

Chapter 1: Existence, Happy and Otherwise

How had he found her? *Again*. Doctor Micki Glass stared at the email without seeing it. Three simple words blurred together as all of her carefully constructed walls threatened to fail. Trembling, cracking, the patched armor around her heart started to crumble. Those three words reduced her to an insecure, needy shadow of the woman she'd become. Three words stripped away all pretense of independence . . . All pretense of confidence . . . All pretense of *indifference*.

She squeezed her eyes closed as if that could somehow erase what she'd read.

I miss you.

Three words that undid three years of therapy . . . three years of agony . . . three years of heartache and unbearable, gut-wrenching loneliness.

I miss you.

Oh, god. Why now?

Outside of her office, the world still turned. The muffled sounds of people going about their lives teased the far edges of her hearing, too distant to snap her back to the present. A car horn beeped. A man shouted, his words suffocated by the haze of an obsession she tried desperately to resist. Memories flooded her senses . . . the heady musk of his cologne, the clean taste of his throat beneath her tongue, the undeniable power of his body overwhelming hers.

I miss you.

Even with miles between them and years apart, her heart remembered. Her skin still craved him. Once upon a different life, she'd lost her way in the magic of his touch, wallowed in it, drowned in it; drowned in *him* until suddenly he was gone and she had to learn to breathe on her own.

A continuous buzzing sound eventually dragged her back to the present. Preferring anger to weakness, she snatched her phone from its cradle and snapped, "Yes?"

"Dr. Glass, your next patient is waiting." Her receptionist, Shantel, paused before adding shyly, "Fair warning, he's in a mood. Do you want me to give him to a tech to start him on warm ups?"

She pinched the bridge of her nose against the beginnings of a vicious headache and sighed into the phone. Yay. God forbid he be *easy* for a change. Her receptionist didn't get paid enough to deal with Mr. Big and Grouchy. Dealing with *him* was *her* job. "My day can't get any worse. I'll be right out, Shantel."

After popping a couple of aspirin, she skimmed her patient's file to review their treatment plan. Normally she loved being a physical therapist. She was fascinated with the mechanics of the human body and truly wanted to make people feel better. Since she was squeamish about bodily fluids, nursing and doctoring were out. As a PT, she could work wonders with patients without the blood and urine. It was the perfect job. Usually.

Mr. Big and Grouchy was more than simply a difficult patient. There was something in the way he looked at her that made her uncomfortable. To most patients, she was a means to an end; a tool, really. Most people focused on her instructions and paid no attention to her as a person. She could've been a robot as long as she got results. But this one was different. She wasn't afraid of him—that wasn't it—she was *unbalanced* with him. It was the intensity of his stare that bothered her. Sometimes it was almost like a wolf's predatory assessment. Cool, intelligent . . .

inhuman. His icy jade irises seemed to see beyond her professional mask. He watched her, studying her as she worked with him. Sometimes his mouth lifted into a knowing smirk that made her wonder just what, exactly, he saw when he gazed into her face. Did he see her secrets? Did he see her shame? It was disconcerting, and she wasn't in the mood for it today. Pushing away from her desk, she squared her shoulders and marched down the hall to the treatment room.

As usual, he waited beside the treatment table with his back to the wall. His broad shoulders were stiff with tension as he read something on his phone. She took a moment to gauge his mood and get a grip on hers. He didn't deserve her anger. He was a patient and was entitled to her undivided attention and compassion so he could heal and get back to his life. Drawing a deep, balancing breath, she ran her eyes over him and sighed again. Judging by the deep crease between his eyes, he was going to be difficult today.

I miss you.

Damn it! Get the hell out of my head! The past was the past. It needed to stay there. *He* needed to stay there. She bit her lip as another wave of regret dredged up crystal clear memories of the strong, lean fingers that typed those words. Those fingers had played her body like their own personal instrument and brought her to her knees for one more touch. Love? Obsession? The line was blurred back then. Now? After three years of therapy, she understood what they had was unhealthy, and yet, somehow, despite the disaster he left behind she still felt his mouth purring against her throat. *I miss you.*

“Are you planning to stare at me all day or can we get on with my session?”

Flushing more from the wistful direction of her thoughts than from his rudeness, she forced a professional smile and said, “Good morning, Koivu. How are you feeling today?”

“Nothing good about it. My friggin’ shoulder’s aching like a bitch and I’m tired of coming here twice a week. If you can’t get me back to normal by the end of the month, I’m not coming back. I was told you were good, but you’re not doing much, are you?” He scowled at the offending shoulder as if he could will it back to health.

“The end of the month is only two more weeks. You know it’s going to take longer than that. You’re recovering from major injuries to several muscles and ligaments. You’ve got scar tissue to work around, and getting full range of motion back takes time. The human body can’t be rushed.”

“I think I need a new therapist.” His stubborn chin lifted and he grouched, “And a refund.”

Instead of sighing and rolling her eyes, she dug deep for a placating tone. “I understand your impatience. I really do, but as I’ve said before, the body takes time to repair itself and you’re simply going to have to be patient.” She sounded like a broken record. This was the exact same conversation they’d had during the past twelve sessions.

He skewered her with his remarkable eyes and peeled away from the wall. “I’ve been patient!” He rotated his shoulder as far as it would go and growled, “This human weakness is bullshit. I need my body back. I have *work* to do.”

Human weakness? Her lips twitched at the odd phrasing, but she didn’t bother to comment on it. His choice of vocabulary wasn’t her concern. “All right, fine. Let’s get started. Have a seat on the table and let’s go through some range of motion tests. We’ll see where you are today and go from there. Have you been doing the exercises I assigned? How’s your pain?”

“Yes, ma’am. I’m doing them every morning and every night.” As usual, he shook off his bad mood now that he had her undivided attention.

With the exception of her embarrassing mini-meltdown in front of him, today was like every other day. They began each session with his threats to leave and her reassurances that he would

heal. Like many people dealing with frustrating pain, he complained just to be heard, to be *understood*, and truthfully, his rough, bedroom voice made his complaints easier to hear. Listening was part of her job, but didn't he have a girlfriend to vent to?

He settled his butt on the table and spread his legs in a comfortable position. She barely noticed how the faded denim clung to his powerful thighs. He raised his arm and explained with a mischievous smile, "I'm a little sore today. I may have overdone it last night."

"Okay, let's see how you're doing."

His tense frame relaxed visibly when she cupped his shoulder between her hands and began carefully manipulating it. She understood his grouchiness. His body was well conditioned. Each muscle was precisely developed from his neck to his calves. He was used to working out and competing fiercely. She recognized that the first day she examined him, but refused to appreciate his natural masculinity. First and foremost, he was her patient and attraction was a no-no, but more importantly, she knew better. Beautiful, powerful bodies usually went hand-in-hand with overblown egos and faithless hearts. "So, on a scale of one to ten, how's your pain?"

"Six."

"Hmm. You may be overdoing it. Don't push yourself past the pain. You don't want to set yourself back." Focused entirely on the firm, warm flesh beneath her fingers, she recited the standard warning.

He snagged her hand, trapping her palm against his chest and declared with a completely straight face, "You can never have too much sex. It's therapeutic."

God help her, she blushed like an idiot and tried to wrench her hand away. After months of his ridiculous, off-color comments, she should be used to them by now. Sometimes he was actually funny—inappropriate—but funny. She did her best not to encourage him, but he had a rough, raw charm that made him likable even when he was being obnoxious.

Drawing her around so she was standing between his thighs, he flashed a devilish grin. "You're so pretty when you blush. I bet you're stunning when you come."

She sputtered, "That's none of your business!" and tugged at her hand. He released her so abruptly she staggered backwards into an equipment cart. A handful of TENS pads fluttered to the floor.

Laughing with genuine warmth, he managed to say, "Sorry. I meant no offense. Don't be mad. I couldn't resist." He didn't look sorry at all. He seemed extraordinarily pleased to see her lose her composure.

"You need to try harder. That's crossing a line and I don't find it funny."

"Aw, come on, doc." The brash twinkle in his eyes dimmed, but his lips still curled with humor. "Let me make it up to you by buying you a drink tonight. I'll be at *La Vida*. Meet me later."

It wasn't an invitation. It was an order. She bristled at the commanding tone that rolled so effortlessly off his tongue. Was he so used to getting his way? Typical. Arrogant ass. "I don't think so."

A soft vibration in her pocket announced an incoming text message and she shivered with a sudden chill. All thoughts of Koivu vanished. Was it *him*? Did he want to see her? No. Absolutely not. She wouldn't see him. *Couldn't* see him. He would destroy her new life; shred her fragile shell of control. She was an addict and he was her drug. One little taste would kill her. One touch . . .

“Hey, do you need to sit down?” Koivu’s warm arm circled her waist, drawing her attention back to him. “You’re white as a sheet. That’s not the usual response I get when I ask a woman out.”

Sidestepping both his supportive arm and genuine concern, she answered a little too brightly, her voice brittle and sharp. “What? No, I’m fine. I have another appointment in a few minutes. I’m going to leave you with Tania for your exercises. I’ll see you Monday.”

She missed whatever he said next because she was already walking away. She had to get out of here before she embarrassed herself even more. Her phone vibrated again. Another text. She didn’t dare pull out her phone in the hallway. Too many curious eyes. God only knew what he wanted—if it was actually him. She didn’t stop until she was inside her tiny office with her back pressed against the closed door. She unlocked the phone with trembling fingers. There were four messages.

I miss you.

I need to see you.

I need to taste you.

Don’t ignore me.

Flinging the phone like it was on fire, she blinked back the first hot tears before they could fall. She couldn’t see him. God help her, she *wanted* to see him . . . touch him . . . taste him. Her nipples strained against the simple cotton bra that he would hate. He wanted her in emerald silk. He wanted her naked and spread across their bed. She could feel his hot tongue caressing her breast; his mouth drawing her nipple into its wet heat until she cried out from the pleasure. She could feel his hands holding her in the position he wanted while his cock pinned her to the bed. Her sex clenched. Her stomach cramped. Her mouth went dry.

Across the room, her phone buzzed with a new text. The soft notification light might have been a spotlight. It buzzed again. Knowing she shouldn’t, but unable to resist, she flipped it over and read the next two messages with a sinking heart.

Don’t make me beg.

I’m only here for the weekend. Meet me.

She stared at the messages for what felt like hours before finally shutting off her phone and stuffing it into her purse. Her hands shook so much she could barely work the zipper. It took two tries to pull it closed. Like an addict faced with a full syringe, she craved him with a gnawing intensity that scared the hell out of her. If she saw him, even for one night, she’d be caught up again. He’d strip away her armor and twist her into someone she didn’t want to be. And then he’d walk away without a backwards glance until he wanted her again.

La Vida was Koivu’s new favorite club. Located between a bankrupt pawn shop with rusted bars on the windows and a thriving pizza place called *Nico’s*, the basement hideaway was filled with thumping music, dim lighting, and easy women. Since they weren’t getting back to Hell any time soon, he and his boy, Derick, were keeping busy. Derick’s human wife wasn’t thrilled with his new found interest in the club scene, but she didn’t know the soul inside the hockey player’s body wasn’t the one she married.

It was Friday night and the club was jammed from wall to wall. The music was loud. The beer was cold. All around him, dancers did their thing. The sexy blonde he was dancing with had gotten pretty handsy in the last few minutes. Her flirty touches on his arms had changed to not-so-subtle tugs on his belt loops. He took the hint and brought her hungry little body against him so they could grind all up against each other. Dipping his head, he slanted his mouth over hers and maneuvered her to the nearest wall for better support for what he had in mind. Once snuggled between the wall and a towering speaker, he cupped her ass in both hands and got ready to see what she had under her skirt.

“Not yet!” She flashed an electric smile and turned her back, swiveling her ample hips so her cheeks rubbed against his crotch.

Coiling his body around hers, he lifted her silky hair and buried his face in her neck so his tongue could play. She tasted salty and smelled like sex and flowers. Moving in unison, they lost themselves to the sultry beat while their bodies got friendly.

Things were about to get *real* friendly when Derick clapped him on the shoulder, yelling over the music, “I’m out, man. Gotta go.”

He shouted back, “Happy to share, dude.” Switching his attention to the blonde, he pressed his mouth to her ear and asked, “You game for a three way?”

She stopped dancing long enough to sweep her eyes over Derick’s muscular body and shaggy hair. She licked her lips and said, “There’s a back room we can use.”

Five minutes later, the three of them found themselves in a tiny room in the back of the club. The plywood door had a flimsy lock to keep out interruptions. Filled with boxes of junk and stacks of yellowed newspapers, the room wasn’t much to look at, but they weren’t there for the decorating. A tattered, beer-stained loveseat was wedged in the middle of the mess. No way they’d fit on that. They’d have to improvise. The second they closed the door, Derick flipped the lock and pulled his shirt over his head.

“What’s your name, honey?” Derick asked, in the tone he always used with women. He had a way of talking that made them take their clothes off. It worked when he was single in Hell and was still working topside. They called him P.M.—short for pussy magnet. Of course, that stopped when he married Lissa. Now, he was just *Derick*.

The woman melted under his gaze and answered in a throaty voice, “Natalia.”

“Natalia’s a beautiful name.” Tugging her closer to the loveseat, Koivu positioned her between him and Derick and grinned down at the question in her eyes. “Your wildest dreams—right here, right now—just relax and let yourself go.”

Bold and fucking sexy as hell, Natalia dragged her gleaming black nails over the bulge in his jeans. “I like things wild. Don’t disappoint me.”

He was rock hard again in an instant. He didn’t just like sex, he craved it. It was a beast that crawled beneath his skin, prowling for escape. The background music disappeared as his mind zeroed in on the pleasure coming up. He covered her roaming hand with his, pressing it against his throbbing erection. “Let’s do this, baby.”

She was game for the fuck if her grip on his cock was any indication, but she took time to ask breathlessly, “Do you have condoms? I don’t do this without protection.”

Condoms? Did he have condoms? Did Lucifer start with an L? After unzipping his jeans, he reached into his wallet and pulled out a couple of shiny, new condoms. They were ribbed and neon yellow. Sex was meant to be fun, wasn’t it? “Will these do?”

“Ooooh, pretty!” she cooed with another naughty smile and a wink. “Yellow’s my favorite color.”

“Mine too, if it gets my dick inside of you.”

Slipping up behind her, Derick drew her shirt over her head and dropped his mouth to her neck, dragging it over her skin and leaving a trail of kisses across her collarbone. Her eyes drifted closed as she melted back against his chest.

Koivu curled his fingers around her delicate jaw and studied her expression. Was she really into it? Her eyes were glazed with desire; her mouth soft and parted in invitation. Her breath came in short pants. She was ready. Cupping a bare breast with one hand and wedging his other hand between her legs, he got to work. Her greedy pussy clutched at his two fingers so he added a third and gave them a little twist. Her throaty gasp was all the confirmation he needed. “Mmm, I think you’re ready. Feel good?”

She clung to his neck, body undulating over his fingers, moaning happily, “Oh, yeah. Feels amazing . . .”

“Hold that thought.” Koivu sat down on the loveseat and freed his cock. She dropped to her knees, but he had other ideas. “Wait a minute, baby.” He pulled his cock out of her mouth and said, “Get up here and put your pretty ass up in the air.”

Since the loveseat was small and the office crowded, it took some maneuvering and laughter, but they got her into position. She lay with her face in his lap and her legs hanging over the arm of the loveseat. Derick squatted and shoved her skirt up to her waist before dragging off a ridiculous black thong. It took him a minute to get her ass exactly where he wanted it for best access.

“Are we good now? I’ve got to work in the morning,” she teased with her tongue dancing across Koivu’s belly button. “You’re way overcomplicating this.”

“Smart ass,” Koivu teased as he aimed his cock at her pouty little mouth. She gave it a long leisurely lick and flicked it playfully until he shoved it inside. Her muttered protests tickled, but he didn’t let her go. She glared up at him, brown eyes gleaming with humor and probably a little booze, and he brushed her damp and curling bangs back with a gentle stroke. “Ah, Natalia, you look so good with my dick in your mouth.”

She bit him with a cheeky wink and burst out laughing when he yelped. “Have some respect!” she cried with her mouth full of cock and her breasts splayed across his thighs.

He adored women like her. She reminded him of female demons: playful, fun, willing to do what felt good without bringing in moral baggage. “I respect the fuck out of you right now. When you’re done here, I’m gonna spread your legs and respect your pussy until you beg for mercy.”

Natalia opened her mouth to comment again, but he was done playing games. “Focus, baby.” With one hand locked in her hair, he moved her mouth over him while Derick worked her pussy from behind.

It wasn’t the best blow job ever. She was having trouble balancing and focusing and scraped him a few times. She bit him when Derick got her off. Using her hair as a joystick, he got her full attention until she swallowed his offering. Since he was such a good friend, he got up and eased her onto her back for Derick to have his turn. She was still sighing with orgasm when Derick crawled between her legs and gave her something to scream about. Watching Derick fuck her wasn’t the most erotic thing ever, but it got him stiff again. By the time she was done praising god, and Derick had grunted his climax, Koivu was ripping open the condom wrapper with his teeth. He didn’t give her time to catch her breath. Fingering her swollen clit and paying homage to her dusky nipples, he got her juiced up until she was writhing in search of another O.

She propped herself onto her elbows and cocked her head, her hair hung like a curtain over her cheek. “You gonna fuck me with that big ass banana or what?” Her lips twitched and she cut her eyes to Derick. “No offense.”

Derick snickered and said roughly, “None taken, but we’re not done yet.”

“Greedy little thing, aren’t you?” Koivu positioned her onto her knees and sank balls deep from behind. When she let out a keening cry of real pleasure, he felt a little bit smug and shot Derick a smirk. Derick flipped him off.

Clutching her hips with both hands, he took his time, enjoying the tight, wet heat of her pussy clutching at his cock with every thrust. While he was busy fucking her, Derick sat down so she could blow him. Watching her head bob up and down, her mouth swallowing Derick’s thick dick was fucking erotic as hell, but watching his bright yellow cock disappear inside her, with her round, tight ass moving up and down? Hot as fuck!

Twenty minutes later, she rolled over and dragged her nails over Derick’s abs with a dreamy smile on her glistening lips. “Can we do that again?”

He and Derick exchanged a wicked smile before he asked, “How do you feel about anal, baby?”