

**Murder**  
*At*  
**Castle Rock**

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**BOOKLOGIX®**

Alpharetta, Georgia

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## Chapter One

“Parker, you’re such a pig!” I shouted at my boss as he stood grinning in my office doorway that Monday morning. He deserved the insult for acting like a total sleaze ball. A few minutes earlier he’d burst through my door and disrupted my work to tell me the raunchy details of the dream he’d had the night before—whether I wanted to hear them or not. So far, I’d learned that his fantasy starred himself, two of our former female interns, and a hot tub. I had *zero* interest in finding out what happened next. I gave him the evil eye and threw up my hands to let him know I’d heard enough.

“Hey! There’s no need for name calling!” Parker responded playfully, clutching his hand to his chest as if I’d wounded him. He dropped his arms back down to his sides and shot me a dubious look. “Come on, Amelia, lighten up a little! It was just a dream. Besides, you know if I *really* had a hot tub I’d pick you to join me over Tina and Stephanie any day.” He chuckled as he ran a hand through his thinning chestnut hair.

“What’s gotten into you lately?” I asked him. Just a few days ago, Parker Deering wouldn’t have dreamed of making a comment like that to any of the girls at work. Sure, he’d kid around sometimes, but he had

never taken his joking too far. Recently, though, there had been an odd shift in his behavior. In just a matter of days, he’d turned over a misogynistic new leaf: cat-calling, sharing risqué tidbits from his sleazy fantasies, and practically drooling over any female that passed him in the hall. Earlier that morning I’d even caught him flirting with the butch woman who delivered our mail—and the first time he’d met her, he’d thought she was a man! *Either it’s the full moon or I’ve walked onto the set of Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, I thought as I glowered at him, waiting for an explanation for his borderline lewd behavior.

Parker gave me a smug smile. “Just unleashing my inner stud.”

“Can you go unleash him somewhere else? I’m trying to run your business right now.”

“Good point.” He grinned. “Alright then, I’ll let you get back to it. Work hard for the money!” he sang, bouncing his eyebrows at me.

I shook my head at him and spun my chair around to hide a grin when his voice cracked on a high note. Holding up a finger to hush him, I turned to answer my ringing office phone. “You’ve reached Castle Rock, Amelia speaking. How may I help you?” I greeted the caller as I swiveled back around in my chair to stick my tongue out at Parker. Too late—his thin frame had disappeared from my doorway, and he was strutting like a peacock down the hall toward his office.

My best friend and coworker, Kat, passed by on the way to her office. “Up top!” Parker exclaimed, giving her a high five. “And down low!” He gave her a second smack, this time on her behind. Before Kat could react, he shoved his hands in his pockets and began whistling to himself as he strolled into his office and closed the door behind him. Kat slowly pivoted her head toward my open door and gave me a

confused look. “Crazy,” I mouthed silently, swirling my finger in circles next to my ear to show that I thought Parker must have a few screws loose. She giggled and shook her head before entering her own office.

I wheeled my chair closer to the desk and propped up my feet on the corner as I returned my attention to the phone call. “Why, yes, Mister—Greer, was it?—your tickets will be available at the box office before doors open. Our box office hours are ten to seven, as posted on our website.” *Doesn’t anyone check the web for this kind of stuff? That’s why it’s posted!* I thought moodily as I hung up the phone. It had been ringing off the hook all morning, and it was hard to get any actual work done with the constant interruptions.

“Hey Ame!” Kat popped her head through the doorway so suddenly that she startled me. I whirled around in my chair too fast and nearly fell on the floor. Speaking of interruptions...

“Shit, Kat! Ever heard of knocking?! You almost gave me a heart attack!” I clutched my hand dramatically to my heart just as Parker had done.

“Whoops, sorry,” she shrugged. “So, what was that whole thing with Parker about earlier? I could hear you yell at him from all the way at the end of the hall.”

I rolled my eyes. “I don’t know what his deal is. I think he’s in heat or something—he’s been acting like a total horn dog all day. I even saw him flirting with Bertha Walters when she brought in the mail this morning.”

Kat cringed. “He made a pass at Big Butch Bertha? You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“I couldn’t say for sure, but he was being awfully friendly toward her. I could’ve sworn I even heard him tell her he loved her new crew cut. He said it complemented her ‘sexy unibrow.’” Kat gave me a

look of disgusted disbelief, and I shrugged. “Hey—his words, not mine.”

“He must have been joking. Sounds more like he was mocking her to me. Ugh, men!” she huffed. “Anyway, wanna grab a bite at Camila’s later? I figured we could head that way in a few hours before sound check. It feels like a Super Slice kind of day.”

Just the thought of an extra-large slice of pizza with gooey melted cheese and hot pepperoni made my stomach growl. “Kat, do you even have to ask? There’s no way I can say no to a Super Slice! Come grab me on your way out—first, I’ve got to wrap up the ticket counts and get the will call list ready for tonight.”

“You got it!” Kat grinned. “I’m pretty sure they have sangria as today’s drink special, so we should head over there around happy hour.” She turned and fluttered off, her long, wavy hair trailing behind her.

My name is Amelia Grace, and that was my crazy best friend, Katherine Taylor. We grew up on the same street in the suburbs of Atlanta and attended grade school through college together. We’ve always been close despite being almost polar opposites: Kat is tall and slender with long, light brown hair and light blue eyes. At five feet, five inches, I’m barely average height, could stand to lose a pound or two (I think all the Camila’s Super Slices and sangria may be partially to blame), and have straight auburn hair, brown eyes, and freckles. Growing up, Kat’s kind, free-spirited nature and good looks made her one of the most popular girls in school. She was on the dance team and yearbook staff, and everyone wanted to be her friend. Even to this day she’s never met a stranger.

While Kat was the Homecoming Queen, I may as well have been voted “Most Likely to Skip the Ten-Year Reunion.” I was the shy music nerd, and I spent most of high school and college with my nose buried

in a copy of *Rolling Stone* or *Spin* and my ears plugged with headphones. I was more interested in reading interviews with Dave Grohl or listening to the latest album from The Pixies than striking up a conversation with any of my classmates. Except for Kat, of course. It was by the grace of God—or, rather, “by the Grace of Amelia,” as Kat often says, poking fun at my name—that she became my best (and sometimes only) friend.

With Kat’s outgoing personality and my passion for all things rock n’ roll, we began working together as the Promotions Director and Venue Manager of Castle Rock, the two-story, two-stage concert venue in the heart of Midtown Atlanta. We had been working at CR since our college days at Georgia State—which, now that we were twenty-seven, seemed like a lifetime ago. Parker had hired us when he first took over the venue after inheriting it from his dad. His father, Jackson Deering, was a retired architect who’d purchased the land with his late wife during the mid-seventies. He designed Castle Rock himself, giving it two bars and a stage on both the top and bottom floors—for “double the disco” as he’d often boasted.

Both of Parker’s parents were now gone, making him the sole heir to Castle Rock and a small family fortune. Since he had no other living relatives, he often joked that his favorite employee would likely get the keys to his “rock n’ roll kingdom” when he finally did buy the farm. At thirty-five years old and a marathon runner, though, Parker was in great shape, and he’d probably outlive us all. I’ll admit that having an awesome venue like Castle Rock just given to me with no strings attached would rock my world—Kat and I had both always wanted to own and operate our own venue. Still, I wasn’t going to wait around for my boss to kick the bucket like some rich man’s gold-

digging trophy wife. I’d open my own place someday, but I would do it on my own terms.

It was because of my go-getter attitude that Parker had recently added booking responsibilities to my plate, which kept me fairly busy. That Monday morning was no exception. It was half past two in the afternoon when I finally looked up from my desk again. My Felix the Cat clock stared back down at me from my office wall with its wide eyes, swinging its tail to-and-fro as it ticked the passing seconds. I couldn’t believe that the morning had passed so quickly, but my growling stomach was telling me it was definitely way past lunch-time. Happy hour at Camila’s started in thirty minutes, and I could definitely use a break (and a drink). I stood up from my desk and stretched, wondering why Kat had not yet stopped by my office to head to lunch with me. Assuming she must have lost track of time herself, I wandered down the hall to see what the holdup was.

I stopped short of Kat’s door when I heard a muffled laugh—a man’s laugh—coming from inside her office. My eyes widened in surprise, and instead of knocking I hesitated, letting my already balled fist drop back down to my side. The man’s chuckle was low and gravelly, and while he sounded familiar, I couldn’t quite place him. His glee was echoed by Kat’s own flirtatious giggle—the ultra-girly one that she usually reserved for the men she wanted to bring home with her from the bar. I bit my lip in a sly grin and raised my fist again, ready to cramp her style so that I could take a peek at the guy she was, uh, *entertaining*—it would serve her right for blowing off our lunch date for a booty call! Before I could burst in and ruin their fun, however, their laughter dissolved into the distinct *smacking* sound of a steamy make out session. Damn—I was pretty sure she would kill me if I interrupted a good lip lock. *Perhaps I’ll let her off*

*the hook for blowing me off just this once*, I thought, backing away slowly from the office door and leaving Kat to have her fun.

As I ventured off to lunch on my own, I puzzled over what I'd just heard. Who was the mystery man in Kat's office? In the many years that she and I had been friends, we'd gone from gushing about crushes and first kisses over milkshakes after class to dishing all the juicy details of our hookups over a beer after work. (Well, almost all—a girl's got to keep *some* of the good parts to herself!)

More often than not, it was Kat that was doing the sharing. I was a little wary of the dating pool we had around these parts. Most of the guys we met out on the town didn't seem to notice me, anyway—not once my bombshell best friend stepped through the door. I didn't really mind; I'd had my fair share of dating disasters, so at the time I was content living vicariously through Kat and her crazy dating stories. It was better than subjecting myself to any more awkward nights spent staring across a table at a man who was only interested in one thing (I'll give you a hint—it wasn't my sharp wit or dazzling personality).

Over the past few years, Kat had been on enough dates for the both of us, but for some reason each romance had fizzled out after only a few short weeks. "My standards are just too high," she'd told me once over drinks and a game of pool at The Cavern, our favorite after-hours haunt. "I find fault with each of them by the third date. Why settle when I'm striving for perfection?" Hmm. Well, she may not have found it yet, but it certainly sounded like she was off to a good start with Mr. Afternoon Delight back there!

"Went on ahead to lunch, join me at Camila's when you come up for air," I texted her, smirking at my own cleverly crafted message.

Camila's Pizzeria was nestled in the corner of a dirty strip mall two blocks south of Castle Rock. While the area surrounding the restaurant was a little seedy, the atmosphere inside—and more importantly, the food—definitely made up for it. It was the best kept secret on this side of Midtown. With its authentic fifties diner interior, cheap, delicious pizza, and short distance from our workplace, most of the Castle Rock staff were regulars. In fact, as I ducked through the front door I could see our bouncer, Bryce, and his girlfriend, Laura, one of our bartenders. The couple was seated next to one another on one side of a corner booth with half-eaten calzones on the table in front of them. Their faces were somber, and they appeared to be deep in conversation. Great, trouble in paradise *again*. I didn't want to get caught in the middle of whatever they were arguing about this time, so even though they smiled and waved as they caught sight of me, I decided to give them their privacy and grabbed my own table near the front.

My waitress, Sharon, knew me by name and always treated me like an old friend. Today she greeted me cheerfully with a warm smile and a pat on the shoulder. "Amelia! How are you, girl?" Her face suddenly lit up even brighter after a moment, and she looked at me expectantly. "Today's the day, isn't it?! Bobby Glitter's coming to town?"

"Yep! Today's the day."

That day was the beginning of the most exciting week at Castle Rock in as long as I'd worked there. We were closing the downstairs Dungeon stage all week for three very special performances up in High Court. That Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, Castle Rock would be welcoming none other than the Pop Rock Prince himself, *Bobby Glitter!* Bobby had enjoyed great success in the late eighties and early nineties as the dreamy, hip-swiveling front man for

British pop sensation, StarStorm. *Rolling Stone* had pegged the band to be the next Beatles, but although they'd had quite a few chart-toppers, the band called it quits after only four years. When StarStorm went kaput, Glitter broke away to embark on a solo career. After releasing five albums on his own, Bobby had taken a hiatus that had lasted nearly ten years before re-emerging into the spotlight last year with the announcement of his twenty-year anniversary tour.

Five and a half months ago, his manager, Shawn Stone, had contacted me with a proposal to film Bobby's live tour DVD at Castle Rock. He'd even insisted that we were the only venue in town that he was interested in working with. Needless to say, when presented with the opportunity to book the Pop Rock Prince for his anniversary and comeback tour *and* three nights for the filming of his DVD, I more than jumped at the chance—I pounced on it with full force and ran with it like a sprinter at the summer Olympics! (Okay, so maybe I was just a *teensy* bit excited...)

Sharon beamed at me and took my hand as she bounced excitedly on the balls of her feet. “How wonderful, Amelia! Are you nervous about meeting Bobby?” she asked.

“A little.” Yeah, right. Nervous was an understatement!

“What I wouldn't give to be in your shoes right now—getting to meet him! What a fox!” The wrinkles around the middle-aged waitress's eyes softened and for a moment she looked about ten years younger. She placed her hand on the hip of her cotton dress and stared off wistfully. With her vibrant red hair, blue eyes, and fifties' style getup, Sharon looked like she'd just stepped off the set of *I Love Lucy*. “You're a lucky woman, Missy,” she sighed as she shook herself out of her reverie. “So, what'll it be today? Do you want

your usual pepperoni Super Slice with a side salad and Diet Coke?”

“Nah, just the slice today, Shar—and I'll trade the soda for a house sangria, please.” With Bobby coming into town in two hours, I needed something to calm my nerves, like a drink...or maybe three or four.

“Coming right up, girl!” Sharon sang as she scurried around the corner toward the kitchen.

A few minutes later, I was sipping sangria and melting my worries away with a mouthful of cheese and pepperoni. I sank back into the booth and chewed a bite slowly, savoring the warmth and deliciousness, and I instantly felt a little better. It was nice to relax, even if only for my lunch hour—I knew I still had a long evening ahead of me. After several stress-filled months of promoting this day like it was the Second Coming, I was finally mere hours away from welcoming *the* Bobby Glitter to a week-long stay in Atlanta for his three sold-out shows! Even though the day had finally arrived, I was still pinching myself to be sure that I wasn't dreaming. I'd brought in some pretty high-end acts during my stint at Castle Rock, but it wasn't every day that I got to book the eighties heartthrob that was my first famous crush.

That's right—with his good looks, charming accent, and sensual persona, Bobby had played the male lead in many a girl's fantasies—including a braces-wearing teenage *moi*. Let's face it: who *hadn't* spent a few embarrassing nights dancing like a maniac in front of her mirror while crooning “Baby, We Gel” into her hairbrush?

Kat had it bad for him, too. He was one of the few things we'd had in common growing up. Bobby Glitter had been our Elvis. In high school, we plastered pictures of him all over our walls and had sleepovers to stay up late and watch him perform on shows like *Saturday Night Live*. When Kat's Aunt

Barb took us to see him in concert in eleventh grade, we made our own t-shirts and wore them for a solid week! We also blasted his *Here's to the Times* album from our rooms at all hours until our parents couldn't take it any longer and held a joint "Glittervention" for the two of us, thus ending our celebrity-obsession phase. Ah, memories.

Now that Bobby was back in action, my idol worship came rushing back, too. *A whole week is totally enough time to make him fall for you*, the voice of my teen-self gushed in my head, not for the first time that day. "Oh, shut up, already!" I chided my inner fan-girl under my breath. This wasn't the time to get all star-struck; this was business, and the success of these three shows would be a huge milestone for both Castle Rock and my career. The stars had perfectly aligned for a deal like this to practically fall into my lap, and I was determined to make everything run smoothly for the duration of Bobby's stay.

After reviewing my mental checklist for the rocker's arrival, my thoughts drifted back to the romantic rendezvous I'd overheard in Kat's office. Who could her new beau be? More importantly, why hadn't she mentioned seeing anyone new? *Surely she's not embarrassed of the guy!* I snorted at the idea. Of course that wasn't the case—Kat wasn't easily embarrassed. She was always quick to own up to her dating screw-ups and brag about her hotter catches, so I knew either way that she'd fill me in as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

Just then, Kat did present herself. She sashayed through the front door, wearing a broad grin as usual, and slid into the booth across from me. "Sorry I'm late," she said breathlessly. "I got sidetracked. You know how it is on the day of a show."

"Uh-huh." I arched one eyebrow and gave her a knowing look. "So, who is he?"

Kat had been reaching across the table to snag a pepperoni from my pizza, but she froze mid-grab and looked up guiltily like a kid caught with her hand in the cookie jar. "So you *did* come by my office," she said sheepishly. She blushed, and I knew I had her cornered. Story time!

"Yup. Didn't you get my text?"

Kat shook her head and looked down at her phone. "Damn cell reception! I *still* haven't gotten it. I think it might be time for a new service provider. What service do you use, again?"

I wasn't about to let her change the subject that easily. "Nuh uh—not so fast! Out with it already! Tell me about this new guy! He must be something special to make you late for happy hour and a Super Slice."

For a brief moment Kat's features twisted in an emotion I couldn't quite identify. Sadness? Regret? Possibly anger? Whatever it was, the expression faded so fast that I wasn't sure I had actually seen it to begin with. She quickly snapped out of it and offered me an innocent smile. "Oh, Ame, it's just a fling," she said, shrugging. "I'll tell you all about him later—but first, *you* tell *me*—aren't you freaking out that *Bobby Glitter* is going to be here in just over an hour?"

Wow. Kat had never been one to shy away from her favorite subject—the current man in her life—so abruptly, and now she'd just done it *twice* in the past five minutes. It was pretty strange, considering both of us were suffering a dating dry spell going on about six-months, and we'd been starved for some good girl talk. Perhaps she was embarrassed after all. I just hoped it wasn't Bradley, that creepy guy with a lisp and overactive sweat gland who had followed her around like a puppy at The Cavern the previous weekend. She hadn't shown him interest then, but maybe, if she'd had a few more tequila cocktails after I left for the night...I shuddered and decided not to

push her for more details right then. Whoever the mystery man may be, she'd clue me in once she was good and ready—or good and over him.

I turned my thoughts to Bobby's impending arrival, and my inner fan-girl came rushing back with a giddy vengeance. "I'm totally psyched!" I gushed, feeling like we were back in high school all over again.

Kat clapped her hands merrily. "You're just like Liv Tyler in *Empire Records!*" she squealed, referencing our all-time favorite movie. I did feel a little like Liv's character, Corey, when the day finally arrived for her long-time celebrity crush, Rex, to perform at the record store where she worked. I only hoped that meeting Bobby wouldn't turn out to be as much of a disappointment as Rex was for Corey.

"Do you think I'm ready to manage a week this huge?" I asked, frowning. "It's not just a one-night stand—Bobby's playing *three* shows and he's here for a *whole week!*" The hair on the back of my neck prickled, and my nerves fluttered like spastic butterflies in the pit of my stomach. Suddenly I wasn't hungry anymore. I pushed my pizza plate across the table towards Kat just as Sharon swooped in to place a glass of sangria in front of her.

"Thanks!" Kat said, smiling at both of us. She took a bite of my pizza and chewed thoughtfully. Her blue eyes locked with mine, and with a mouthful of crust, she said, "Ame, you've got this. The will call list is ready, and all of the other tickets were mailed weeks ago. The sound and light crews are at the venue setting up right now, and Bobby is gonna flip when he sees the sweet set-up you've got for him in the green room! If anything, I'd say you *over*-prepared for this week!"

"Thanks, I needed that." I gulped down the last of my sangria and crumpled my napkin into a ball in my hand as I stared down at the table. Without meeting her eyes, I added softly, "It's just that I've been

looking forward to this for so long that I've psyched myself out, I guess."

"Typical Ame," Kat scoffed. "You need to relax! By the Grace of Amelia, we're all going to get through this week just fine!" She gave me an encouraging wink.

"By the grace of me, my *ass!*" I rolled my eyes and playfully threw my napkin ball at her, hitting her square in the nose as she sipped her sangria. She snorted and splattered the drink all over herself. *Whoops!* I cringed as the burgundy liquid seeped into her light blue Foo Fighters tee.

"Son of a...I'm gonna have to go home and change!" She swore under her breath as she dipped her napkin in my glass of water and dabbed at a few dark circles that were spreading on her sleeve. "Will you cover for me until I get back? If I go now I think I can beat rush hour traffic."

"Sure, no problem. And your drink's on me...er, well, it's on *you*—what I meant to say was I'll pay for it." I couldn't help but snicker a little.

"You're *so* funny," Kat deadpanned before flashing me a goofy grin. "Thanks, girl—I'll see you back at Castle Rock in an hour, tops."

She flew out of the restaurant just as Sharon was rounding the corner with our checks. The waitress raised an eyebrow and nodded her head through the window at Kat, who had already jumped into her black Honda Civic and was speeding out of the parking lot like a bat out of hell. "Where is she off to in such a hurry?"

"Wardrobe emergency." I gestured to the purple-stained napkins that lay in a puddle of drink on the other side of the table. Sharon clicked her tongue in a *tsk tsk* noise and shook her head as she pulled out a handful of extra napkins. I took them from her and handed her my credit card. "Put both checks on my



card, please. I'll clean up the mess." I began sopping up the remaining puddle with the extra napkins.

Five minutes later, I strolled toward the door, smiling to myself. I'd placed a pair of tickets to that night's show on the table along with Sharon's tip. I heard her squeal in delight as she made her round back to the table. "Oh, Amelia! *Thank you!!*" she cried after me.

"Enjoy the show," I called back and gave her a wave before I ducked out of the restaurant and into the bright sunlight. I walked back to work at a leisurely pace so I could take in the view of the Atlanta skyline as I climbed the hill on North Avenue. The beams of sunlight breaking through the cityscape gave the buildings a heavenly glow, and the glass windows shimmered like a sea of diamonds in the distance. *I love this city*, I thought as I drank in the beautiful scene. *Sharon's right, I am a lucky woman. This is going to be a week I'll never forget.*

I was definitely right about that last part.

## Chapter Two

An hour later, I was standing in front of Castle Rock, smiling nervously and waiting for Bobby and his entourage to arrive. They were several minutes late, and for a moment I was worried that maybe the bus driver had gotten lost or passed us by without realizing it. Of course, it would be nearly impossible to miss a building like ours—it looked a bit out of place in the middle of a city like Atlanta. Castle Rock was named for its resemblance to a sixteenth century European-style Gothic castle. It looked as though it belonged on the set of *Dracula* or atop a rugged mountain on a dark and stormy night. The castle was built of dark grey ashlar stones, some of which had crumbled slightly around the edges, giving it a mysterious and even spooky appearance. There were two large stone columns on either side of the entrance, topped with pointed arches. Rockers and rock n' roll fans alike were attracted to the dark, dramatic building that looked as if it were home to creepy underground crypts, torch-lit stairwells, and perhaps a ghost or two.

Of course, there were no gargoyles, crypts, or creepy crawlies around, and the only "Dungeon" was the aptly named stage on the bottom floor. There was one mysterious feature of the castle that stood out, though. The rear west wing of the building featured a grand,

round tower that was connected to the castle proper by stairwells that fed into its spiral staircase from the first and second floors. The tower extended high above the rest of the venue, with a door that opened into a room and balcony on top that were off-limits to venue patrons. The majestic structure was mainly an aesthetic contribution to the authentic castle-like appearance of the building, and there were two red flags emblazoned with black guitars that hung from its front windows. The neon red “Castle Rock” electric sign and these two banners were the only things about the building’s outward appearance that hinted at the raucous concerts inside. The flags could be seen flapping in the breeze from several blocks over, which helped out-of-towners locate Castle Rock when coming into the city for a big show. The only way Bobby’s driver could miss this place was if he was driving blind-folded.

As if on cue, a large black tour bus pulled up right then and came to a stop on the side street next to Castle Rock. A short, grey-haired man in a tattered brown suit emerged from the front, flashing me a plastic smile. “Hi there! I’m Shawn Stone, Bobby’s manager.” He was American, with a hint of a Midwestern accent, and he had rather plain features save for his sharp, shockingly white teeth that gleamed in the afternoon sun. While the man approaching me wasn’t impressive at a glance, I forced a smile as he drew near—after all, he was the man who had insisted that Bobby *must* perform at Castle Rock and who was paying more than *triple* our fee for each performance. There were dollar signs in my eyes as again I tallied in my head the potential takeaway from this week—and believe me, it was a pretty penny! It was best to make nice with this guy.

While on the inside I was squealing with glee and hearing the *cha-ching!* of hitting the booking jackpot, I maintained my outward composure and shook his hand. “Amelia Grace. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you! We

are so thrilled to have you and Mr. Glitter here with us for the week. Welcome to Castle Rock!” As I shook his hand, he flashed his teeth in another blinding smile that made me wish I’d worn sunglasses.

“Ey! Stone!” A husky British voice bellowed from somewhere inside the bus. Bobby Glitter?! I retracted my hand from Mr. Stone’s grasp and quickly straightened my posture, running my fingers through my hair in a final attempt to make myself presentable. I glanced down at my outfit: I’d donned my favorite pair of dark denim jeans and a crimson tank top with a fitted grey blazer, and I had spent a few extra minutes that morning applying some shimmery silver eye shadow and my sexiest pink lip gloss. I was practically shaking in my black leather ankle boots as I craned my neck toward the bus, waiting for Bobby to show himself.

My jaw nearly dropped down to the gravel as a devastatingly handsome man stepped off the tour bus and approached us. He had short-cropped black hair, dazzling emerald green eyes, full lips, and the sexiest dimples I’d ever laid eyes on. He hadn’t shaved in perhaps a day or so, and I found the light stubble that peppered his chin rugged and incredibly hot. It took my mind a moment to catch up to my hormones, and I realized with some disappointment that this man was much too young to be Bobby Glitter. “Hi—” I began, but my voice failed me as his hand closed over mine.

“I’m Brant Willis, Bobby’s bassist,” said the gorgeous man in a deep baritone voice that held no trace of the accent I’d heard calling out from the bus. There was a charming twinkle in his eyes as he shook my hand, and I stifled a gulp as the warmth of his skin made me tingle all over. I knew Bobby had hired a couple of supporting band members for his tour, but I’d pictured a couple of older, long-haired, greasy roadies—I certainly hadn’t expected someone so...dreamy. Not that I was complaining. His

appearance on the bus steps had made me all kinds of excited! I was much less thrilled, however, to see the cheap-looking blonde floozy that appeared suddenly on the bus stairs and wandered down to wrap her arms around him. “This is Candy James,” Brant introduced her. Damn, the good ones are always taken!

“Hiya,” Candy said, smacking her gum. She stroked Brant’s arm as she narrowed her eyes and fired me a possessive “He’s mine!” kind of look. I forced a polite smile and greeted them both. Another figure appeared on the stairs and shuffled quietly off of the bus—a thin, wiry man with curly brown hair and a big nose that held his dark sunglasses on his face. He strode past us without a word and leaned against the back of the bus, crossing one black boot over the other. He stooped down to reach into one boot and pulled out a pack of Marlboro Reds. The thin man lit his cigarette and puffed away, oblivious that our little group had stopped talking and all heads were now turned in his direction. “That’s Cliff Rogen, the drummer,” Candy drawled in between smacks of her bubble gum. “He don’t talk much.”

“*Stone!*” The same hoarse British voice from before suddenly thundered again from the depths of the bus. “Where are my bloody cigarettes?” A figure appeared at the top of the stairs, and I inhaled a sharp breath. The man that emerged from the bus was not quite what I was expecting. Photographs of Bobby Glitter in magazines showed a sexy British hunk with wavy jet black hair, a chiseled jaw-line, defined cheek bones, and smoldering eyes. I guess it’s true after all that celebrities look nothing in person like they do in photos or on television. In the flesh, I could see that the years of partying had certainly not been kind to him. Bobby was tall and lanky with stringy black-grey hair that hung in his face; his jawline was still somewhat chiseled, but his cheeks were sunken in, and his face had the gaunt,

hollow look of years of drug addiction. His dark brown eyes still had some of that fire, but it was mostly dulled by a drunken stupor.

Bobby staggered off of the bus and lost his balance as he pitched forward down the steps, nearly falling flat on his face on the street where we stood. At the last second, he found his footing and clumsily straightened himself before leering down at me. “Well what have we here? Who is this lovely young bird?” Bobby stretched his thin lips in an off-putting smile. Then he hiccupped. Charming.

So, *this* was the guy whose picture I’d cut out and secretly carried around in tenth grade, taped inside my makeup compact? *Ick!* I recovered quickly—and hopefully unnoticeably—from my disgust and extended my hand to the aging pop star as I introduced myself. “We’re so honored that you and your band have chosen to film your DVD with us here this week!” I smiled graciously at them all and turned to lead the way into the venue. “Come on, I’ll show you around and take you to the green room to get settled before sound check. How was your check-in at the hotel?”

“Bloody great! I would love to show you the room myself. We could dig into the mini-bar and then hit the hot tub...see where the night takes us.” He squeezed one eye shut in a creepy wink.

What was it with people and giving me unwanted visuals of hot tub hanky panky today? *Ew!* I willed my lunch to stay put in the pit of my stomach—it was a good thing I hadn’t finished that Super Slice! “I appreciate the offer, Mr. Glitter, but—”

“Please, love, call me Bobby,” he corrected me, and he bounced his bushy black eyebrows up and down.

Brant had been watching our exchange with a look of amusement. “Don’t give her too much trouble yet, Bob. It’s only Monday, and you’ve got a whole week to flirt,” he said jokingly, but his voice carried an

undertone of seriousness. He found my eyes and gave me a friendly wink, and I felt my cheeks flush. I gave him an embarrassed smile as Candy stepped between us and glared at us both. I disliked her already.

“Right this way, folks,” I said, clearing my throat awkwardly. Cliff, the curly-haired Marlboro Man, snuffed out his cigarette and joined the group as I led the five of them through the entrance to Castle Rock.

The front of the venue boasted a huge wooden door with a large brass knocker, like you might see on a real castle. While there were other entrances to the building—a smaller door in the front, one on the west side, and also an employee-only exit in the back—this was the way that concert-goers entered the venue for a show, and people loved the novelty of it. Everyone felt like rock royalty when that large door opened to grant them entrance to Castle Rock.

“This place sure is fancy,” Candy murmured in awe as she tilted her head upward to take in the full splendor of the architecture.

“How regal,” Shawn remarked. His eyes roved slowly over each stone, and he rubbed his hands together. He even licked his lips as he caught sight of the tower. I could tell he was pleased that he’d selected such a unique location for Bobby’s DVD shoot.

I chuckled. “Oh, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet!” I pulled open the large wooden door and ushered them into the entrance hall. While the exterior of the building was quite a sight, the venue’s interior was the real spectacle. From the outward appearance of the castle, one might expect a lavish entrance hall with a beautiful crystal chandelier and a mile of gaudy red carpet, but the authenticity of the castle-like appearance didn’t reach past the main door. We *did* have a red carpet, alright—but the black-light bulbs of the floor lights made the chintzy tapestry take on more of a deep purple hue. The chandelier that hung high above the hall wasn’t made of

colorless crystals like you might see in other castles, either. Instead, it was comprised of bright, multicolored transparent gems. They reflected a rainbow of colors that danced along the walls as the light fixture swayed slightly from the air current created by opening and closing the front doors.

“Sweet window art,” Brant said as he ran his fingers gently over one of the stained glass windows in the entrance hall. There were two of these windows; one was built into the wall on either side of the front hallway, with floodlights set up below each to illuminate their rock-themed designs. One window featured a winged blue electric guitar soaring high above a lake of fire, while the other depicted a red guitar placed on a golden throne, with waves of musical notes floating away from it down a red carpet. They had been designed by Jackson Deering himself.

I turned back to smile at Brant as I led the group through the hallway to the downstairs Dungeon stage, but Candy and Bobby had purposely wedged themselves between us. Cliff shuffled behind them, looking disinterested, and Shawn brought up the rear, carefully inspecting his surroundings.

Nearly forty-five minutes later, we stood in the green room with cold beers in hand, having wrapped up our tour of the venue. After dodging several more drunken propositions from Bobby, I was relieved to see Laura Holly step through the door. With her porcelain skin, curly dark hair, light blue eyes, and unnaturally long lashes, Laura was our most popular bartender. Some nights she had customers lined up twenty deep just to order a drink from her.

Laura had her long hair fixed in long flowing curls, and she wore a tight blue dress that hugged her curves. She greeted the men and Candy with a smile bright enough to light up a dark room. “Hi, y’all,” she called in a twangy Southern accent—one that I knew was one

hundred and ten percent fake, reserved for coaxing customers to drop an extra dollar or two into the tip jar. Laura was originally from Boston, but since people didn't find that inflection quite as charming, she adopted her own version of a sweet Georgia lilt. I wasn't a fan of it. "Aren't you going to introduce me to your friends here, Amelia?" She drew out each syllable of my name, "A-meee-lee-yaaa," in kind of a singsong drawl every time she used that accent. It drove me nuts!

"Of course," I said, remembering my manners. "Everyone, this is Laura Holly, one of our bartenders here at Castle Rock. She'll be happy to bring you more drinks if you'd like."

"Sure thing! Can I get any of you another brewsky?" I rolled my eyes at her rehearsed Southern charm. She was laying it on thick today, and, as usual, it was working. Laura gave me a wink and turned her attention back to the drooling men. She tossed her hair over her shoulder and gave a flirty flit of her lashes, and they ate it up—except for Candy, of course, who didn't like the way that Brant was looking at Laura one bit. She made her displeasure known with a loud cough and a jealous glare. It was good to know it wasn't just me she hated. The men didn't seem to notice Candy's pouting as they stared at the lovely bartender—even the quiet drummer, Cliff, let out a low whistle.

"Yes, love, that'd be peachy," Bobby drawled back as he ogled her, instantly smitten—a relief to me since he was finally shifting his advances to someone else. It was funny to think that just hours earlier I'd been daydreaming about being the object of his attention. Be careful what you wish for, am I right?

"Thanks, Laura!" I called as she gave a small curtsy and sidestepped out of the room. Turning back to Candy and the men I said, "I hope that these finger foods will hold you until dinner is delivered after sound check." I gestured toward a smorgasbord of cheeses,

meats, crackers, bite-sized sandwiches, and more set up in an attractive display across the long buffet table. I'd gotten every refreshment Bobby had requested on the rider—which is basically an artist's list of demands in their contract—that Stone had faxed me. I had stocked the table with everything from chilled coconut water to a bottle of brandy and a bowl of green—and *only* green—peanut butter M&Ms. Rock stars are so needy!

"This looks lovely, but I'm craving something a little...*sweeter*," Bobby stared hungrily at the door in the direction that Laura had disappeared a few moments earlier. "Like a Georgia peach." He cackled at his little innuendo. *Ew*. I suppressed a groan for the umpteenth time that afternoon. Cliff was already silently munching away on a handful of M&Ms, and Candy had dragged Brant over to the table to fix a plate of snacks.

Shawn was standing in the corner of the room with his cell phone in his hand, texting furiously. He must have felt my eyes on him because he looked up then and smiled, flashing me those sharp pearly whites again. "Is the owner of the venue in today, by chance?" he asked. "I'd like to introduce myself since we'll be around here all week."

"He's downstairs in his office, I think. I'd be happy to walk you down there," I offered. Anything to keep Mr. Moneybags, here, happy.

"Thank you, I'd like that," Shawn said agreeably. We excused ourselves from the band and Brant's groupie and made our way downstairs to Parker's office. I paused as I heard muffled laughter—both male and female—wafting through his door. I could hear a female voice speaking in hushed, sultry tones, but I couldn't make out what was being said. She giggled, and Parker responded, his own voice sounding thick, and huskier than usual. Suddenly, he grunted, causing me to jump back from his office door. *Oh man*. First Kat, now Parker? This was the second hookup I'd

encountered just this afternoon! Was I the *only* person in the office that wasn't getting any action on the job?

With horror, I realized that if I could hear them, so could Shawn. I flung myself hastily in front of the door and began to talk loudly, hoping to drown out some of the primal noises coming from the office. "I'm sorry, Mr. Stone—I, er, forgot that Mr. Deering, um, had a meeting this afternoon. It seems things may not have been wrapped up just yet. Could I send him up to see you as soon as he's free?"

From the look on Stone's face, it was obvious that he knew exactly what kind of meeting was going on in Parker's office. His cheeks burned nearly as hot as my own felt, but he didn't seem angry—in fact, there was something in his eyes that actually made him look, dare I say, *intrigued*. "No problem at all," he said in a surprisingly good-natured tone. "I'll just head back to the green room and grab some refreshments for now, and I'll come back down to see him when he's no longer tied up." With that, he strolled back to the stairwell and disappeared through the doorway.

*That was weird*, I thought as I gaped after Stone for a few moments before scurrying quietly past Parker's office so he wouldn't think I'd purposely been eavesdropping on his little, uh, *meeting*. I was just about to shut my office door when Kat bounded by from the other direction, now wearing a bright purple long-sleeved tee and skinny jeans. She caught sight of me and stuck her foot in the way to stop my door from closing. "Finally!" she gasped, out of breath as she pushed her way into the room and plopped down in the chair opposite my desk. "I thought I'd never make it back. Traffic was a bitch! I gave up sitting in it a few blocks away and parked in a deck off of Peachtree. I practically ran the rest of the way here. When I changed shirts, I totally should've changed shoes too." I grimaced as she crossed one long leg over the other and

removed one of her boots. She rubbed a spot on her foot where a bright red blister was already forming. *Ouch*.

"No sweat. Nobody even noticed you were gone," I assured her—which was the truth. Parker was getting busy—er, I mean, was busy in his office, and the rest of the staff was preparing for Bobby's sound check.

Kat and I chatted for a few minutes while I gathered some walkie-talkies into a mesh bag to take over to the stage crew. She offered to help out during the sound check for me so that she could get a good look at our first rock star crush. "I can't believe Bobby Glitter is upstairs right now!" She rubbed her hands together excitedly.

"Ogle away, but you're going to be disappointed," I warned, then added with a grin, "The bassist is easy on the eyes, though."

"Thanks, Ame!" She jumped up excitedly and left the room just as my phone began to ring off the hook again, making me regret coming back to my office. After fielding several inquiries about our box office hours and ticket pick-ups—again, does *no one* check the website for these things anymore?—I printed off the night's will call list and marched toward the venue entrance to deliver it to our box office intern, Bronwyn Sinclair.

Bron was smacking her gum and twirling a teeny strand of her hot pink pixie cut hair around her pinky finger while she flipped through this month's issue of *Cosmopolitan* (according to her, nineteen made her *way* too old to be reading *Seventeen* anymore). She didn't even glance up when I slid the will call list over the page she was reading, but instead continued to stare hard down at the papers in her hand. "Thanks," she said flatly. Youth today—so enthusiastic. Not.

"Look alive, chickadee!" I said sweetly. "It's almost show time! I've printed out separate lists for each night, so here is the one for tonight only. Also, if you can't find a name on the will call list, check this separate

guest list for Bobby and his crew.” I held up two sheets of paper with the words “Guest List” highlighted at the top.

“Got it, boss lady. This ain’t my first rodeo,” she rolled her eyes before turning away with a frown. She seemed extra moody today. Before I could ask what was troubling her, Bron’s face lit up in the next instant as she caught sight of something happening behind me. “Sweet! 95Rox is here!”

I turned and shielded my eyes against the setting sun. A cargo van displaying the logo of our local rock station, 95Rox, was pulling to a stop directly in front of the gravelly Castle Rock walkway. While the driver exited and moved to the back of the van to unload equipment, a man with a silvery ponytail and matching goatee hopped out of the passenger side and waved as he approached us. He looked like a roadie with his torn jeans and faded black 95Rox t-shirt. He was of average build, and a little on the short side, but he carried himself with a great deal of confidence and his head held high. His eyes never left mine as he strode purposefully in our direction. Bronwyn groaned in disgust at the sight of him. “Ugh, seriously? *Tim Scott* is here?! That dude is *so* lame. I was hoping they’d sent Charlie Chill instead.”

Tim Scott was somewhat of a regional celebrity in these parts. Having spent the past thirty or so years in music journalism and radio, he’d had his fair share of breaking news from some of the biggest entertainment stories in the Southeast—from an eyewitness account of the fire at the Calexico Theater, to an exclusive interview where Jet Jetson and the Jam Pack announced their reunion tour. In recent years, he spent most of his time in the studio, where he hosted a syndicated music news show called *Tune Talks*. His show was widely popular across the Southeast region—though he was based out of Atlanta, people tuned in from three states

over to hear his up-to-the-minute news briefs on today’s rock gods and their antics. Tim would also occasionally regale his audience with stories and anecdotes from his heyday interviewing and partying with the bands like The Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. The man had certainly gotten around back then, but recently it was only when his stories got stale that Tim would head back out into the field to do a live broadcast or two.

I studied him carefully as he drew near. He was relatively close to my height, perhaps an inch or two taller. His silver hair was peppered with a few remaining strands of rich black from his youth. I noticed Tim’s left eyebrow had a clean slice straight through the middle where no hair grew, probably a battle scar from one of his crazy rock n’ roll stories from the road. From his bar fight with rocker Teddy Roxbin, perhaps?

“Good afternoon, ladies. I—” he paused for dramatic effect as he reached us—“am Tim Scott. It’s a pleasure to meet you both.” Tim took my hand in his and pumped it up and down enthusiastically as Bronwyn snickered behind me.

My stomach fluttered nervously. Bron may have been annoyed by him, but I was thrilled by his arrival. While Tim Scott certainly wasn’t the type of man to get my heart pounding, his emergence from the *Tune Talks* studio to cover our week with Bobby Glitter solidified the fact that my little pet project of the last few months was a big deal. It marked the return of the eighties’ Pop Rock Prince himself—and yours truly was responsible for snagging his DVD filming and three performances in Atlanta. I gave myself a huge mental pat on the back.

I cleared my throat and retrieved my hand from Tim’s grasp. “It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Scott. My name is Amelia Grace. This is our promotions and booking intern, Bronwyn Sinclair,” I stepped aside and gestured to the narrow-eyed, pink-haired teen peering at him

disdainfully from behind me. “Bron is a *huge* fan of yours,” I added with a wicked grin. Bronwyn was not amused and she let me know it by connecting her elbow to my rib with surprising force as she reluctantly stepped forward to shake Tim’s hand. *Oof!* For a little sprite of a girl, she packed some power. I grimaced and gingerly rubbed my ribcage.

Tim’s face lit up. “A fan, eh?” Before Bronwyn could protest, he launched into a story about one of his more “hip” *Tune Talks* installments. Bron glowered at me, but I paid her no mind as I surveyed the equipment being unloaded from the 95Rox van by the station’s remote technician. A pop-up tent, some speakers and a PA system, a microphone and headset—it looked like Tim planned to run a live broadcast either before or during the show. Kat had forgotten to mention this during our promotions meeting last week, so I’d have to add him to the guest list and give him a backstage pass, but I didn’t mind. *He’s totally going to boost our publicity*, I thought excitedly. *He’s...smokin’ hot!*

For the record, that last thought was not about Tim—all thoughts of Mr. Scott had flown out the window the second his radio tech turned around and our eyes met. *Hot damn!* He was tall, lean, and rugged with shaggy dark brown hair curling up from under his black 95Rox baseball cap. He had a chiseled jaw line that would make even the Greek gods jealous, and quite possibly the most kissable lips I’d ever seen. Despite his slender appearance, I could see the muscles in his arms ripple as they flexed under the weight of the speakers he was carrying. He returned my stare, and his grey eyes burned into mine in a way that made me blush all over.

I broke eye contact with him and glanced down at the ground as I shifted my weight from foot to foot and nervously tucked my hair behind my ear. It wasn’t every day that a man that attractive looked at me so intensely. When I risked a peek back in his direction, he

smiled and waved, and my heart did a little dance. Mustering up some courage, I walked steadily in his direction, intent on introducing myself. Hormones aside, it was my job as the manager of Castle Rock to be courteous and introduce myself—especially to drop-dead gorgeous men who were working radio promotions in front of my venue. Right?

As I neared him, I opened my mouth to say hello, but instead I shrieked in surprise as I tripped over a speaker cord. The setting sun was suddenly blocked from my vision by a dark shape that had launched into the air. Following it with my eyes I realized with horror that the cord I’d tripped on had yanked itself free from the speaker with such force that it pulled the speaker off of its stand—and that huge black box was now hurtling straight for me.

*Gulp.*



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