

A Lush Engagement

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Joss

If someone had told me two months ago that this would be my life today, I would have laughed at them. Flat-out laughed my ass off. Two months ago I was living in my dad's spare bedroom in Denver, surviving the dissolution of my band by writing some songs and having a tentative email interaction with my very former girlfriend, the only woman I've ever loved.

Today? Today I'm in a jewelry store in downtown Portland shopping for an engagement ring. Because I've finally got the girl right where I want her and I'm not about to waste time waiting around for some other fucking life disaster to ruin my chances of keeping her forever.

I've hired Ethan, a member of my former security team, to spend the day with me while I shop. While seeing Joss Jamison, rock star, walking around Portland is pretty well accepted, seeing Joss Jamison shopping for engagement rings isn't. The last thing I need is to have a mob form in front of a jeweler's, and get my business plastered all over the entertainment news. I'd like to surprise Mel, the way any guy does when he proposes. Somehow being filmed on E! TV while I buy the ring doesn't fit in with that plan.

Luckily, I'm still popular enough here in my hometown that the jewelry stores are only too happy to set me up in private rooms while I look through dozens of rings. Then Ethan escorts me in and out of back doors with practiced ease. Now if

only he could find the perfect ring for Mel with as much grace. I'm not one of those dipshit men who doesn't have a clue what to buy for his girl. I know what'll look like a million bucks—and may cost that much—on my Mel. I know what will work for the way she lives and for her job. As a photographer, she spends a lot of time working with her hands, I can't get her a ring that's too high profile or it'll get caught on something—a camera strap, or the adjustable rings on a tripod. But, I don't want something that's so practical it's boring either. Mel's one fucking hot package, and her ring needs to be just as gorgeous as she is.

After four hours of this shit I'm getting discouraged. I've seen big rings, small rings, diamond rings, sapphire rings. Rings with round stones and oval stones, square stones and teardrop stones. Platinum, yellow gold, white gold—it's all sort of starting to blur. I can see Ethan dragging too, although he would never complain or let down for a minute while he's working.

We're walking along a side street, trying to stay out of the main crowds. I've got my hair covered by a baseball cap, and sunglasses on, Ethan's wearing jeans and a t-shirt so he doesn't flash "bodyguard" all over the place. I could take a car to go from store to store, but honestly, it'd take longer than walking, and it's a really nice day out, so I want to take advantage of the good spring weather.

The short block we're on is compact, room for just two cars to pass slowly. The sidewalks are wide and most of the adjacent businesses are restaurants, some with patios outside. My head is starting to feel light, and I see Ethan rubbing at his gut and wincing. This day is rapidly turning bad. Who knew it would be such a

nightmare finding one little diamond ring? I see a sign up ahead for The Triple Crown Pub, and I know what we need.

“Come on, man,” I tell the big guy. “I’ll buy you a drink.”

We head inside the cool, dark interior of the traditionally styled pub, and take a seat in a booth in the back. The place is nearly empty, which is a relief—I can relax without worrying about being recognized. Going out in public isn’t anywhere near as bad as it used to be before my band broke up, but since I’ve given a few solo performances in the last few weeks, I’m on the radar again.

If she knows who I am, the waitress doesn’t give any indication, and so I ditch the hat for bit, giving my head a chance to cool off. When she comes by to take our orders, I get a Rueben sandwich with a pint of Guinness. Ethan orders bangers and mash with a Coke.

“No beer?” I ask him.

“It’s okay Mr. J. I’m on duty,” he answers.

“Dude, it’s light duty, you can have a beer.”

“I really shouldn’t.”

“Ethan. What are you? Two twenty? Two thirty?”

“Um about that, yeah.”

“One beer isn’t going to impair your ability to walk me around my hometown in the middle of the day.” I look at the waitress who’s watching us with curiosity now. “Get him his lunch and another pint of the Guinness,” I instruct her. She nods her head, eyes darting between Ethan and me. I give it until the final bill comes before she figures it out. Fuck.

After curious Caliope has left, I sigh and lean back into the cushy leather bench we're sitting on. "So,"—I look at Ethan across the table—"how'd you propose to Stella anyway?" Stella is Ethan's very tiny wife. When he worked for me full-time she used to come to the recording studio and hang out while we were laying down tracks. She's like a little doll you could fit in your pocket. She and Ethan look hilarious together.

"Aw, I don't know," he answers. "Just sort of asked her. We were on a Ferris wheel at Six Flags and when we stopped up at the top for a couple of minutes I blurted it out. I was too nervous to do it where anyone else would see—like a restaurant—and I didn't want her to be able to run away either."

I laugh. "That confident about the whole thing, huh?"

He smiles and looks down at the cocktail napkin he's shredding. "Well, I'm not a rock star Mr. J. I'm a former college football player who never finished his degree and spends most of his time in the gym or out on tour with guys like you. Stella's smart, you know? I wasn't too sure she'd want to put up with me."

I nod my head and give the waitress a smile as she delivers our food and beers. After she walks away I say, "They're all smarter than us, man. We're fucking lucky they give us the time of day." Ethan looks somber and replies, "I tell myself that every morning when I wake up and see Stella next to me in that bed. I'm just fucking lucky."

We dig into our food, and I can feel my energy renewing with each bite. But my estimate is a little off, it's actually when she returns to ask if we want dessert that the waitress finally clicks in.

“So, um, are you really Joss Jamison?” She coils a strand of hair around her finger as she bats her eyelashes.

I see Ethan stiffen beside me, ready to go into action. I clear my throat. “Yeah, I am, but I’m sort of laying low today, you know?”

She nods emphatically. “Oh yeah, sure. I totally get that. It must be so tiring having everyone on you all the time. Trying to get a piece of you.” Her hand slides from that strand of hair down into the cleavage peeking out of her v-neck t-shirt. She casually rubs her knuckles up and down in between her breasts while she talks. I see Ethan’s eyes sort of glaze over as he becomes mesmerized by the motion. Stella or no Stella, he’s a guy. We can’t help ourselves.

But, what catches *my* attention is the ring on her hand. It looks antique, and has a diamond in the center surrounded by lots of smaller diamonds that continue on down the band. It’s got a lot of sparkle and the gold is a unique shade, but the center stone is set lower than most rings. It’s the closest thing to what I want for Mel that I’ve seen so far.

The girl smiles at me coily as she notices my eyes fixed on her chest. “See anything you like?” she asks, definitely not referring to the dessert menu.

I hear Ethan clear his throat, and I look up at her quickly, my brow furrowed.

“Where did you get your ring, if you don’t mind me asking?”

Her smile fades and she stands up straighter, her hand falling from her chest to her side. “Some antiques place over on Halstead. It cost me a whole month’s worth of tips. But no one else will ever have the same one, so that’s why I like it.”

I nod. “It’s great. Do you remember the name of the place?”

“Yeah,” she says placing our bill facedown on the table. Guess we’re not getting dessert after all. “Marelli’s. Marelli’s Fine Art and Jewelry.”

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Marelli’s Fine Art and Jewelry is like something out of a 1980s flick about gremlins or magic. It’s filled from top to bottom with junk. Furniture, knick-knacks, paintings, tiny statues, animal heads. It makes you feel like you’ve walked into that room at Hogwarts where they keep all the stuff the kids aren’t supposed to find. And yeah, so I’ve watched Harry Potter once or twice, what can I say?

Ethan and I weave our way through the mounds of musty stuff, and I’m wondering if this was such a good idea after all. I mean I’ve had my choice of the most expensive engagement rings in the Pacific Northwest—pristine, documented, flawless diamonds. What do I think I could possibly find in this bizarre conglomeration of cast-off crap that I couldn’t at a top-notch international jeweler’s?

But, I soldier on, until I finally reach the bowels of the store, where a small glass counter covered in a layer of dust buffers a tiny wizened old man who is reading a newspaper. He looks up as I approach, adjusting his reading glasses that balance precariously on the tip of his nose.

“May I help you?” he asks, voice rusty as only a very old person’s can be.

“Um, I hope so,” I say, leaning my forearms on the glass countertop in spite of the filth. “I’m looking for an engagement ring, but I want something one-of-a-kind. Special. You know?”

He nods. "You've come to the right place," he answers as he hops off his stool, surprisingly spry for such a shriveled up thing. "Let's start with your budget? How much do you want to spend?"

I smile, and Ethan mysteriously develops a coughing problem as he turns and pretends to look at a mound of polished stones in a bowl behind us.

"Money really isn't an issue. The ring has to be top quality, unique, something really exceptional. I'll spend whatever it takes if it's the right ring, and I'll know it if I see it."

The old dude's eyes narrow for a moment. Then he gives me a sharp nod. "Well, took you long enough," he mutters as he motions for me to come behind the counter and follow him.

"Excuse me?" I ask, wondering if the guy's all there.

"I've had it waiting for you quite a while now. I was starting to think you'd never get here."

I look at Ethan who's following along behind me dutifully. I raise an eyebrow, and he puts a finger to his temple and taps twice indicating he thinks the guy's batty too.

We walk through an ever-congested morass of items until we reach a table topped by a large old-fashioned safe. The shopkeeper looks at me over his shoulder once, before he positions himself in front of it and spins the dial rapidly back and forth. A few seconds later there's a loud click as the tumblers slide into place and he pushes the lever handle down to open the door.

He digs around inside for a moment, then straightens and turns back to face me. In his hand is a black velvet box with gold filigree on the lid. I've never seen anything quite like it. The gold is actual metal, not some sort of paint or glitter. It's pressed into the velvet in scrolls and whorls and fancy, delicate patterns. With a flourish, the old guy opens the lid, and it's like a bolt of lightning has hit me. There, nestled in its little pillow is Mel's ring, the ring that will make her mine forever.

It's like a burst of shine and sparkle, just like Mel herself is, the details of it delicate, but the overall effect demanding your attention. The center diamond is large, but not set up high. It's surrounded by smaller diamonds in a ring all around it. The band is platinum, and splits as it approaches the center stone, creating a bracket that holds the big diamond. All along the band the smaller diamonds continue, getting smaller as they go down. Finally, on either side of the diamond are two large triangular sapphires. Deep blue, the same color as Mel's eyes. It's fucking perfect.

Ethan leans around me to get a peek. "Wow," he breathes.

"Yeah. Wow."

I look up at the shopkeeper who's smiling at me with a look of triumph. "This is the one, right?" he asks as if it's a foregone conclusion.

I can't deny it, no matter how much my enthusiasm might drive the price up. "Yeah man. This is the one."

He snaps the lid shut. "Wonderful. It's a size five. I assume that will work?"

I'm dumbfounded. It took me days to find a time I could swipe one of Mel's rings from her room at her sister's house and sneak it to a jeweler so I could find out what size she needs. Sure enough, it's a five.

"Uh, yeah. She's a size five," I say, feeling like I've entered the twilight zone.

"Right this way then," he says as he shuts the safe and heads back toward the counter.

Once we're back in our respective places on either side of the glass counter, he digs around in an old accordion file until he pulls out a yellowed paper and places it on the counter between us.

"This is the history. You're welcome to take it to another jeweler for authentication and to examine the stones. It belonged to Grand Duke Nicolai Romanov a nephew of Catherine the Great. He gave it to his wife, a German Princess named Alexandria. It is said that they were very much in love and lived happily together for over forty years.

"But, when the October revolution took place in 1917 the shock of learning of the assassination of the royal family caused Alexandria to have a heart attack. She died and Nicolai followed shortly thereafter when he wandered out of the home he was staying in while hiding from the revolutionary soldiers. He froze to death in an alley in St Petersburg. No one knows where the ring went for over sixty years after that, but it turned up in the collection of a private individual in 1983, and because the Soviet government was busy fighting to stay in power at the time, they didn't challenge the ownership. It was put up for sale at auction that same year and I purchased it."

“So you’ve had it for thirty years? Sitting in that safe?” I ask, stunned by all of this.

“Oh yes. I knew you’d come for it eventually. Although as I said, it took you quite a while.”

I hear Ethan make a strange choking sound behind me and I think something like “nutjob” passes his lips as well.

“I wasn’t even born in 1983,” I say, skepticism lacing my voice.

“Well, that would explain it then, wouldn’t it?” he answers smiling. “Now, will you be paying cash or charge?”

**

It’s seven p.m. and I’m racing around my apartment trying to finish up the preparations for my dinner with Mel. She’s been at her sister, Tammy’s, house all day packing because we’ve agreed it’s time for her to move in with me. Tammy’s gone off to Texas to wrangle Walsh into submission—which I have complete faith she’ll do eventually—and Mel’s been staying at the mansion alone. It’s a long way out of town, and considering neither Tammy nor Walsh, who owns the place, are speaking to me, I don’t feel comfortable staying there with Mel.

So, Mel’s been having to go back and forth between my place and Tammy’s, dragging her clothes around and generally making me worry about her safety. I finally said I’d had enough when I had to sleep alone two nights in a row because there were early morning deliveries coming to Tammy’s that Mel had to be there to accept. I told her in no uncertain terms to pack her shit, close the damn place up and come live with me.

Then I begged.

Luckily, she took pity on me.

I've just gotten out of the shower and thrown on a pair of jeans when I hear the doorbell. I rub a towel over my head, toss it on the floor of the bathroom, and go to let the caterers in. I can do a lot of things, but cooking is not one of them.

"Hey, Carlo, how's it going?" I say to the owner of Carlino's as I let him in.

"It's great, Mr. Jamison. How about you? Ready for the big night?"

I grin as we walk to the dining room, Carlo's staff following with table cloths, trays, rolling carts, and other assorted things. "As ready as I'll ever be, I guess."

"Good. You go finish getting ready." He lifts an eyebrow as he looks at my bare chest. "You got to give her something to look forward to, you know. Don't give up all the goods yet."

I laugh and slap him on the back. I've been eating at Carlino's for years. Carlo's a great guy, and their northern Italian food is to die for.

Fifteen minutes later my apartment's been transformed. There are candles everywhere, my dining room table—which has only been used for poker games prior to now—is draped in a spotless white table cloth, covered silver serving dishes and pristine white plates littering the surface. There are also flowers everywhere. Vibrant red roses, delicate white sprays of something—hey, I don't know shit about cooking *or* flowers, so sue me—and big puffy pink things that are surrounded by all sorts of vines and greenery. It looks just like you'd think a chick would want it to look. Thank God for Carlo. I would have bought some wildflowers at the grocery store, and put out the good paper plates instead of the cheap ones.

I check the time and adjust the collar of the black button-up I'm wearing. Mel should be here any minute, and my heart is beating like a bird's wings when it's trying to escape a cage.

I've just opened up the first bottle of wine when I hear her come in. "Joss?" she calls from the foyer.

I walk around the corner into the living room and lean against the doorway, just taking her in. She's wearing a pair of deep purple shorts, with high wedge-heeled sandals and a little flouncy top that scoops low in the front and falls off one shoulder. Her dark red hair is up in some sort of clip, but pieces have fallen down over the day and one drifts over her eye now as she struggles to drag the biggest fucking suitcase I've ever seen into the apartment.

"Here, here, let me get that baby," I say rushing forward to help her. I bend to lift it and get a whiff of her lemon shampoo. I have to stop and lean in to kiss her just for a moment. Her lips are soft and warm under mine, and I can feel them turn up in a smile.

"Don't hurt yourself with that," she warns. "It's all my shoes."

I tug on the handle and feel my back protest as I try not to show just how heavy the damn thing is. "Christ," I mutter. "Just shoes?"

She laughs as she steps into the hall to drag in more suitcases. Six more to be exact. All clothes. Obviously the doorman helped her get them up here. I shake my head as I begin schlepping them to the bedroom. Thank God I've got a walk-in closet.

When I'm done carrying in her bags I find Mel standing in the dining room looking at everything in awe. I walk up behind her and put my arms around her

waist, pulling her back against me. “What do you think?” I whisper in her ear, making her shiver in response.

“It’s beautiful. I can’t believe you did all this for me.”

“Actually, Carlo did it. I just watched,” I admit.

She turns in my arms, placing her palm along my cheek and gazing up at me. I could drown in those deep blue eyes of hers. I can feel her warm breath fan over my lips, and my heart squeezes at the knowledge that soon I’m going to get her to promise that she’ll belong to me always—in this life, and any future ones as well. What’s meant to be is meant to be, and Mel and I are, without a doubt, meant to be.

“I don’t care who arranged the flowers or cooked the food,” she tells me softly. “You asked them to. You arranged to have it done, and you did it to make me happy on our first night living together. I love that. I love you.” She presses a perfect sweet kiss on my lips, and my dick responds by throbbing inside my pants. But not yet. It’s not time for that yet. I need to make sure that Mel understands exactly how much I love her and how far I’m willing to go to make her happy, to show her that she’s the single most important thing in my world.

Then, I’m going to fuck her senseless.

**

Mel

I’ve been packing all day long, and I’m exhausted. But as I sit enjoying the fabulous dinner Joss got for me, I start to relax. I’ve been really nervous about moving in with him. Worried that maybe it won’t feel like home or something, but as

I sit here looking at his golden hair falling over his eyes as he takes an enormous bite of crab ravioli I'm understanding that wherever Joss is feels like home to me.

I'm still worried about my sister, but after Joss asked me to move in, I realized that he and Tammy were both right—putting my life on hold to wait for hers to gel wasn't helping anyone. It's time to move on, and this is the only place I want to move on to.

As if dinner wasn't incredible enough, afterwards Joss brings out chocolate mousse for dessert. Well, chocolate mousse for me—lemon soufflé for him. Joss has this thing about lemon desserts.

"Oh, man, this is like better than sex," I say as I roll the bittersweet, creamy chocolate around on my tongue.

Joss actually growls. "You're asking for it," he warns as he leans across the table and digs his hand into my hair at the back of my skull, pulling me toward him.

My breath catches as I see the look in his eyes. We're nose to nose, the table between us, but our desserts instantly forgotten. His hand is hot on the back of my neck and my core goes all achy and liquid like it does every time he's this close to me.

"Telling me a bowl of pudding, no matter how expensive, is better than being in bed with me tells me I need to work harder, Mel." He leans in a fraction of an inch and slowly runs his tongue across my top lip. "Should I be working harder?" His voice is gravelly and I feel it vibrate through my chest and down into my stomach. God, I hadn't noticed how hot it is in his apartment before.

“Um,” I gasp out. “What?” I’ve completely lost track of the conversation. I’m pretty preoccupied by his lips hovering in front of mine, and his big hand palming my head, and that really delicious scruff that’s sprinkling his strong jaw. I watch the cords in his neck move as he tips his head and lowers his mouth to mine. My eyes drift shut and all I can feel or hear or think is that I need Joss inside of me. Now preferably.

His tongue slips out and skims along my lips before I open to him, tasting the tangy lemon he’s been eating. It mixes with the chocolate like an exotic truffle. He moves his hand to my cheek, caressing it with his thumb before he pulls away gently.

“Do I need to work harder, Mel?” he repeats.

“You’re doing really great. Honest,” I practically gush breathily.

The bastard sits back and smirks, obviously relishing his triumph.

I narrow my eyes at him, disgusted by my own easiness. I’m putty in his hands and it’s pathetic.

He takes a long drink of wine then gives me a big grin. “You were saying you like the chocolate?”

I roll my eyes. “Fine. It’s not as good as sex. Or even kissing. But it’s very good,” I concede.

“That’s better,” he tells me as he stands and holds out his hand. “You done?”

I sigh, taking the last scoop of mousse from the dish. “Yes. Although if someone offered me another serving I wouldn’t turn it down.”

“You’ll forget all about it in a few minutes,” he tells me. “I’ve got plans for you.”

He takes my hand and leads me to the large balcony of his third floor apartment. Portland doesn’t have a lot of high-rise buildings, so he’s got a nice view of the downtown area and all the lights at night. The balcony is one of the spectacular features of the place. It’s a good twenty feet long and ten feet deep, the size of a whole room. It’s covered by a fancy latticework roof, and has a seating area as well as an outdoor eating space. The open side is buffered by a long glass half wall, and right now, the railing above it is holding glass votives with little white candles inside. There are also tiny white lights dripping from the ceiling. It looks like a fairyland.

Joss takes me over to the loveseat facing the outdoor fireplace. Even though it’s pretty warm outside, the fire dancing in the big brick structure is so pretty I’m glad it’s lit.

“Do want some more wine?” he asks as we sit down side by side.

“Sure.”

He picks up a bottle of Chardonnay that’s been placed in an ice bucket on the coffee table, removes the loosened cork, and pours me a glass. I take it and sip, relaxing back into the big cushions.

“You’re setting up ridiculous expectations, you know,” I tell him. “I’ll think every night living here is going to be like this—gourmet food, wine, candles. You’ll never be able to go back to pizza and beer like we usually do.”

He laughs—a rich, warm sound. There’s a reason Joss was the lead singer for a mega-successful rock band. His voice alone makes women’s panties damp. It’s that hot.

“Well, I wanted tonight to be something you’d never forget.”

I lean in and gently brush his lips with mine. “I’ll remember it always.”

“Ah, but I’m not done yet,” he whispers, leaning his forehead against mine.

“It’s been perfect. I don’t know how it could get any better.” I tell him.

He reaches behind the pillow he’s leaning against and comes out with a black velvet box that’s encrusted in gold filigree. Then, before I have a chance to take even a breath, he pulls the wineglass from my hand and sets it on the coffee table. Next he slides off the loveseat and onto the floor in front of me. Time stops. Joss Jamison, the god-like specimen of male perfection, filthy rich, deliciously sexy, adored by millions of women all around the globe, kneels in front of me, his expression tentative, and his hands shaking.

“Mel,” he says, before clearing his throat. “When you agreed to give me another chance eight weeks ago, I made a promise to myself that I would never waste another moment of our life together.”

I feel tears well up in my eyes, and I struggle to maintain some sort of composure as I realize where Joss’s speech is heading.

“I love you, Mel,” he continues, his voice sounding stronger with each word. “I’ve never loved anyone or anything the way I do you, and I’ve never been more certain of any feeling. I know, without a doubt, that I want you with me always. I

want to live my life with you, have my children with you, experience the world with you. Will you please marry me, Mel?"

He lifts the lid on the little box and reveals the most stunningly gorgeous ring I have ever laid eyes on. It's like an explosion of tiny lights surrounding one large, perfect white diamond flanked by two deep blue, almost purple sapphires.

My hand flies to my mouth as if I might possibly contain my shock. I can feel the tears sliding down my face and I'm literally speechless. I look from the ring to Joss's beautiful face and back again, simply stunned.

He takes the ring out of the box. And holds it up. "Mel? I'm dying here," he whispers.

I open my mouth to speak, but can't, so I just nod my head over and over again, as little noises come out of me like I'm some sort of squeaky toy.

He lifts my hand and slips the ring on my finger as I watch, tears streaming down my face now.

The ring fits perfectly and for a moment we both just stare at it on my hand. Then he looks into my eyes and runs the back of his fingers underneath them to wipe away the tears.

"Are you okay?" he asks, worry furrowing his brow.

I nod. "Oh my God. It's beautiful! It's...oh Joss, it's just too much."

He sits back up on the loveseat next to me and holds both of my hands in his, stroking the backs with his thumbs as he looks down at the ring and talks. "It's not anywhere near enough to show how I feel about you. It's nowhere near as beautiful as you are, nowhere near as valuable, nowhere near as extraordinary." His eyes lift

to mine, and they glisten in the candlelit night. "You are everything to me, baby. There is no possession that could ever represent that. This is just the closest thing I could find."

I sniffle a bit and bite my bottom lip as I nod like an idiot. My heart is ready to explode out of my chest. I've never felt so overwhelmed by emotion in my life. And, when words won't come, you make do. I throw my arms around his neck and start kissing him like a maniac. On his neck, on his cheeks, his eyes, his lips. Over and over again until he captures my face between his hands and steadies me, planting his lips on mine. There's nothing gentle about the way we come together. Our lips and teeth and tongues are in a frenzied contest.

In moments we're both breathing hard. "Fuck, Mel," he pants as he reaches for my blouse, pulling the shoulder down farther and palming my breast through my bra. "God, I want you so bad."

I arch my neck as he licks along my carotid artery, the link between my heart and my head. "I love you. I love you," I gasp.

"You're mine," he growls, stopping and looking me in the eye before he reaches down and pulls my blouse over my head. "Always. This..." he touches my ring, "this tells the world. You're mine." He gazes at my chest before he flicks the front clasp of my bra open and pinches my nipples between his fingers and thumbs. "And I'm yours, baby. I am *so* yours."

My head lolls back and I dig my fingers into his shoulders. Then he slips the bra off my arms and drops it on the floor. I start to work on the buttons of his shirt, frantic to get to his skin. He watches me and caresses my breasts at the same time.

“You’re so fucking amazing. You know that?”

“I’m not amazing enough to get your damn shirt off,” I hiss in frustration.

He chuckles, then pulls hard on either side, popping the buttons off right and left.

“Well, that’s one solution,” I mumble as I pull it the rest of the way off and toss it behind me someplace.

“Get out of those shorts. Now,” he commands as he stands and starts undoing his jeans.

“The building across the way is going to get a show,” I pant, stripping the shorts and my panties off in one smooth movement. I lie back on the loveseat and watch him, enjoying every golden inch of his smooth chest, rippled abs and very erect cock that’s now revealed as he steps out of his jeans.

“Commando?” I ask, grinning up at him.

“I knew what I was going to be doing tonight,” he says lowering himself onto the loveseat alongside me. “I didn’t want any extra barriers in the way.”

“What a smart man.” I groan as he starts licking my nipples and smooths his hand down my torso moving close to the danger zone. Oh, God, how I wish he’d get to the danger zone.

“Smart enough to get you to marry me.” His fingers slide along my clit and I can’t help but groan.

“Don’t get too full of yourself. It was the ring.”

His laugh vibrates through my stomach as he presses open-mouth kisses around my bellybutton.

“And here I thought it was the rock star thing.”

I reach down and stroke his shoulders as his mouth moves south. All the way south.

I cry out when his tongue hits exactly the right spot.

He licks again, then molds his lips around my clit and sucks. My pelvis lifts off the sofa and I dig my fingers into his hair. Joss Jamison has hair that is famous around the world, and I get to run my fingers through it any damn time I want. So yeah, it’s partly the rock star thing.

I can feel that fist-sized spot in my lower gut coiling tight. The aching pressure building with each lick and suck of Joss’s mouth. His hands are cupped under my knees and he lifts my legs up and spreads them wider as I gasp for breath and grind against his mouth.

Then, moments before everything spirals into the throbbing release I’m dying to reach, he stops, sliding up my body. I moan in protest.

“Only with me inside, Sweet Mel. I want to feel you around me when you come.”

I reach down between us and grasp his cock, rubbing my thumb across the tip to feel the moisture leaking out there. I lightly run my nails up and down his shaft causing him to shudder above me.

“Fuuuck,” he exhales.

“You’d better get inside, Mr. Jamison,” I coo.

“Whatever you say, Mrs. Jamison,.” He drives into me, stealing all of my breath and any words I might have to add.

I open my eyes for a moment, determined that I will absorb every tiny detail of this night. The night that Joss Jamison asked me to be his everything. The sky is dark above us, but the candles are like tiny stars that have fallen all around, giving a soft, sparkling light to this little bubble we exist in, just the two of us. The fire crackles and the scent of wine drifts from the open bottle next to us on the coffee table. The fabric under my back is smooth and the cushions are firm. Joss's skin is slick, his breath hot against my ear. He slides out of me and my eyes close before he presses back in.

He's so deep then that every nerve-ending in my body explodes in a sizzling wave of pleasure. As the wave crests, my insides pulse, over and over until I think it can't continue another second. Then it does. Again. Finally, I remember to breathe, and I hear Joss moan as he throbs inside of me, his hips jerking against my inner thighs. I clutch him as tightly as I can, my heart syncing with his as he slowly relaxes into me, nuzzling my neck.

We lay together, his weight on me heavy, but necessary, the tangible proof of the weight of what we are, who we are, where we are going. His solid muscles and firm skin like the solidness of our love, the firmness of our commitment. Eventually, he slides slightly to the side, his arm across my torso pinning me in place. I tuck my head under his chin and take a deep breath. Everything feels different—more. And it is so incredibly right.

“Mmm,” Joss mumbles into my hair.

“I didn't think it could get any better,” I whisper.

“If it gets any better it might kill me.”

I giggle. "What happened to all your swagger?"

"It'll be back. Give me fifteen minutes."

"Oh good, because I don't think I thanked you for the beautiful ring yet."

"Fuck, baby, you're going to be thanking me for that for the next sixty years or so."

"I might need some more food then."

"Anything for my gorgeous fiancé," he rumbles as he gently kisses me. "But first a little nap, huh?"

"Okay," I whisper as I roll onto my side and snuggle into the curve of his big body. He folds his arm around my waist and pulls me back against him even tighter.

"Mel?" he whispers as my eyes drift shut.

"Yeah?"

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"For being my world."

"I love you," I say softly, then smile as I listen to his deep, even breaths. My sleeping rock star.

THE END