

*Sunshine Daydream* is a work of historical fiction. Aside from well-documented people, events, and locations, the characters and situations are entirely of the author's imagination and any similarity to real people or events is entirely coincidental.

## SUNSHINE DAYDREAM

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Written by Bethany J Miller.

“Sun” and “Flowers” Cover Art by China Cat Creations.

This book would not have been possible without the unconditional, unwavering support of my favorite Deadhead, Mike. Thank you for pushing me, believing in me, listening to this book at least a hundred times, and always being down to shake your bones.

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To Linda Fausnet, Rebekah L Fraser, Tara L. Roi and The Greater New Haven Writer's Group, who never let me do anything less than my very best.

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And to all my fellow Deadheads, life's a hell of a ride and I'm so glad to be on the bus with all of you.

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A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to Archive.org, as the giant catalog of Grateful Dead shows they make accessible to the general public for free is an invaluable resource as well as a true joy for any Deadhead.

## Author's Note

In the spring of 1991 I left home to follow the Grateful Dead. I'd have happily stayed on tour forever, if my life and the death of Jerry Garcia hadn't interrupted me. Instead, I stepped away, focused on raising a family and being a respectable adult. But in the back of my drawer, behind the collection of t-shirts I'd amassed as a gymnastics/robotics/football mom, the tie-dyes were still lurking.

*Sunshine Daydream* began as an attempt to come to terms with the life I'd left behind. But as I researched the shows Bailey and her friends go to, listened to each them over and over on Archive.org or watched them on YouTube, determined to get every historical detail correct, I was transported back to that magical time when the only thing that mattered was getting into the show.

Rather than coming to terms with what I'd left behind, I wanted it more than ever. After more than 20 years away, I went to a show.

The first thing I noticed was how very different everything was. There was no more "lot" as I knew it. Vending was done in venue-approved booths, not out of people's trunks. Most everyone had a ticket. No one offered me doses. And I didn't know anyone.

But as much as things had changed, some had stayed the same. When Bobby came out on stage and the first notes of "Eyes of the World" echoed through the stadium the crowd went wild. The grey-haired guy next to me offered me a hit of a legally obtained joint, the twenty-something kid on my other side sang every word to every song. When the woman in front of me turned around during "He's Gone" and we sang that we were going to steal each other's faces, I knew I was home.

The Grateful Dead scene as I knew it may be gone, but the vibe is still there. In bars where bands cover songs written before they were born, at multi-day music festivals where clean cut college kids dance next to brothers and sisters with dreadlocks to their waists, at stadium shows where middle-aged moms and grey-haired grandpas talk about what it was like back in the day, and in the hearts of every Deadhead.

## Chapter 1

Teague was half way through the preliminary draft of the prenup when he stopped. He couldn't write this contract. He considered how to phrase what was going to amount to a refusal to work with this client as he dialed the extension for the firm's senior partner.

"This is Phillip."

"Phillip, this is Teague. I'm working on the Constantine prenup and I've got some concerns." He began pacing, his long strides taking him across the small space much too quickly. "Some of the things he's looking to do are illegal, and some I'm not comfortable with."

There was a pause, the sound of papers shuffling. "You are aware of who this is. What this particular client means to this firm."

He loosened his tie. "I am, and I do. Which is why I feel that another attorney may be better suited to—"

Phillip cut him off. "I expect the preliminary draft of the Constantine prenup on my desk by the end of the day." The line went dead.

Teague set the phone back in the cradle and sank into his chair. He pulled out a yellow legal pad, intending to re-read the client's instructions and take notes. Instead, he drew triangles in the margin.

This wasn't what he'd had in mind when he'd chosen his specialty. He'd intended to make sure men were fairly represented, that they were allowed visitation rights to their children,

that vindictive wives didn't play the sympathy card and walk away with everything. Basically, he wanted to be the lawyer his father hadn't had.

He hadn't realized how horrible people could be to each other. There were days when he'd sit in his office long after everyone else had gone, trying to work through other people's issues so he didn't have to bring them home. Ironically, his attempts at not bringing problems home were causing major problems *at home*.

The phone rang, startling him out of his thoughts. "Hello?"

"Teague?"

"Cole?" He could tell immediately, by the desperate tone in his brother's voice, there was a problem. "What's wrong?"

"I'm in jail. You gotta help me. I'm so fucked."

He leaned back in his chair. The only surprising thing about Cole being arrested was that it hadn't happened before. "What'd you do?"

"Nothing."

Taking a deep breath, reminding himself that this was his brother and he was required by the laws of family to help, he clarified, "What were you arrested for?"

"Possession with intent to sell." Panic tinting his voice, he added, "They're saying fifteen years. It'd be 2005 by the time I got out. *Two-fucking-thousand and five.*"

"Who's saying fifteen years?"

"The judge."

Teague sat up straighter. "You've already been to court?"

"This morning."

His mind suddenly reeling, trying to remember everything he'd ever learned about criminal law, he asked, "Tell me exactly what happened."

"I was walking home yesterday, and these fuckin' cops start harassing me, and next thing I know they're throwing me in the car, arresting me on bullshit charges."

"They read the formal charges this morning?"

"Yeah, but I'm telling you, they're bunk."

"Did you enter a plea?"

"Yeah. I told them I was innocent. I wasn't selling anything to anyone."

He grabbed the legal pad and started making notes. "You pled not guilty. Did you tell the judge you were going to hire an attorney?"

"I told him you were one. That's why they let me call you."

"Okay. I'll get someone over there. Where are you?"

Fear coming through the phone loud and clear, he said, "Vermont. I've been staying at the house up here."

Teague dropped his pen, watched it roll across the pad. This was suddenly a hell of a lot more complicated. "Shit. Cole, listen, I'm going to have to..." He needed to think.

"You're gonna get me out, right? They set bail."

That was out of the question. Not loving the idea of telling Cole he didn't trust him, he used the easiest excuse he could. His girlfriend. "I can't do that. Marlina'll kill me. Just sit tight and stay out of trouble until I can figure this out."

As soon as he hung up, he began pacing again. *Criminal defense is not your thing. You're gonna have to hire someone. How the hell are you going to pull that off? You don't have any contacts in Vermont, and no good way of making any. If you ask around here, everyone will*

*know by tomorrow that your brother's in jail for dealing drugs. Fuck! Cole's dealing? Jesus. It's gotta be a mistake. But it's not and you know it. Does Mom know? Shit, I'm gonna have to call her.*

There was no way in hell he was calling his mother until he had a plan.

*If I had a Vermont phone book I could— Forget it. That'd just be a name. Same if I use the Lawyer's Reference catalog. The most I'd get is a specialty, and just because they practice criminal defense doesn't mean they're any good. Something like this, fifteen years, you gotta meet them in person, make sure you're comfortable with them.*

He stopped pacing. *Shit, I'm gonna have to go up there myself. The house is five hours, at least, from here. If I drive up tonight, I can start making calls first thing in the morning. Marlina's fundraiser is tomorrow and if I miss it she's gonna freak. But Cole's pretrial is next Friday, I don't have time to waste. If I go up in person it also means someone else gets assigned to the Constantine fucking prenup. That's a plus. Do you even want to do this? Cole's dealing fucking drugs. He belongs in jail. But if I don't do something Mom'll never forgive me. Christ, this sucks.*

Back at his desk, Teague took out his wallet and flipped through credit cards to the picture Cole had given him for Christmas. The black and white image of all four brothers, shirtless, smiling, with their arms around each other, had been taken during the summer they'd spent in Vermont, just before their parents split. Teague wondered where Cole had found it. Probably Vermont. Cole'd had plenty of opportunity, since he was the only Gallagher who'd used that house in the last twenty years.

As he slid the picture back into his wallet Teague made a decision. He didn't agree with his brother's choices, or his lifestyle in general, but Cole was still his little brother. He had to do what he could to help him.

He had to go to Vermont.

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It had been bad enough going to HR, explaining that he needed a couple days, maybe a week, off from work. Listening as the office manager reassigned his most pressing cases to other attorneys and answering questions about his clients' needs. He'd given out the phone number at his mother's house in Vermont to everyone who was helping him, just in case there was a question.

Now he was going to have to explain this to Marlana.

He sat in his car and stared at the front of the townhouse. Marlana had bought it before they'd met. She'd liked the eat in kitchen, with its sleek white cabinets, and she'd liked that there was a balcony off the bedroom upstairs. She could have bought a house, but she hadn't wanted to worry about shoveling snow or mowing the lawn.

When he'd first moved in they'd talked about buying something together. Someplace with an open floor plan where they could entertain, and maybe a yard for kids. Climbing out of the car, he knew there was little chance of that happening now. He'd been warned that if he didn't make her his first priority it was over.

As soon as he stepped into the foyer she called from the kitchen, "You're late."



He slipped his shoes off and set them on the rack in the closet, hung his coat, and headed down the hall. He stood in the doorway and watched Marlana for a moment. He loved the way her dark hair, cut very short in the back, showed off the curve of her neck. She stood on her toes as she reached to pull dishes out of the cabinet.

“Let me get that for you.” He moved to help.

“I’ve got it.” She grabbed the dishes, turned and set them on the table with a bang. She crossed her arms over her chest. “Teague, we talked about this. You get out of work at five.”

The way she pressed her lips together, he knew he was in trouble. “Babe, I couldn’t help it.”

“Yes, you could. You’re a lawyer, not a doctor. No one’s going to *die* if you leave on time.”

“This time it’s different.”

“Yeah? How.”

“Cole called. He’s in trouble.”

She rolled her eyes. “I’m sure. How much did you send him?”

“Not that kind of trouble. He’s in jail, for possession with intent to sell.”

“Shocking.”

He clenched his fists. “Marlana, this is serious.”

Her lip curled as she said, “Why do you sound surprised? Did you really not know what he was doing?”

He’d known Cole did drugs, but he hadn’t considered he may be dealing. And when he’d told him the charges were bunk, Teague had believed him. Even if he wasn’t completely sure of what “bunk” meant.

Marlena continued, "I'm sure someone at your firm can handle it."

"That's the thing." He explained, "He's in Vermont. I'm going to have to go, in person, to hire someone."

Her eyes narrowed. "You're going to Vermont."

"Yes."

"When?"

"As soon as I can pack a bag."

She enunciated each word as she asked, "And how long will you be gone?"

This was the part he was dreading. "A few days?"

She slowly uncrossed her arms, put her hands on the table between them and leaned forward. "Teague, you know how hard I've worked on tomorrow night's benefit dinner. How many donor's asses I had to kiss, how many of my parent's friends I had to beg into coming. How is it going to look if you're not there?"

"It'll look like I had a family emergency."

"Not acceptable."

"I have to go."

"You don't *have* to do anything."

"What am I supposed to do? Just leave Cole sitting in jail?"

She snapped, "Cole *belongs* in jail."

"He's my brother."

"Ted Bundy had a brother, too. Do you think he should have bailed him out of jail?"

Appalled, he said, "How the hell can you compare Cole to *Ted Bundy*?"

"How the hell can you choose your fucked up, hippie freak, druggie brother over *me*?"

“How the hell can you ask me to choose between you and Cole?” Disgusted, he said, “I’m going to pack.”

She yelled down the hall at his back, “Pack everything, because if you leave this house you’re not coming back.”

He ignored her. His brother needed him. He wasn’t going to be some douche bag who left his family to fend for themselves, or who demanded that they choose between people.

He threw a garment bag on the bed and packed slacks and Oxfords. He wondered briefly if Marlana was serious. Just in case, he pulled out a suitcase and added a couple pairs of jeans, a few polos, and whatever else he thought he’d need for a few days away. As an afterthought he threw in his address book, the novel he’d been reading for the past year, and the football jersey he wore on Sundays.

Looking around the room, he decided there wasn’t anything else he wanted. He’d paid for most of what was there, but nothing else was *his*. He zipped the suitcase and brought both bags down to the foyer. He slipped the brown shoes he’d chosen that morning back on and tucked the black ones in the side of his suitcase.

“You’re such a fucking asshole.”

He looked up to see Marlana, arms crossed, leaning against the wall.

Straightening, he considered trying to make this right. But the Constantine prenup flashed through his mind. It wasn’t that they were trying to protect their assets, or that they were going into a marriage expecting it to fail. *Relationships shouldn’t require conditions. If he loved her, and she loved him, they’d work out whatever shit came up— together.*

He pulled out his keys and unclipped the one for the condo. He bounced it in his hand a few times, then handed it to Marlana.

She stared at him, shock on her face.

He opened the door, picked up his bags, and walked out.

## Chapter 2

The tape player on top of the refrigerator was a poor substitute for seeing the Grateful Dead live. Bailey sang along anyway, about midnight sun and silver kimonos and diamond eyed jacks.

She measured sugar into a big stainless-steel bowl, added salt and baking powder. When she'd opened her coffee shop four years earlier she'd taped the index card with her mom's handwritten instructions to the freshly painted cabinet above her workspace. After making muffins nearly every morning since, she cracked eggs, poured milk, and added blueberries without having to consult her mom's precise script.

As she scooped batter into tins, "China Cat" gave way seamlessly to "I Know You Rider." The words echoed through her. When she'd first heard those lyrics she'd had no idea how much she'd someday miss having riders. Especially Jesse, although she didn't consider her boyfriend to be a rider even when he chipped in for gas. They'd been together way too long for that. *Since the beginning. It's always been you and Jesse. He'll be back soon. Maybe today. A lot of family go home after the New Year's shows.*

She smiled a little to herself as she remembered the first time someone had referred to her as family. It'd been at Red Rocks, a few months after she'd left home to follow the Dead. She hadn't even known the guy who'd said it, but the feeling of being accepted as a Deadhead had stuck with her. *Are you family, still? You haven't been to a show in months.*

She'd skipped News Year's in Oakland, it was too hard to take time off to drive cross-country. And the previous fall she'd only managed three nights in Philly. *You can go back. You are family, and nothing can change that.*

The timer dinged. She pulled the first tray of cookies from the oven, slid the second tray in, put the muffins on the lower rack, and shut the door. Once the timer was reset and the first cookies transferred to a cooling rack, she prepped the third and final tray.

The tape player popped open. Instead of flipping the cassette over, she shut it off and headed into the main room. Delilah padded softly past her, nuzzling her big black head against Bailey's hand. She briefly thought how funny it was that people were afraid of rottweilers. Delilah was the sweetest dog ever. She rubbed the dog's side before turning the knob on the stereo. She almost started the tape in that player, then opted for the radio. Maybe in a while she'd switch back to the Dead, but right then she needed to listen to something that didn't stir so many memories.

Tom Petty was singing about rolling joints. She sang along as she started coffee. Once she had the first pot brewing, she went out into the seating area.

Morning sun streamed through the big windows at the front of the shop, reflected off the glossy tops of the light oak tables with their matching chairs, and brought brightness to the seating area in the front corner. Bailey straightened the deep blue and burgundy throw pillows on

the couches, knowing it was a lost cause. By the end of the morning rush they'd be in total disarray again.

That was fine. She wanted people to make themselves comfortable. To play the board games she'd piled on the coffee table, to read a book or two, or to just hang out and do nothing.

Satisfied that everything was ready, she flipped the sign on the door to "Open."

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Bailey took advantage of the late afternoon lull to clean. She threw out cups that had been left on tables, wiped up cream and sugar spills, and pushed chairs back where they belonged. Behind the counter she added to the growing list of supplies she needed to order while she kept one eye on the street, looking for the school bus. A light snow had begun to fall and she worried about the roads.

When her niece, Aria, came in Bailey came around the counter and grabbed her in a bear hug. "Hi, sweetie! How was school?" She kissed her cheek and set her down, running her hand down Aria's long, light brown hair.

"Good. We had gym today and we played leap frog."

"Sounds like fun. Do you have homework?"

Aria rolled her eyes dramatically. "Yes. We always have homework. It's supposed to make us 'sponsible."

Bailey thought it was insane to have homework in kindergarten. "Go start it please and I'll bring you a snack."

Aria went to a table and unpacked her bag, pausing to pet Delilah when she wandered over. The dog lay at her feet, where the crumbs usually fell.

Bailey brought a cookie and a glass of milk to the table. “Do you need anything else?”

“No, Auntie, thank you.”

“If you do, come get me.” She went back to work, checking on Aria between customers.

When Rain came in, shaking snow from his long blonde dreadlocks, she leaned across the counter and kissed his cheek. Of all her friends, she missed him the most when he was gone.

“Hey now. Where’ve you been?”

“Here and there. I caught the shows in Oakland.” He gave her an easy smile, his deep blue eyes lighting up. “New Year’s Eve they opened with ‘Sugar Mag’, then went into ‘Touch of Grey’.”

She rolled her eyes. “I hate that fucking song. And ‘Sugar Mag’ should always be followed by ‘Sunshine Daydream’.”

His smile growing, he said, “I know, but they made up for it. They rolled out a ‘Dark Star’, then *ended* with ‘Sunshine Daydream’ and did ‘Midnight Hour’ for the encore.”

“Wish I coulda been there.” “Dark Star” was a rarity, and any time it made it into the rotation was cause for celebration. Hoping against hope, she asked, “Did anyone else come back with you?”

“Na, I hitched.”

“Fuuuck, that sucks.”

He shrugged, “It wasn’t that bad. I hooked up with family to Chicago. Then I caught a ride with a trucker all the way to Springfield, then Matt came and picked me up.” Rain always



spoke quietly, but as he leaned closer to Bailey he lowered his voice even further. “Matt told me about Cole.”

That had been the biggest topic of discussion all week. “It sucks, he totally doesn’t deserve to be in jail.”

“No doubt.”

She said, “I heard they set his bail really high.”

“They think he’s a flight risk.”

“Would you hang around, if it were you?”

“Hell no.”

“Me, neither. If I were Cole.” She asked, “What do you think’s gonna happen to him?”

“His brother’s some big shot lawyer, coming up from Connecticut. I’m guessing he’ll work something out.”

Surprised that no one else had mentioned that, she asked, “How’d you hear that?”

“Matt was in court on Tuesday with my sister, when Cole was arraigned. They set his pretrial for next Friday.” He shook his head sadly. “Fridays are bad. That usually means they’re not planning on letting you go.”

Bailey scrunched her eyebrows together. “Really?”

Rain shrugged. “That’s what my old man always said.” The bells above the door jingled as people came in. He glanced up at the menu boards. “Bail, can I get a large organic blend?”

She poured the coffee. As she handed it to him, she asked, “Where are you staying?”

“With Matt. They’ve got some shit to do around the farm and I’m gonna give a hand.”

“So you’ll be around for a while?”

“For a bit.”

There was a flutter in her stomach— definitely interest in the way he was looking at her.

“Don’t be a stranger.”

“I won’t.”

He took his coffee and sat with Aria. The little girl gave him a huge hug. Bailey took care of the next customers and half-watched the two of them, Aria bouncing in her seat as she told Rain something. It made Bailey feel good that her friends went out of their way to be kind to her niece, considering she spent so much time at the shop. After a while Rain hugged Aria, waved to Bailey, and left.

When Katelyn came in to relieve her, Bailey took Aria and Delilah upstairs. The convenience of living above her shop had been the deciding factor when she’d chosen this location, although she’d wanted to be downtown anyway. She’d always loved the old brick buildings that surrounded the town green, with their high ceilings, huge windows and unique features. Her building had vintage tin ceilings, something that just wasn’t done anymore.

She opened the door of her apartment to the lingering scent of sandalwood incense. She slipped her Birkenstocks off, leaving them by the door with all the other shoes, and crossed the hardwood floor barefoot. She turned lamps on as she went, lighting the chocolate walls and cranberry couches with a warm glow.

On the other side of the living room she flipped through tapes, reading labels. “Any special requests?”

“Foxboro last year?” Aria spun slow circles in the space between the coffee table and the couch, her arms wide and her skirt flaring around her.

Bailey grinned. “You just want that because you were there.”

“Not-ahhh.” Aria stopped spinning and gave her the most adorable smile. “They ended with ‘The Mighty Quinn’ and you like that one.”

She countered, “Yeah, but they did ‘Sugar Mag’ without ‘Sunshine Daydream’ and that’s so weird.” She began looking for that tape anyway, because Aria had asked for it and because she liked nearly every song they’d done that night.

“They did it on New Year’s.”

She figured that was what Aria and Rain had been talking about, but she asked anyway, “How’d you know that?”

“Because everyone knows.” She started spinning again, slowly enough that she could ask, “Do you think Jesse will bring tapes from New Year’s?”

The casual reminder that her boyfriend had left her behind again stung. After the shows in Philly she’d gone home to Vermont to take care of the shop and Aria. Lacking those responsibilities, Jesse had finished out the tour. Cole, Sage and a few others had come back in early November. Jesse hadn’t.

Keeping her back to her niece, Bailey said, “I don’t know. It depends on when he comes back, if the tapes have made copies yet and if he can get them.”

“How come he’s not back?”

She found the right tape and stuck it in. “I don’t know.”

“Rain’s back. And Sage. I saw him yesterday.”

Bailey turned around slowly. “Sage has a car. And Matt went down to Springfield to get Rain. If Jesse’s on his way he probably has to hitchhike, and sometimes that’s really hard.”

“Why don’t we just go get him? Like Matt got Rain?”

Bailey sighed, knowing Jesse would show up when he was ready. “I don’t know where he is, or what he’s doing. He might be on his way, or he might chillin’ on the west coast so he can catch the shows in February.” Not into discussing this any further, she asked, “What do you want for dinner?”

“Hmmm.” Aria made a show of giving it a lot of thought, with her hand on her hip and a finger over her lips. “Stir-fry?”

“Perfect. I’ll get the rice going and you can pick veggies.” Bailey led her into the kitchen. Even in the fading light of late afternoon the room was bright and sunny, the yellow of the cabinets echoing the sunflower pattern of the wallpaper. She pulled the cord on the ceiling light anyway, liking a lot of light when she cooked.

Aria got a cutting board, set it on the table and started carefully chopping the vegetables the way her aunt had taught her. After a while, she asked, “Auntie? Are you going on spring tour?”

Over her shoulder, she said, “That’s a ways away. I haven’t decided.”

“Can I come? If you go?”

“Not this time, sweetie. You’ve got school.” She felt bad. Aria was used to being part of Bailey’s life, including going to shows, and school was really getting in the way. It was an adjustment for both of them.

Pouting a little, she said, “Yeah, that’s what Nannie said, too.”

Surprised, Bailey turned to actually look at Aria. “You asked Nannie if you could go on tour?”

“Yeah. Just the east coast shows, though. Cuz that’s what you do, right? When me and Mallory grow up we’re gonna get a van, like yours, and do *all* the shows.”

She smiled at the thought of Aria asking her Nannie if she could go on tour. Not that Baily's mom would have been surprised by the question. Most everyone Bailey knew had spent at least some time on tour, and Aria had spent a whole lot of time with Bailey and her friends. But still, it was interesting that Aria apparently thought it was a normal thing to do. She asked, "And what does Mallory's mom say about that?"

"She says we'll see." Aria looked at Bailey from the corner of her eye. "That's what grown-ups say when they mean no."

Smiling at the blunt assessment, Bailey went back to cooking.

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After dinner Bailey and Aria snuggled on the couch, reading. When Bailey's mom, Ellen, got there they stacked the books on the coffee table while Aria got her shoes.

Quietly, hoping the little girl didn't hear, Bailey told her mom, "I heard Aria asked if she could go on tour."

Ellen glanced at her granddaughter and smiled. "She did." She looked back to her daughter. "She wants to be just like her Auntie Bailey."

Bailey wasn't sure how she felt about that. As much as she loved being on tour, living on the road could be a hard life. Not necessarily what she wanted for her niece. Speaking louder, so Aria heard, she told Ellen, "Her homework's done. We had veggie stir-fry for dinner, and she somehow managed to weasel ice cream out of me."

Aria grinned at the last part as she carefully tied her shoelaces. She grabbed her bag and took Ellen's hand. "Bye, Auntie Bailey."

Bailey gave her a quick hug and kiss, “See you tomorrow.” She watched her mom and niece as they went down the stairs, Aria already chattering away about her day.

Once they were gone and the dishes were done, Bailey called Delilah and went back downstairs. By this time of the night everyone in the shop was family. They kicked back on couches and sat around tables, or stood in groups talking. Delilah lay in her customary corner and Bailey sat on the couch next to Rain. He hugged her in greeting. “Hey, sistah.”

“Hey now.” She leaned against him, letting him keep his arm around her shoulders. It was nice to sit quietly after having to talk to customers all day. It was nice, too, to feel Rain’s fingers trace along her skin.

Eventually everyone left, except Rain. Bailey locked the doors, shut off the lights, and walked back to where he was leaning against the wall at the bottom of the stairs, waiting. He touched her hair, played with the hair wrap, making the silver bells tinkle softly. “Hey.”

“Hey.” She ignored an unexpected surge of nerves as Rain’s blue eyes met hers. They’d been friends a long time, nothing would change that.

He brushed his hand over her cheek, rested it on her neck. He leaned toward her, kissed her gently.

She led him upstairs. She pointed at the stereo as she sat on the couch. “Do you want to put something on?” She watched his back, loving the way his dreads hung nearly to his waist. She twirled her own hair. She’d been close to letting it dread once. A long time ago.

After a minute he put a tape in the player and came to sit next to her.

“What’d you pick?”

He took her hand. “You’ll see.”

The music started and she grinned. She recognized “Alabama Getaway” immediately, and it was easy enough to guess what he’d chosen. “Rochester War Memorial, 1982?”

“Damn, Bail, you’re good.”

She shrugged. “That was our first show.”

He nodded. “It was.”

“That was such a great tour.” Those were the days she so desperately missed, when it’d always been her, Jesse, Rain and Sage. “It feels like a million years ago.”

He laced his fingers into hers. “It’s been *eight years*.”

“That’s insane.” She put her head on his shoulder. “We shouldn’t even be old enough to be able to say that.”

She felt him smile against her head. “No shit, huh?” He laughed softly. “I still remember you with pig tails tied with ribbons.”

“And I remember when you were Walter.”

He snorted. “I swear to god, if you ever tell anyone that…” He trailed off.

Barely a whisper, she said, “I’d never do that.”

Just as softly, he said, “I know.” He let go of her hand and slid his fingers over her shoulder, tangled them into her hair.

She leaned into him, kissed him firmly.

Delilah nudged her leg. Pulling back from Rain, she gave the dog a quick scratch between her ears. “Go lay down.”

She put her head in Bailey’s lap.

Bailey gently pushed her off, stood and held her hand out to Rain. He took it and she led him to the bedroom. She shut the door, leaving the dog in the living room.

She slid her hand under his shirt, feeling his smooth skin. Closing her eyes, she put her head against his chest as he ran his fingers through her long, soft hair.

He unbuckled one side of her overalls, letting the strap dangle. She shuddered with pleasure as he caressed her hip. When he undid her other buckle and let her pants fall to the floor, she stepped out of them and pulled him towards the bed.

“Dire Wolf” played, just loud enough to hear through the door. She hummed, the music always a part of her.

Tingles of pleasure ran through her as Rain trailed his fingers over her shoulder, across her collarbone, traced her breasts, making her nipples harden. She touched his side, watched her winter-pale fingers against his skin, still tanned from his time in California, as she ran them along his hip. He moved above her.

Gently, she stopped him. “Wait.” Reaching into the nightstand, she grabbed a condom.

Needing to feel close to him, she ran her hands over the smooth skin of his shoulders, down his sides, and gently pulled his hips, guiding him. Her eyes closed as she concentrated on the pressure of him pushing into her.

Warm breath, expelled with a low moan, tickled her shoulder. Slowly at first, so she felt every thrust and withdrawal, then harder, faster, he took what he needed until he strained against her. Arching to meet him, she tightened her grip on his hips, felt sweat break out over his skin as he throbbed inside her.

He wrapped his arms around her, his jagged breath slowing to normal. He ran his hand over her cheek, turned her face to his and kissed her. “Do you have another condom?”

She stayed on her back while he did what he needed to. Once he was ready, he ran his fingers up her thigh, touched her inside. With each movement he brought her closer to



fulfillment. “Rain, ummmm, Rain.” His name slid from her lips, disappearing into the space between them. Pleasure radiated from where he touched, pulsed through her in waves coming closer and closer together. “Now, please.”

Nearly there, she heaved against him, her body tightening uncontrollably around him. She stopped breathing, her entire consciousness focused on him inside her. “*More.*” He pushed, groaning with the effort, as she came on him.

Spent, they lay in the dark together. He kissed her shoulder as he slipped his arm around her waist. She twined her fingers with his and held him close. She drifted, listening to the comfortable rhythm of his breathing, and to the music that had been the background to nearly everything she’d ever done.

-End of Preview-