

## Chapter One

*Lucy*

I believe in love. Wholeheartedly.

Seriously, don't shake your head like that. I do.

I can picture those of you who already know me snickering. Well, don't.

There is no need for that, and frankly, it's kinda rude, don't you think?

Here, I'll say it again: I genuinely believe in love. I know all about its magic. Good and bad. I know the world seems bigger when you're drunk on love. I know it mends broken hearts, makes you deliriously happy, excited, hopeful...terrified, sick...a whole list of things that make this complicated world we are living in a better place.

For example, my best friend Olive. She has loved her husband ever since she was a wee bitty kid. She even asked Jason to marry her when she was six years old. She was six, people—six! Isn't that just the cutest thing you've ever heard? Then when they found each other years later, his movie star self swept her off her feet. Love works for her, big time, and it looks good on her too. She deserves all the love in the world.

Me? Love hangs a bit loose on me. Essentially, it's not quite the best fit.

So...what I'm saying is, love can do anything and everything...as long as you don't have a curse hanging over your head like I do. Oh, and you have to be willing to let love into your life, open that heavy door that leads the poor guy into the maze that is your heart, so to speak.

That's the tricky part, isn't it? You have to let love in. You have to open yourself up, share your least lovable parts, the deepest, darkest corners of your soul. That's the only way to experience real love. They feed us that shit as early as possible, or so I've heard. Our surroundings are an ongoing commercial for love. Share yourself with someone, be true, be honest, and if they love you for who you are then you are golden.

Enjoy the confetti shower that just blasted in your face.

You found real love. Good for you.

Sucks for the rest of us.

Now...do *I* let love in? Nope. I try my hardest not to, thank you very much. Been there, done that. If you are asking me what my problem is if I do indeed believe in

love...well, if you are so curious about it, my problem is that my dear old friend 'love' doesn't love me back. Never did. Probably never will.

I'd say it's quite rude of her, but...I've made my peace with it—at least I thought I had until I went and fell for Jameson.

Enter the hot bad boy covered in ink. College love.

If you haven't guessed it yet, I have all kinds of daddy and mommy issues. As if all of those weren't enough to fuck up my life, I have grandma issues to top it all off.

Blah blah blah...

Now you're starting to think I'm boring, and we can't have that.

Let's talk about one-night stands instead. Those are fun, right? You're skirting around love, smiling at each other, feeling all dizzy and ditzy with the excitement that you might score a good one, enjoy the feeling of having someone else's skin on yours, his hot breath, the heat, that blasted bliss you get to experience for a few seconds when he manages to hit that sweet spot—if he hits that sweet spot. Those are all awesome things, I agree. Hell, I encourage you to experience all those feelings, especially if he has some good inches on him.

Don't be a bitch; be a calm, happy waterfall.

Roar at life. In life.

Don't be closed off; be as free as a raindrop.

Most important of all: *live*.

My greatest advice to you all is, whatever you do, don't go back to the spectacular one-night stand you had just to satisfy your traitorous body's needs if you're trying to stay away from love, have your fun, live a little, love someone for a single night and then move on. Because if you keep going back to the same guy, oh, I don't know...about a hundred times...eventually what *will* happen is that you'll start to have feelings for said guy.

Look at that—I have a heart after all. Didn't expect that, did you? So you start to fall in love just like I did. Slowly. At first, you might feel a trickle of something you can't name because of how well he wields that huge cock of his (by the way, that's called an orgasm, not love). He'll zap you with all kinds of feelings when he is using it on you. And yes, he'll be that good; heartbreakers tend to be good in the sack.

More for you to cry over when they're done with you. Goody, right?

But then you'll foolishly start to put more meaning behind the Big O you experience every time he is near you with that monster cock. And then his smile will start muddling the waters, or the way he touches your face, or the way he looks at you when you take off your shirt in front of him—all smoldering and shit. Then those wicked words of his will make their way into your heart *and* brain. And maybe, just *maybe*, you'll start to feel safe because he seems to genuinely care for you. Then somehow, before you have the chance to back up...before you even realize what your heart is doing behind your back...

Boom!

You're in love.

Congrats. And, well, fuck you, dear heart!

Now you can thoroughly enjoy the misery that will surely follow suit.

Of course, I can't speak for everyone, but at least that's what happened between me and Jameson, my one and only college love, so go and blame him for the love vomit.

It had been exactly six days and twenty-one hours since he'd left Los Angeles and moved to Pittsburgh to start his stupid new job at his stupid new firm, leaving me behind, a little heartbroken, and essentially homeless.

If you're wondering how I managed to fall in love with this Jameson who broke my heart...let me rewind a bit. I met Jameson in a study group for our economics class. Contrary to popular belief, I wouldn't jump into bed with someone I'd just met—and I didn't. At first, I just enjoyed the view and chose to somewhat salivate over him...because that's always fun, isn't it? Oh, the anticipation, the coy looks, all those knowing smirks. Then a few weeks later we just tumbled into a bed that was nearby. Just like that, I swear.

Completely accidental, I tell you.

I recall seeing some ink on his chest and forearms, and then he turned around and I saw those tight buns. Suddenly we were in a bed and he was giving me and my lovely vagina the time of our life. I've already mentioned how good those monster cocks feel, haven't I? I wouldn't have minded if he were a tad bit thicker, but, oh well...I guess you can't have it all in life.

So, I went back for more. I remember telling myself, *Just one more time, Lucy, and that's it*. I sincerely thought it would be a crime not to experience that level of hotness again, and I'm no criminal. What could *possibly* go wrong, y'know...

Then somehow we ended up having those one-night stands a few times a week. So, technically he wasn't a one-night stand, but I'd still like to call him just that. He also proved to be a tough cookie when he started to fall asleep in my bed before my brain would start working enough to remember why I needed to kick him out of it.

Funnily enough, that's how I used to end up going for sleepy time on my best friend Olive's boobies. Sleeping and cuddling with your one-night stand is a big no no. The best part; Olive's boobs were ~~The.Best.Freaking.Pillows.In.The.World!~~ Trust me on that. So soft, yet so firm. It was basically magic, but that's a story for another time.

Long story short, I'd started to fall for Jameson. I thought maybe it was time for me to give good ol' love a spin and see if I was still cursed or not. True, I wasn't necessarily expecting a happily ever after at my first try because real life is rarely all unicorns flying around and farting rainbows in the clouds, but hell, I hadn't been expecting a sudden cut and run either. I was just dipping my toes into the water, not trying to electrocute myself.

So, yup, still cursed.

No love for this gal. Hurray...I guess.

"Hello? Lucy? Ah, there you are. Is there a reason you're talking to yourself?" Olive asked as she appeared at the end of the hall where I was dumping a trash bag filled with Jameson's clothes. I straightened up and let out a deep breath as I took in her appearance. The yoga pants and baggy white shirt she was wearing were practically her uniform when she didn't want to think about what to wear. And baggy or not her boobs still managed to look good. Her strawberry blonde hair was in a messy bun on top of her head and looked like it had seen much cleaner days. My guess was she had come straight from her writing cave.

"No reason at all. Just entertaining myself," I answered, clearing the invisible sweat off my forehead with the back of my hand. "What are you doing here this early? I thought you were coming around later. And is there a reason why you look like you haven't showered in a week?"

She was in the process of looking through the trash bags I had lined up against the wall that contained the clothes Jameson had chosen to leave behind. At my question, Olive's head snapped up and her lips spread into a wide grin.

"Not a week, but maybe two days? I only have a few chapters to write then it's officially The End for the story." She shrugged and went back to her rummaging, looking for God knew what. "Who has time to shower anyway?"

It wasn't a question, but I answered her anyway—under my breath of course. “People who like to be clean instead of smelly like you maybe?”

“And to answer your ungrateful question,” she continued. “I came early because I'm *the* best friend anyone could have. Why do we have to go through his clothes? Why didn't the bastard take them with him?”

“*We* aren't going through his clothes, *you* are. I've already gone through them. I'm just gonna leave them outside. Jameson texted to say his friend was coming over to take care of them. I don't care either way.”

“Or we could burn them to make a statement.” She kicked one of the bags toward the door and reached out to lift up my small, bright yellow weekend bag.

“And what statement would that be exactly?”

“I don't know...to show him that we are a united front against him? And it would be therapeutic for you, too.”

“Right. How about we stick to moving me out of here as quickly as possible instead.”

She shrugged and grabbed the bag I was holding out to her. “By the way, I'm pretty sure Jason would've said something if I smelled. And look who's talking—you look like death warmed up. Your beautiful blue eyes are practically dead. Even your dark hair somehow looks...darker.”

I clasped my hands over my heart and batted my lashes. “Aww, thanks, my little green Olive. You look lovely too, with your greasy hair and sleepy eyes. Combined, it all does wonders for your complexion.”

A small smile playing on her lips, she shook her head and carried the bags downstairs to her car. I opened the bathroom door and checked the medicine cabinet to make sure I hadn't left anything behind. Then just to be safe, I checked the bedroom again. When I was sure everything was packed and ready to go, I carried my last suitcase into the living room where Olive was waiting for me with a full bottle of tequila.

“I brought this,” she said, using her hands to present the bottle to me, as if that baby needed any extra presenting.

Taking a few steps to make it to her side, I snatched the bottle from her hands, ignored her gasp, and plopped my ass down on the shit-colored sofa, as I liked to describe it.

While I was busy trying to screw the top off, Olive sighed and dropped down next to me. I took a quick gulp and screwed up my face when the precious liquid burned my throat then handed the bottle back to her waiting hands.

She'd been my friend for three and a half years, and I doubted anyone else knew me better than her. She was a writer—a crazy successful author who'd made the bestseller lists with her very first novel. My favorite part was that she was the lucky, lucky wife of the hottest actor in Hollywood, who had also been her childhood crush. You'd think that shit would only happen in books, but nope, she did it. She scored the hottest guy. I liked to think I'd given her a small nudge in the right direction, encouraging her to go after what she wanted, but her chemistry with the guy was off the charts, so I knew with or without me, they still would've ended up together. And, well, despite being a hotshot celebrity, Jason Thorn was one of the good ones. He was completely in love with Olive—otherwise I would have totally organized a sneak attack on him to get his paws off my best friend.

“So...” Olive started after she took her own gulp of tequila and coughed a few times. “What was the subject of the conversation you were having with yourself when I walked in?”

I took another sip, a big one. That one definitely went down easier. “Actually, I was reminiscing about your pretty boobs and thinking how come you're so selfish about sharing those puppies.”

She quirked her eyebrow at me and pulled her legs up to get comfortable. “Who said I'm selfish? I share very nicely with my husband.”

I gave her a genuine smile. “Are you ready to share exactly *how*? As in with details? Like what's his favorite position? Doggie? Does he take care of your boobs? Is he nice to them?” I knew she wouldn't share—I had tried before; I didn't understand why, and it never stopped me from trying to get answers. Plus, it was fun watching her squirm. That's what friends got for hoarding important details like that.

“Sorry, no bueno.”

Doing my best to give her my version of the evil eye, I offered her some alcohol. She passed, which was good for two reasons. One, more for me—yay—and two, well, she got out of hand when she got drunk.

“Not to sound like an ungrateful friend, but I thought you said you'd come around two PM, not ten AM. And you came bearing gifts too. Are you being nice to me 'cause I'm a victim?”

She looked clueless as she glanced at me. “A victim? A victim of what?”

“A victim of love, of course,” I returned, acting outraged. “I got chewed up and spit out—and not in a sexy way.”

She rolled her eyes and gave her attention to the phone buzzing in her handbag. After checking the screen, she sighed. “Sorry, my poor victim of love, I need to take this. I’m scheduling meetings with potential agents.”

“You go ahead and do that, and I’ll keep doing this tequila.”

As soon as she left the room, I closed my eyes and let my head rest on the back of the sofa.

So Jameson was gone. So I wasn’t in a relationship anymore. Whatever, right? I’d never planned to get into one in the first place. I should’ve been happy. I should’ve felt better knowing I’d been right about the existence of a curse on our family.

Did I feel anything like happiness at that moment?

Not even close. But I knew I would live, so there was no point in acting like my life was over. Thanks to my family, I’d seen worse. Jameson was a saint compared to them.

When Olive came back, I tried to avert my gaze so she wouldn’t focus on my watering eyes.

Oh, shush! I hadn’t been silently crying or anything, I was just allergic to the damn apartment.

“How about we get out of here?” Olive asked softly.

Apparently I hadn’t been quick enough to look away. I wiped away a lone tear and took my last sip from the bottle. As much as I wanted to get sloppy drunk with my best friend and possibly start a big fire and make voodoo dolls with big junks, we couldn’t. Adulthood sucks big balls.

“Yeah. We should do that,” I agreed.

Olive reached for the bottle in my hand, and I reluctantly gave it up, after a short struggle, of course.

“I’ll hold onto this, and we’ll continue later.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.” She narrowed her eyes on me. “Hell, you know what? I’ll even let you cuddle me.”

Perking up, I wiggled my brows at her. “And while I’m cuddling you, will you be cuddling your pretty husband?” I sat up straighter. “Olive Thorn, are you granting me a cuddling threesome because I’m a victim of love? If so, I’ll totally take that.”

“No, you little perv. Jason has a shoot tonight. I’ll cuddle you until you go to sleep. Then I’m sneaking out of your room to sleep with my pretty husband.”

“Ah, now you are just twisting the knife that’s already been lodged into my heart.”

“Good. I’m still angry at you, you know.”

I made a miserable face. “Me? What did I do? I’m the victim here.”

“And I’m your friend. You waited six days to tell me what that asshole did. You robbed me of my friendship rights.”

“Oh, come on. You can’t get angry at me for that. I just didn’t want you to be miserable with me. I gave myself one week to cry my eyes and heart out, and I did just that. It didn’t even take a week. Now it’s done. Over. Tonight, we’ll celebrate my singleness. I saved you the best part: the celebrations. We’ll have a Tinder party and swipe right on every one. As far as I’m concerned, I’m a kickass friend.”

She offered me her hand and pulled me up. “Nope. You robbed me. It’s as simple as that. I didn’t get to cry with you *or* curse at Jameson for leaving you. Now how am I gonna make the transition from sadness to anger and then straight to celebration? I’m still pissed. And I’m sad, too. Because my emotions are all over the place. I talked Jason’s ear off the entire night after your phone call. He agrees with me completely. You definitely violated my rights.”

I tilted my head and patted her arm. “Aww, you love me. I’d hug you, little Olive, but you smell even worse up close.”

She gave me a hard push. Laughing, I fell back on the couch. “No need to be an angry waterfall, Olive. Be a lake. Like me. Look how calm I am. Fine,” I added when she kept standing over me with a raised eyebrow. “If it’ll make you feel any better, I’ll probably cry some more tonight, so you’ll still have your shot at being miserable with me.”

“That’s more like it. Thank you. Do try to cry at the beginning of the festivities, okay?”

Shaking my head, I got up on my own as we started a logical discussion of how long we should cry before starting the celebrations.

After Olive helped me carry the last suitcase to her car, I left her with the bags and went upstairs to do a last check, which was how I found myself alone in the living room, just gazing around. Remembering.

When Jameson had had his motorcycle accident a few months before, Olive and I had rushed to his side at the hospital. That had been the first time I'd accepted that I loved him.

When it became obvious that he was gonna have trouble looking after himself with all those stupid broken bones, I'd asked him if he wanted me to move in with him so I could help him out. When he smiled that sexy, confident smile—the one that encouraged your brain to do some stupid shit—and said he thought I'd never ask, I was relieved for two reasons.

One, I wouldn't have to beat him to a pulp until he realized he needed me while he was already in a hospital bed. Because, let's face it, that wouldn't look good for me, and, yeah, I liked his face a little too much to mess it up. Two, I'd get to move out of an apartment I was sharing with two very stupid people—stupid ex-friends to be exact, both to Olive and me.

Because of my quick move, I hadn't brought a ton of stuff with me. I didn't own many things anyway, and at the age of twenty-two bordering on twenty-three, being the owner of just a few suitcases worth of stuff was a bit depressing.

When I thought about it, I realized I was now the proud owner of new memories. Memories that wouldn't go away in a puff. Memories I wished weren't mine, because none of them, none of the I love yous I'd gotten out of Jameson would keep me warm at night.

No. These memories would play with my mind and remind me what I would never have in my life.

Because, yes, you guessed it...the freaking curse.

“Man, those stairs are kicking my butt. Are we done here?” Olive asked as she came in to stand next to me.

“Looks like it,” I replied, wiping off my clammy hands on my leggings. “You ready to get out of here?”

“Shouldn't I be the one to ask you that?”

“I don't know. Should you?”

She eyed me for a few seconds, probably trying to figure out if I was messing with her.

“Nah,” she said eventually, linking her arm through mine. “No need to ask; you are ready to close this door. This is already ancient history, right?”

I took a deep breath and laid my head on Olive’s shoulder. “I wish I were as sure of that as you are, my little green Olive.”

“You mean to tell me Jameson isn’t ancient history?” Her voice softened. “It’s okay if he isn’t, Lucy. You know that, right?”

“Oh, the heartbreaking, panty-stealing bastard is most definitely ancient history, but I’m not sure our memories and all the I love yous he whispered to me within these walls are. And isn’t that how it goes? You get over the guy way before you get over the memories.”

She rested her head on top of mine and gently asked, “Are you sure you’re okay, Lucy? I love that you’re coming to live with us—”

“Temporarily,” I spoke over her, but she pretty much ignored me.

“—because I’d hate it if you left the city, but why didn’t you? I mean, Jameson was the first guy in four years who managed to put a dent in those walls you’ve built around your heart. I know you loved him. I saw it.”

“I did love him,” I agreed after a moment of silence. I had asked myself the same question multiple times after he’d left. “But I told you already, he never asked me to go with him, Olive. He never sat me down and explained his plans, or asked about mine for that matter. He just informed me that he had a job offer and that he had to leave. Oh, and he added that he would miss me like crazy. That’s it. That’s all he gave me. I’m not about to go after someone who doesn’t want me with him.”

“Would you have gone with him? If he had asked, I mean?”

“We’ll never know that now, will we? Hell, it was all so civil. I didn’t even get the chance to throw a vase at his head or anything. Never had the chance to have back-scratching breakup sex. I feel robbed by that. He just informed me of his plans and told me the lease for this place would expire at the end of this month. It was all so...I don’t even know what it was. The only thing I do know is that he never asked me to go with him, or if I would consider going with him. I didn’t factor into his plans, which is why I say fuck him. I wasn’t about to beg the guy just because he gave good orgasms, that’s for sure.” I straightened from Olive’s shoulder and turned my back to the living room. “Yeah, fuck him and the horse he rode in on. I’ll stay with you guys until I find a job, then I’ll be out of your hair.”

“Are you going to call your grandma—”

“That is the *last* person I’m planning on calling. I broke up with a guy; it happens every day. I’d much rather call Jameson than call Catherine. I’m not suicidal.”

After giving me a hard look, she opened her mouth to say something, but I grabbed her arm and ushered her to the door.

“It’s over and done with, Olive. Obviously Jameson wasn’t the right one for me. Not everyone gets their happily ever after, and that’s totally okay. I’m totally okay with that fact. Now can we go and continue this unnecessary conversation at your place? Preferably when I have some more alcohol in my bloodstream?”

She huffed, but exited the apartment without me having to push her all the way to the car. I grabbed the key on my way out and gave the apartment a last look.

“Just so you know,” I said to Olive, who was standing right behind me, probably so she could catch me if I decided to throw myself on the ground and bawl my eyes out. I guess she really was looking forward to being miserable with me. “I’m never saying I love you to any other guy again. Mark my words. The moment you spill the words, they screw you over. So I’m done with that. I don’t even care if he is a God in bed, or if he has a foot-long in his pants. No more I love yous.”

She made a strangled sound, so I looked over my shoulder. “A foot-long? Ouch, Lucy.”

I gave her a devious smile. “Not ouch, that’s actually a *come to mama* moment, but even the foot-long guy won’t get an I love you from me. His penis might, but not him. If I ever make the mistake of doing that, give me a good pinch or dump a bucket of cold water over my head, anything to snap me out of it.”

I locked the door, faced Olive, and waited for an answer from her.

“Fine.” She sighed, pulling me away from the door. “I’ll hurt you.”

“Great. Now that that’s out of the way, did you think about what I said way back?”

“What?”

“About you and your husband adopting me. Now...I’ve spent some serious time thinking it over, and I believe it can be beneficial for all parties involved.”

“Oh? Please, do tell about these benefits.”

“First benefit: so you know how much I drool when I see your husband shirtless on the big screen? I’ll stop ogling your husband when he is shirtless on the big screen.”

“That’s a good start, I guess. Tell me more.”

“Second benefit: you’ll have to give me cuddle time more frequently, because, well, I’ll be your daughter. You’ll have to show me love with cuddles.”

“Interesting. Does anyone else besides you benefit from this adoption? Because you just said—”

“Well, I haven’t thought that far ahead yet. Geez, Olive. Victim of love here, remember?”

“Right...”