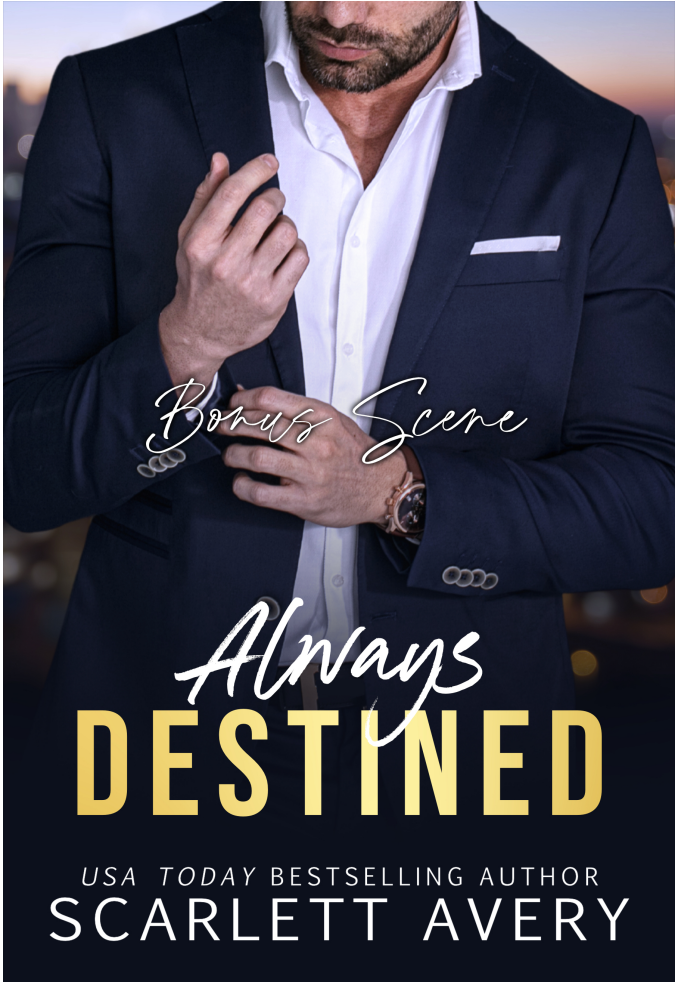




Bonus Scene

Always
DESTINED

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SCARLETT AVERY

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Scarlett Avery

Three years ago in Paris

Kyla

Why did I think I could do this?

I'm such a fool.

Arghhh.

I need perspective.

I need to talk to someone before I lose my mind.

The irony is, I'm in the same city as my best friend, but I can't talk to her. Not about this. She's the last person I can open up to. As much as I hate keeping secrets from Harlow, some things are better unsaid between best friends. Talking to Hayden and Stella could turn out to be a liability later on. What if they let it slip in a conversation when the four of us are together? Harlow would freak out.

No talking to your best friend and it's best to keep the cousins out.

Crap.

I can think of only one person who can help me in this situation.

Rizzie.

Patrizia Pennino and I are both from LA and we both ended up at the same film school in New York. Our dads know each other well. We're not best friends, but since we both grew up in influential filmmaking families, we bonded. Living in NYC would've been unbearable without her.

Patrizia is back home during summer break. She's working on a couple projects for her dad, but there's no such thing as a 9-to-5 in the movie business.

After confirming the time in LA, I text her.

Kyla: Hey! Are you around?

Rizzie: I am. I was on a set until seven this morning. Thank God I'm done for the day. Just got out of a hot yoga class.

Kyla: Are you driving?

Rizzie: No. I'm getting out of my car and walking into my parents' house. What time is it in Paris?

Kyla: It's ten at night.

I cut to the chase.

Kyla: I need to talk.

Rizzie: What's up?

Kyla: Man trouble.

Rizzie: I thought you were in Paris to hang out with your best friend. When did

you have time to find yourself a Frenchman?

Kyla: I am here to see Harlow. He isn't French. He's all American.

Rizzie: Does he live in Paris? Is this going to turn into a long-distance relationship?

Kyla: It's not what you think. You've walked in my shoes before. Well, I guess you're still wearing said shoes.

Rizzie: I see. You're right. You do have man trouble.

Kyla: You're the only one who can understand.

Rizzie: Give me fifteen minutes or so. I'm going to jump into the shower and then I'm all yours.

Kyla: Okay, hurry. I'm freaking out.

I pace my parents' Trocadéro luxury apartment, biting at my cuticles. The view of the illuminated Eiffel Tower from these floor-to-ceiling windows is enough to

calm me down. Not today. I doubt drinking would help. I'm already in too deep for booze.

I'm just about to call Patrizia again when my phone rings.

Thank God.

I accept the video call.

"I'm a breath away from losing it," I say in lieu of a greeting.

"Breathe," Rizzie says.

I inhale a deep breath. "I'm calmer." *Sort of.*

"Okay, are we talking about *who* I think we're talking about?"

I nod. "Yes."

"Are you two involved in some hot and heavy sexting? Is that it?"

"Loki is here in Paris, Rizzie."

Her eyes grow wide. "No shit."

"Yeah."

"Did you know he was going to be in Paris at the same time as you?"

I shake my head. "We both came to Paris to surprise Harlow."

"Talk about serendipity."

"You mean talk about bad luck."

"So, something happened between the two of you?"

"No, but there's this weird-amazing-all-consuming-oh-my-God-I'm-going-to-melt energy between the two of us, and I don't know what to do with myself."

“So things are a little weird when the three of you are hanging out together?”

“Harlow has been way too busy to hang out with us.”

“Okay.”

“I brought this on myself,” I say with a loud exhale.

“You lost me.”

“Silly me, I thought I could be around Loki without my heart tripping, but that was foolish... especially when I spend the entire day with him.”

“What?”

“We’re chained at the hip and it’s my own doing.”

“Kyla, you aren’t making any sense,” Patrizia says.

“I offered myself as Loki’s tour guide while he’s in Paris.”

“Why would he need a tour guide?”

“He doesn’t speak a word of French, and as I said, Harlow has been MIA.”

“Got it.”

“I conned myself into believing I was being helpful. Harlow is caught up with an upcoming high-profile fashion show she’s part of. She barely has time to sleep, let alone hangout with her best friend. Ditto for her brother. This little tour guide gig was supposed to be fun and light-hearted...” I let out a long sigh.

“Things got complicated.”

“Things got *very* complicated.”

“I’ve warned you, Kyla. A sibling’s best friend can be a dangerous thing,” she says.

“Yeah.”

“I’ve been pretty transparent about what’s transpired between Gabriel and I.”

“I know. I figured after living in New York for a year and not seeing him, I’d be cured of the Loki-spell I’ve been under for so long. I was dead wrong. He’s been in Paris for nine days, and in that time, I’ve allowed myself to develop an even bigger crush for the guy. Stupid, right?”

“Some guys have a hold on you, and no matter what you do—or who you’re with. It’s always about them. You were just being helpful. You didn’t know it was going to turn around and bite you in the ass.”

“So much for being helpful.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. The only reason I’m not entangled with Gabe is because he’s in Australia working for one of his father’s divisions. I get a pass this summer... but I still have a thing for my big brother’s best friend.”

Patrizia fell hard for her brother Leo’s best friend Gabriel McKinley. He’s seven years older than she is. Matt and Gabe go way back. Gabe and Patrizia have had a hush-hush relationship for two years.

Since Leo has been bouncing from Australia to New Zealand for the past couple of years working as an assistant director for an epic movie trilogy, he still doesn’t know.

Gabe has flown in many times to New York to be with her. We've all gone out together. They're perfect together, but Gabe's legacy keeps them apart.

Gabe's father expects him to sit at the helm of the family empire. From what Patrizia has shared, Gabe is overwhelmed by the responsibilities and expectations. She knows in her heart he wants more, but he's torn between duty and her.

"Has he been in touch?"

She nods. "He has."

"And?"

"We talked and video chatted, but it's too hard. After Australia, he's off to Argentina and South Africa after that. The family business comes first. Always. Having a long-distance relationship with someone on the other side of the planet is only going to end up with me having a broken heart. Again. If Gabe couldn't make up his mind about us when we were both living in the same country, what chance does he have now when he's God knows how many miles away?" Sadness veils her eyes.

One of the reasons she asked to be transferred to New York to finish her degree is because of Gabe. The other reason is her family's name. Patrizia Pennino's father is the famed and acclaimed film director, producer, screenwriter, and film composer Nicolas Pennino. He's been awarded an impressive number of Academy Awards.

After a successful run as a child actor and a short-lived stint in modeling, Patrizia decided to follow in her father's footsteps. She's also one of the heirs to

the Schiller family fortune on her mom's side. Hannah Schiller comes from old money. A lot of old money. I may be one of Hollywood's princesses, but Patrizia is pretty close to being a queen.

"I'm sorry." I don't know what else to say.

"Don't be. It's always been on-again off-again with Gabe. I'm used to it. I just need to convince my heart to move on." She pauses. "Can I be honest?"

"Sure."

"This infatuation with Loki—"

"I know, I know." I interrupt her. "I've had an unreasonable crush on this guy for as long as I can remember and now I'm fucked."

"That's not what I was going to say."

"Oh, okay. Sorry."

"You're convinced he sees you as his baby sister's best friend and nothing more."

"Yup."

"You're no longer a kid. You're all grown up. You two haven't seen each other for a while. You say there's this weird-amazing-all-consuming energy between you—"

"You forgot the oh-my-God-I'm-going-to-melt part."

We both laugh.

"I stand corrected. In any case, energy runs both ways."

I frown. "Where are you going with this?"

“Sometimes the guy needs a nudge. Gabe had been checking me out for a while, but he wasn’t sure it was mutual until I nudged him.”

I laugh. “We’re talking about Lochlan Berkshire, a guy who can have any woman in the world just by snapping his fingers. He doesn’t need a nudge, Rizzie.”

“You seem so certain.”

“That’s because I am.”

“You’re a hundred percent certain he has no interest in you?”

“He doesn’t see me.”

“You’d stake your trust fund on that conviction?”

“Yes.” I pause. “Well....” I’m so confused, I don’t even know what to think anymore.

Rizzie tilts her head from left to right like a pendulum.

“What?”

“There’s an easy way for you to find out for sure that doesn’t involve nudging him,” she says.

“I’ll bite.” I narrow my eyes. “How?”

“Maybe a guy like Loki needs more than a hint. Put your big girl panties on and tell him how you feel point blank. You never know.”

“And risk embarrassing myself?” Her suggestion is outrageous. “Worse, I’d risk making things awkward—not only between the two of us, but also between Harlow and I.” *I don’t think so.*

“So, you’re going to keep all these feelings bottled up?”

“If he was interested, he would’ve made a move by now,” I say. “We’re talking about a notorious bad boy. I doubt he gets tongue-tied around women he wants.”

“You’re—”

“Loki is leaving tomorrow.” I put an end to Patrizia’s fairytale story. I have to. It’s self-preservation. “After that, I’m in Paris for another few weeks and then I fly to Italy to spend some time with my grandparents. After that, we’re back in New York for school. I’ll be lucky if I see him at functions when I visit LA. Sure, his father and mine hang out together, but it doesn’t mean I’ll see much of him.”

The lines between Loki being Harlow’s brother and my unreasonable attraction have been blurred for a long time. Still, I have to remember it’s unlikely anything would happen between us.

“You’re willing to live tormented like this?” Patrizia arches a brow.

“I guess so,” I say, my tone deadpan.

This conversation didn’t turn out quite as I expected.

“It’s a shame.” Her words are heavy with meaning.

My heart breaks a little.

We just stare at each other for a few beats.

“Tell him, Kyla.”

“You hit a brick wall with Gabe.”

“Perhaps, but I was able to know what it was like to be with a man I wanted so much.” Her answer comes quick. “I didn’t rob myself of that chance. Sure, it wasn’t a fairytale ending, but for a while he was all mine.”

His last day in Paris

Lochlan

“Great choice on the restaurant,” I say.

“Pho Bản Cúon is so unassuming from the outside, but this place packs a lot in terms of flavors,” she says. “Year after year, it tops the list of best restaurants in Paris. That’s why the line-ups are so crazy.”

We’ve been walking around Paris all day. This has been our itinerary since Kyla offered herself as my guide. I suck at French and thankfully, she’s fluent.

“I was getting impatient, but since you assured me it was worth the wait, I listened,” I say. “I’m glad I did.”

“This is the first pit stop for Grandma Oralie and Nono Bruno when they’re in Paris. She loves this restaurant.”

“I can see why,” I say. “I’m sure there are Vietnamese restaurants in Los Angeles, but I never even thought of checking one out.”

“Same here,” Kyla says. “I get my fill when I come to Paris. I’d hate to be disappointed. Not to mention, just like it is for my grandparents, it’s become a tradition.”

“This might become a tradition for me as well.”

She leans into the table. “Do you want to know another one of my traditions?”

“Hit me.”

“The Notre Dame Cathedral. It’s a must. I have to stop by every time I’m in Paris.”

“I’m going to have to fire you as my tour guide.”

“Oh no, I thought you were happy with my services.”

“I was until now. I don’t recall the Notre Dame Cathedral being on our itinerary. I’m flying back to LA tomorrow, so in many ways I feel cheated.”

“Dear client, I saved the best for last. Not to mention this is a perfect time of the day for a visit because we get to see the sunset.”

Kyla wanted me to experience this incredible Vietnamese restaurant, but she warned evenings are busy. Since I didn’t want to wait two hours to eat, we ended up having dinner at seven-thirty, right when the restaurant opens for dinner. An hour later, we’re full. Judging from the line-up outside, I’d say it was a great call on her part.

“Sold!”

She laughs. “So, you’re retaining me as your guide?”

I’d like to retain you as a whole lot more. “For now.”

“You’re a hardball, Mr. Client— I’m sorry.” She shakes her head with her eyes closed. “I didn’t mean it like that. I wasn’t talking—or thinking—about your balls— Crap. That came out the wrong way again.” She looks petrified.

I chuckle. “I don’t know how I feel about your statement.”

“Ignore me. My mouth is running away from me.”

I’ve come to like her mouth. A lot. Much more than I should. In fact, I’ve come to like every bit of her.

This trip has allowed me to get to know Kyla a lot more. She’s transformed into someone amazing. I must’ve been sleeping at the wheel. I missed when she went from being my baby sister’s best friend—and a kid—to the stunning woman I’ve been hanging out with for the past ten days.

When I’m around her, I don’t know what to do with myself. I have no business looking at her the way I do and my cock should know better than to get excited when she gets too close.

I wasn’t ready for the charming, witty, and drop-dead gorgeous Kyla.

“It’s a ten-minute walk from here to the Notre Dame Cathedral,” she says. “A trip to Paris isn’t complete until you’ve saluted the *grande dame*.”

“Lead the way, *madame*.”

“Ooohhh, someone speaks French.”

“I wouldn’t go that far. I heard you mention it a few times, so I picked it up.”

“You’re quick learner.”

“Thanks for the compliment.” I smile. “Come on, the *grande dame* awaits.”

“Oh, now you’re just showing off.”

We laugh.

We leave the restaurant and walk up the street we came from.

“Let’s cross,” Kyla says.

“I’m right behind— Careful!” I grab her by the waist, pulling her out of harm’s way.

A guy on a bike guns down the sidewalk like he fucking owns it.

“*Enfoiré! Espèce d’abruti! Y’a pas idée d’être sur le trottoir comme ça!*” Kyla shouts that at the rider’s retreating back with some pretty explicit hand gestures.

Translation: *Asshole. You moron. Sidewalks are for pedestrians.*

She’s feisty. “You’re okay?”

“Stupid cyclist. He almost ran me over.”

“I wasn’t going to let that happen,” I say.

“Thanks. I didn’t see him coming.”

As the idiot rides off, flipping us the bird, I read the name on his backpack. “Foodie Eats. Figures. He shouldn’t be on the sidewalk like that.”

She rolls her eyes. “They don’t care. They’re as reckless in New York.”

“Nothing hurts?” I scan her body.

She shakes her head. “No, I’m okay.”

“Why don’t I hold onto you to make sure we get you to the cathedral in one piece?”

“You don’t have to do that,” she says with a touch of shyness.

“I know, but I want to.”

We stare at each other for a few short beats.

There’s something happening between us.

“Lochlan Berkshire. The ever-consummate gentleman,” she says, breaking the moment.

“My mama raised me right.” I wink.

“Yes, she did.”

“Are we still heading that way?” I point in front of us.

“We are.”

I could use the excuse of crowded streets filled with Parisians leaving work to justify why I’m holding her so tight, but that would be a waste of time. I have her nestled against my body because—goddammit—I’ve wanted this for the last ten days.

She guides me along the way, stealing glances up at me. I wink every time she does that, and she laughs. I also take full advantage of the opportunity by rubbing my hand up and down her arm—to make her feel safe, of course.

Soon, we approach the bridge that crosses the Seine. We stand smack in the middle of the Pont Notre Dame amidst a mob of eager tourists.

“There she is.” Kyla points at the historical Notre Dame Cathedral.

“I really love this cathedral,” I say.

“Wait. What? You made it sound like you’d never seen it before.”

“I’ve been to Paris a few times with my parents when I was young and I’ve been here three times since Harlow moved here. Of course, I’ve visited the Notre Dame Cathedral before.”

“So you tricked me?”

I turn to face her. “I wanted to extend this... a little longer.”

“You expected me to spend more time with you?”

“It’s my last day here... every minute counts,” I say, my voice deeper than I expected.

She clears her throat. “Ten days. Where did the time fly?”

“But we had fun?” I reach out and brush away a strand of hair from her beautiful face.

She’s startled by my boldness. Her huge eyes are searching mine.

“You didn’t enjoy yourself, Kyla? Am I a lousy client?”

“We had fun. And for the record, you’re my number one client.”

“I love knowing that.”

I grab her hands into mine and interlace our fingers together. Her gaze drops to our joined hands, but she doesn’t pull away.

I squeeze a little harder. “I wish I could stay longer, but I have to fly back to LA.” This trip was way too short. “It’s a shame.”

“It is,” she says in a low voice.

“You know what I discovered while I was here in Paris?”

“No.”

“Kyla O’Keeffe is all grown up and she’s stunning.”

She lets out a nervous laugh.

"I'm sure there's a lucky bastard waiting for you in New York," I say.

"Nah."

"What do you mean, nah? There's more than one guy?"

She laughs harder. "You're being silly, Loki. I'm single."

"I refuse to believe that."

So far, I've veered the conversation away from anything personal, but hell, I'm flying out tomorrow.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you."

"So, there's no one?"

There it is again.

Something unspoken passes between us.

"No." That comes out in a whisper.

I nod, weighing my words. "There's so much I didn't know about you, Kyla. So much I still don't know... So much I *want* to know."

"Loki..."

My eyes drop to her tempting lips.

I'm dying to claim those damn sexy lips.

"Poussez-vous! Faites la place. Il vous appartient pas le pont." A young guy shoves into my back.

Translation: "*Get out of the way. It's not like you own the bridge.*"

I don't know what he said, but I don't like his tone. "Watch it, asshole!"

"*Espèce de sale Americain.*" He flips me the bird and keeps walking with his three friends in tow.

Translation: “*Stupid American.*”

I take a step forward, ready to teach him a lesson, but Kyla places a hand on my arm. “He isn’t worth it.”

She’s right.

She sighs. “I guess you still have to pack.”

Thanks, fucking moron, for killing the moment.

“I do.” I pause. “Thanks for being my private tour guide.”

“It was my pleasure. And for the record... it’s too bad Harlow was so busy she didn’t have much time to spend with you.”

Given the energy between us, the words seemed like a cop out. Still, they put everything into perspective.

She’s Harlow’s best friend.

“It is.” I nod. “I’ll catch up with my little sister on text or video chat.”

I offer my own cop out line.

* * *

**Thank you so much for reading
Loki and Kyla’s story.**



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