbstruck, at his perfect smile and soft yellow eyes, feeling my flirtatious single life drifting away. He was the one I’d been searching for all summer. I’d had a crush on him ever since we brushed fingers as I handed him an iced coffee with extra cream.

“Heart Attack”

by Demi Lovato

was background noise to his words.

“Are you okay?” He raised his eyebrows, looking over my shoulder at the creep shirking into the background.

“I’m fine.” I pulled my hair over one shoulder. “But I don’t get why being a virgin who is waiting for marriage is like being an elderly person walking a tight rope.”

He laughed. “Interesting comparison.”

How would it feel to hear his laugh forever?

I giggled and said, “I’m serious. I’m not trying to be an accident on the side of the road everyone’s slowing down to see, acting like it’s the first time they’ve seen it. Once upon a time, everyone was a virgin.”

“You’re funny.” He looked down, seemingly bashful. Then he stepped a little closer and said, “I’m Zack.”

“I know.” I batted my eyes. “Zack with the iced coffee, extra cream.”

“Wow, you remembered.”

“Yeah, well, you come in almost every day.”

I can’t believe how close he’s standing to me. I hope he can’t tell how nervous I am.

Madison came out of nowhere and threw her white spaghetti arm over my shoulders. “Are you coming to the rave?”

I looked at Zack.

He was looking at Madison. Is he going?

“Sure, I’ll go,” I said.

“Sweet,” she said. “You’re riding with us.” She grabbed my wrist and yanked me out front as an Uber driver pulled up. She pushed me into the smell of laundry detergent and Skittles, shoving me between her mousy-eyed guy-of-the-month and her.

“Wait up.” Zack stuck his head in. “Give the guy at the front my name, and he’ll let you in for free.”

“Okay,” I said as my face involuntary formed a goofy smile.