

One – Jess

“Hey, baby,” the husky voice said as Jess answered her phone. “How are you doing tonight?”

Jess hurried across the path in front of a cyclist. “Better soon, I hope.”

“Mmm, I hope so, too. So, what are you wearing, gorgeous?”

“Clothing.”

“Tell me everything. In detail. Start at the bottom.”

“Boots. They’re black. Or they were when I started out. They’re gray now, from the dust on this path. Deserts are not made for black footwear. I really should have stuck to the road but—”

“By bottom, I mean *under* the clothing.” Samantha’s deep, put-upon sigh hissed across the phone as her sex-line operator voice vanished. “You really suck at this, Jess.”

“Sorry, I need proper motivation. Like a *guy* on the other end of the line.” Jess stumbled. “Damn it. I shouldn’t have bought three-inch heels. If I make it to the gun club without falling on my face, it’ll be a miracle.”

“I thought we agreed on the four-inchers?”

“Did I mention the falling on my face thing? Really not a good look for me. Blood, dirt, an extra bump on my nose. Mmm, sexy.”

“You never know. Declan might like a girl who can get down and dirty. Some guys do.”

Jess laughed. As she did, a guy walking ahead of her glanced back, did a double take and said, “Hey, Jess.”

“Who’s that?” Sami asked.

Undone

“Hey,” Jess said back. She had no idea who he was. Presumably a classmate but . . .

“Trent,” he said. “From Advanced Immunobio last term.”

“Right.”

“Still have no idea, do you?” Sami whispered on the other end of the line.

“You going somewhere?” he asked. “Let me walk you. It’s not safe out here after dark.”

It was barely dusk. And there were a half-dozen other students on the path.

“Someone *must* look good tonight,” Sami said. “Not that she needs the extra help, Miss Cute Little Blonde with double-D—”

“C,” Jess whispered.

“Only if you squeeze them in—”

Jess cleared her throat—loudly—and put the phone on mute while she thanked Trent for his concern but assured him she was fine. He left with some reluctance, and she un-muted Sami.

“Is Trent-from-Advanced-Blah-Blah hot?” Sami asked. “Or did you even notice?
Normally, a dumb question, but we are talking about you.”

“We are.”

“Which makes it all the more imperative that Declan-the-Shooting-Instructor—a.k.a. the first guy I’ve ever known you to get hot and bothered over—goes down tonight. Figuratively speaking. Or, well, no. If you could really get him to go down on a first date . . .”

“It’s not a date.”

“She says, otherwise ignoring my comment altogether.”

“I wasn’t ignoring it. If he wanted to go down? Hell, yes, and please.”

Sami sputtered with laughter. “You really are serious about getting some, aren’t you?”

“Um, yeah. If I haven’t made that clear, you haven’t been listening. I want sex. Fun, satisfying sex with a hot guy, no strings attached, because after twenty-one years of waiting

Katey Wolfe

for Mr. Right and getting Mr. Asshole Chandler, I want a fling. One really good, really hot, really satisfying fling.”

“And Declan-the-Shooting-Instructor is it, right?”

Jess deflated. “In my dreams. I’m probably not his type or—”

“Stop.”

“I just mean—”

“Stop. Failure is not an option. You’re hot. He’s hot. You’re single. He’s single. You’re horny. He’s a guy.”

Jess snorted.

“It will work,” Sami said. “Just stay positive. Tell me what you’re wearing, and this time, make it sexy.”

Jess took a deep breath outside the campus gun club. When she adjusted her skirt, her hands were trembling. She glanced at her reflection in the glass door. Was the miniskirt too much? Too short? She tugged at it, but that didn’t help.

“Does it cover your ass?” Sami had asked when Jess bought it.

“Yes, but—”

“Then it’s too long. Take it back.”

She’d laughed at that and felt a pang of loneliness, wishing Sami was still in Arizona, not two thousand miles away in Rhode Island. The first time Jess saw her freshman roommate—crashed on *Jess’s* bed, half-dressed, freshly blue hair leaving dye on her pillow, “Fuck You” tattooed on her shoulder blade—she’d thought, *This is so not going to work*. But it had. It really had.

The tattoo turned out to be marker ink, written on by someone at a party the night before. Crashing in the wrong bed was an innocent mistake. Sami wasn’t even drunk, just exhausted

Undone

after accepting a party invitation following a cross-country flight. The blue hair was all Sami, though. She was a visual arts student, an amazing artist who'd been accepted at the Rhode Island School of Design last summer. Hence the separation and the beginning of a crappy year for Jess.

Her best friend across the country.

Preparing the application for her dream master's program in Atlanta, the one that came with the CDC work-study option.

Her parents pestering her about applying for med school until she lied and said she was, just to get them to stop asking.

And then there was Chandler Walker. The perfect boyfriend who'd turned out to be a perfect asshole and, worse, an asshole Jess couldn't get rid of.

Chandler had been harassing her since their breakup two months ago—calling her, following her, hassling her friends. Having Jess call the campus cops to report him only convinced Chandler he had to work harder to get her back.

She needed a break. She needed fun. She needed release. She needed sex. And while it was, she supposed, easy enough to get on a college campus, she had her heart—okay, *other* body parts—set on one particular guy. Who was right through that door.

Another deep breath . . . and she pulled it open.

Jess found Declan in the side room, cleaning guns. He had a revolver disassembled on the table as he worked on it, standing slightly turned away from her, just enough that he hadn't noticed her there.

Jess paused in the doorway to watch him. It was a good angle. Oh, hell. With Declan there were no bad angles.

Katey Wolfe

Six feet tall, give or take an inch. Twenty-four. Chestnut brown hair that he sometimes tied back, but it wasn't quite long enough for that, so he mostly just shoved it out of the way. Strong features. Her dad would say they were too strong and list the ways he could "fix" them, how he could make Declan bland and boringly perfect and model pretty, as only Seattle's preeminent plastic surgeon could.

Jess wouldn't fix a thing. The square jaw. The Roman nose. The widow's peak hairline. And the parts she couldn't see from this angle but had memorized. Hazel eyes that could warm to green. A lone dimple on his right cheek. Two small scars, one across his chin, the other bisecting his left brow. It was a gorgeously imperfect face, exactly how a face should be.

Imperfect was definitely not the word for the rest of him. From the neck down Declan Cavanagh was as damned near perfect as a guy could be. A lean build with muscles every place a guy could have muscles. Tonight he wore his usual outfit—worn blue jeans and a plain T-shirt. The color of the T-shirt varied from white to navy to the occasional black, but it was always plain and always fit just right. As did the jeans, sliding over slim hips, and quite possibly, the only ass Jess had ever found herself staring at. That ass was the first thing she'd noticed about Declan. Her initial view of him when she'd walked into the self-defense expo after one too many "accidental" post-breakup run-ins with Chandler.

Declan had been putting out flyers on a table, bending to set them in an empty corner of the booth, and she'd walked in and . . . Well, she was pretty sure she'd stopped in her tracks to stare. Worn jeans over a perfect ass, one hand braced against the table, biceps bulging, the edge of a tattoo mostly hidden under his short sleeve, his hair hanging forward, brushed back with an impatient hand as he straightened. Then he'd turned, seen her and grinned. Not a "caught you looking" grin, but a genuine smile that lit up his eyes and flashed his dimple, and that was it. Jess fell in love. Well, lust. But it was hard-core lust.

Undone

“Hey, I’m Declan. Campus gun club.” He’d held out a flyer. “Free lesson with this coupon.”

She’d managed to take the flyer but was 99 percent sure she hadn’t actually said a word beyond a mumbled—possibly unintelligible—thanks before scampering into the expo. Later, she’d told Sami about him.

“Hey, you always wanted to learn how to shoot,” Sami had said.

“Um, no, I never—”

“Sure you did. You’ve told me that many times.”

“When?”

“Many, many times.” Sami spoke slowly, as if to a small child. “You have always wanted to learn to shoot, and now you have the chance, so you are going to redeem that coupon. Got it?”

Jess got it. Eventually. A week later, she’d shown up at the club, only to have the forty-year-old guy at the desk say sure, he’d give her a lesson, then stare at her chest the whole time she was bending over to read the liability waiver.

She’d been about to declare that she’d changed her mind when Declan had popped in, seen her and flashed that grin, saying, “Hey, you’re from the self-defense expo, right?” She’d nodded mutely, and he’d told the other guy he had an opening, so he’d take Jess. Thus began six weeks of lessons, during which she’d learned that Sami had been right—Jess had always wanted to learn to shoot, and she enjoyed it very much, very much indeed.

Jess cleared her throat. Declan raised a finger without looking up. He slid the bore brush into the barrel. Then he glanced over, and when he did, she got that grin.

“Jess.” He set the gun down. Then his smile faltered as he grabbed his phone. “Shit, did we reschedule our lesson?”

Katey Wolfe

“No, I just . . .” She shifted her weight, hoping the heels didn’t give way under her. “You said if I ever wanted extra time on the range, I should swing by and see if you were here, so I’m . . . swinging by.”

“Right.” The smile didn’t reignite. Instead he cast a surreptitious glance at his watch.

“You have something tonight.”

“No, no. Uh, yes, actually, I do.” Another watch check. “But we could probably squeeze in—”

“That’s okay.” She took a step back. “Sorry, I should have called.”

“No, I said swing by, and we do have time. I don’t need to leave for a while. Just hold on.” He punched in a text and sent it, sliding the phone back into his pocket. “There. Done. I am officially yours for the next hour.”

Don’t I wish. Jess ducked her head and hoped she didn’t blush.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“I am.” He headed for the doorway. As he did, his gaze traveled over her. “Looks like I’m not the only one going out tonight.”

Now she definitely blushed. “Just for drinks later. With friends.”

A quick frown. “Not the friends who are also pals with Walker, I hope. The ones who keep bugging you to give him another chance.”

“No, I’ve stopped hanging out with them. It was clear they weren’t giving up.”

“Good. I mean, about hanging with them. Not about . . .” He shook his head. “You know what I mean. Let’s get you shooting.” He started in the direction of the gun locker and then stopped. “Hey, you want to do something fun tonight?”

Do I ever.

“Sure.”

Undone

“How about we try a special kind of gun. My personal fave. Pull it out. See what you can do with it.”

There was so much she could say to that. So much that was certainly not what he had in mind. When she hesitated, trying to find her voice, he said, “Rifle? Distance shooting?”

“Sure.”

After ten minutes of rifle practice, Jess decided she shared Declan’s opinion. This was so much better than pistol shooting. Probably not for the same reason he liked it, though.

With the handguns, in the beginning, Declan had to get up close and personal, moving in behind her and getting her in position. Once she had the stance, he’d backed off, though he’d occasionally come in close to adjust her aim. That had been nice. Declan standing behind her, his hands on hers, his body so close she could feel the heat of it. There’d always been a gap, though, meaning all she felt was that heat. With the rifle? Oh, that was different.

“Look straight down the sight,” he whispered, his breath tickling her ear. He’d set up a table for her to lean over—*best to start prone for stability*—and he was right behind her, pushed against her ass as he leaned over her, getting her into position and holding her there and . . . yes, she had a very hard time concentrating on the shot.

Once he had her lined up, his hands slid to her hips, wrapping around them.

“This okay?” he murmured.

“Uh-huh.”

“It’ll keep you steady.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Tell me if it’s uncomfortable.”

“Uh-uh. I mean, it’s fine.”

Katey Wolfe

“Good. Just lean forward a little more. Right. Just like that.” His hands slid down as she moved, and she found herself wishing—really wishing—she’d taken Sami’s advice on the skirt, because if she had, his fingers would have reached the hem by now and . . .

She bit her lip and tried to focus.

“This okay, Jess?”

“Uh-huh.”

His lips brushed her ear. “If I do anything that’s not okay, you just say so, all right?”

“Uh-huh.”

He shifted and pressed against her again, his crotch against her ass and—

His cell rang. A ringtone from a song Jess didn’t recognize.

“Fuck,” he said. Then he paused, not making any move to answer. It rang again.

“I’ve, uh, gotta get that,” he said. “It’s about tonight.”

“Okay.”

His hands tightened on her hips. “I really should get that.”

She was pretty sure she wasn’t keeping him from answering, but he seemed to be waiting for her to do something, so she straightened. He stepped back fast, mumbling, “Sorry, just give me a sec.”

He answered, and Jess heard a woman’s voice say, “Where are you?”

Declan turned away and lowered his voice. “Didn’t you get my text? I’ll be there before eleven. Something came up at the gun club.”

“You haven’t even *left*?” The woman’s voice went shrill. “You were supposed to be here five minutes ago.”

Declan moved into the next room. Jess stood there, gripping the rifle tight before realizing she was still holding it and setting it down safely on the table.

A date. He had a date tonight.

Undone

Um, yeah. Single guy. Saturday night. What did you expect?

Okay, so he had a date. It happened, and there was nothing wrong with that. It was just lousy timing on her part.

Declan returned a minute later, pocketing his phone with one hand as he shoved back his hair with the other. His gaze moved to the rifle and stayed there, avoiding hers.

“Gotta run, huh?” She forced a smile. “No problem. I shouldn’t have dropped by without warning.”

“No, no. I told you to.”

“Well, next time I’ll call. Sorry if I made you late for your evening.”

He nodded, saying nothing.

She picked up the rifle. “I can put this away while you get ready. Your apartment is just in back, right?”

“Yeah, but I’m all set for tonight. Come on, and I’ll show you how to put this away.”

As they walked to the gun locker, he said, “So this bar you’re going to, is it the campus one?”

She nodded.

“Isn’t that where Walker showed up last time?” he said, glancing over, his expression concerned.

“It is, but only because the girls I was with told him I was there.” Especially since she wasn’t actually going to a bar. The remainder of her evening would be spent in the campus coffee shop on a hot date with her Immunochemistry textbook. Good times.

“How about I swing by after? I’ll be done before one. I could come by the bar, have a beer, make sure Walker doesn’t show up.” He unlocked the gun-room door. “If you don’t mind me hanging with you and your friends. Or is it an all-girl thing?”

Katey Wolfe

Even if it were, she'd have been more than happy to have him *swing by* and *hang out*. It was almost enough to make her set up a spur-of-the-moment pub night with friends. Except that, well, since she'd jettisoned the friends she'd met through Chandler, and with Sami across the country, there were only a couple of names left to call, and both were busy tonight.

"Girls' night out," she said, making a face, hoping it conveyed the right look of *damn, I really wish it wasn't so I could say yes*. "But I appreciate the offer. It's very sweet."

Now he was the one making a face. He stood there, gaze lowered, thumbs hooked in his belt loops as he mumbled, "Yeah, well . . ." He looked around. Then he walked to one of the lockers. "Can you do me a favor?" He took out a handgun. "Take this."

Jess backed up. "I'd rather not—"

"I know you don't feel ready to carry one. But you are, and the point of taking these lessons is to be able to carry a gun, right?"

No, actually, it wasn't. But that had been her excuse, so she couldn't very well say she had no intention of ever carrying.

"I need a permit, don't I?" she said.

"Campus is private property. I wouldn't flash it around, but you'll be fine. We'll get you a gun of your own and register it properly next week. For now, I'm worried about tonight."

"I—"

"If Walker comes after you, you just need to show it to him. Let him see you have it, and he'll know you're serious. He's escalating, and you need to shut him down. If he shows up at the pub, and you have time, text me if you'd rather handle it that way."

She agreed and let him show her the gun.