

Chapter 1

The red light went on and Lexi felt the familiar squeeze in her stomach. It was a burning pain that signified the start of another panic attack. She clenched her teeth and forced herself to focus on her producer, Raj. His fingers flashed the countdown. 3...2...1.

"And we're back at the top of the hour, the glory of rush hour in full swing. If you've landed on KPOX, you either really like my show, or you're too busy flipping your fellow motorists off to care what station you're on. Either way, welcome to the party." Lexi flipped through the script even though she knew the words by heart. It was something she always did. She flipped the pages to hide the nervousness. Nothing else about her was nervous. Nothing about her low alto voice, with just a hint of New England drawl would betray the constant turmoil she felt.

She felt it whenever she was on the air.

To hide the non stop butterflies, she adopted a cocky, slightly bored demeanor. For all intents and purposes, it had made her a star. Lexi considered the irony. The thing she did to hide the fact that she was terrified of public speaking was the thing that made her famous, which forced her to do more public speaking. Her standard script over, Lexi shoved it away to begin her least favorite part of the day. Call ins.

"Lexi," Raj's voice came over the headset, "I have Harriet calling in from Coral Gables."

"Hello?" The screech of feedback attacked Lexi's ears and she flinched.

"Harriet? Do me a favor and move the radio away from your phone." Lexi adjusted her headset as Harriet did what she asked. "Ok, now ask. You might have to yell. For some reason, I've suddenly gone deaf."

"Am I on the radio?"

Lexi didn't bother to hold in her sigh. "Yes."

"I can't hear myself."

"We're on a five second delay."

"Oh, there I am, but that's from before. I think your radio show is broken. It's echoing."

"Lady, you're killing me." Lexi resisted the urge to bang her head on the desk. "Ask your question."

"Oh," a pause. "I was having a problem with my husband..."

"This isn't a relationship show. "

"I know, but my question is about politics. See, he thinks I should vote like he does because he's head of the household. But last time around, I wanted to vote for Obama, even though he's a Muslim and..."

"Stop, I have an answer to your question already." Lexi's face was dead serious. "Neither of you should ever vote again. You're dumbing down the pool." Lexi turned to Raj. "Next caller."

Raj smirked as he put the next caller through. Luckily for Lexi, the next caller actually had an intelligent question. Lexi got to engage in a debate where he called her a lesbian hippy liberal and she called him a mouth breathing, brain damaged redneck.

Through it all, the conflict made her heart pound, but her voice never wavered. She laughed mockingly, made snide comments and eventually made the caller look like an idiot.

It was what made Lexi Logan famous. The sharp tongue, the quips and comebacks. She was an outspoken, frequently controversial liberal political commenter with a huge following. She was a commercial success, with her face plastered on busses and billboards. She was a party girl who wound up in more than one paparazzi photo.

One year before, she'd been no one.

Lexi placed a hand on her stomach as her show ended and she did her usual sign off. The stress melted as soon as the red light went off. Summer hiatus. The three month break she'd been waiting for. Raj jumped out of his chair excitedly.

"You were in rare form today."

Lexi grabbed the water bottle he held. "I'm in a shitty mood." She took a sip. "Why do you keep putting idiots through? I told you, there's no sport in it. It's like hunting on a closed range."

"I thought you could use a break. You look tired."

Lexi sighed. "I'm hung-over. Want to go get a recovery drink?"

"You're not going to Leo's closing party?" Raj was referring to the party held every year for the shows that were lucky enough to be in syndication. As Lexi's show, Lessons from Lexi, was syndicated on several different stations, she was at the top of the list. Hiatus. It was like

summer vacation for adults. So every year, as the radio shows went into hiatus, the station manager had a party on the last night of live programming. Everyone was expected to attend.

Lexi never did. "No. Why would I?"

"It might be nice to make an appearance."

"Yeah, I don't want to set a precedent for being nice." Lexi yanked on his arm. "Come on, skip school with me."

"Lexi, five minutes," Raj pleaded. "I need to go. You can get away with not showing up. I can't."

"You know that's not true. You're my producer. You make the show. You get to ride the diva train with me."

"Lexi! Ron!" A voice boomed out from behind them.

"It's Raj sir." Raj responded to the station manager, Leo Everward, as the portly, middle aged man waddled up to them.

Everward wasn't alone. He was with a man in a suit. To Lexi, he was nothing more than a blurry form. Everward ignored Raj's name correction and stood directly in front of Lexi. "Lexi, I'm glad you're still here. I was worried I wouldn't catch you at the party later."

"I can guarantee that you wouldn't have caught me there later."

"I wanted to introduce you to the new owner of the station."

Lexi looked up. A generically handsome blonde man was watching her with interest, but she didn't have the time nor the energy to flirt. "Lexi," she murmured, without offering a hand to shake. She met Leo's eyes. "Was that all?"

"I figured you might like to meet him, and he wanted to meet you. He has a few ideas for your show."

"No."

"Why JT was just stating..." Leo turned to her in surprise. "Excuse me?"

"I don't care about his input for my show. If that's going to be a problem, fire me." Lexi turned to leave. "Now if you'll excuse me, I would really like to get my vacation bender started." Lexi didn't wait for an answer. She stalked away, her stilettos clacking on the floor.

"You know you're going to get yourself in trouble." Raj gasped as he stumbled into step with her.

Lexi gave a humorless smile but didn't answer. The truth was, she didn't care. She had nothing to lose. When Lexi had gotten into radio, her goal had been behind the scenes work. She loved the script writing and the prepping for the show. What she hated was the yelling at people...and dealing with conflict. Then, one year before, after the worst day of her life, she'd been shoved into the spotlight and for reasons that completely escaped her, people loved her. She'd blasted to the top of the charts. She was famous.

She hated every second of it.

"Well, she was pleasant." JT watched the woman walk down the hallway. She was a looker. Long jet black hair fell down her back, stick straight, the color of ink. She was tall and leggy, though a little thin for his tastes. It was her eyes that caught him though. Dramatic bottle green. They'd been so bright he thought she was wearing contacts.

"Sorry about that." Leo turned away with a forced smile. "She starts hiatus tonight, so she's probably trying to check a flight. Regardless of what she thinks, I think your idea of cross marketing her with your brand is perfect."

"Yeah, I'm thinking she's not going for it," JT drawled out lazily. She was even better in person and he knew he'd been right. If they were going to get a younger following for their hotel line, they were going to need to find the perfect spokesperson. The perfect spokesperson was apparently a bad tempered radio DJ with a drinking problem. JT held in a sigh and tuned back into whatever Leo was droning on about.

"We had to argue with her about the billboards, too. But did you see that face? It was worth the extra padding in the contract."

JT smirked. She probably used it to pay FCC fines. Lexi racked up her share. She wasn't in the same league as Howard Stern, but there had been a few times where her temper got the better of her and the five second delay hadn't caught all the profanities. As far as JT was concerned, Lexi Logan would be better off if someone would take the bull by the horns and wash her mouth out with soap.

"Of course, she won't be back for three"

"No," JT interrupted. "If we're going to have any benefit from the partnership, this has to be done while her star is on the rise. Radio is dying a slow death. We need to get her involved in

something else." He crossed his arms over his chest. "I want a meeting with her and her representative within the next two weeks."

They moved on to the party and he walked in with Lexi Logan all but forgotten. She would fall in line. People always fell in line for JT Hussner.

Lexi picked the darkest corner of the bar and Raj, plans to show at the hiatus party abandoned, slid into the opposite side of the booth.

"You didn't even listen to what they had to say."

Lexi sighed and rubbed her eyes, her contacts starting to bother her. "It doesn't matter what they had to say. Anything anyone does is just going to make the damn show bigger and I really can't handle that."

Raj nodded in silent acknowledgement. He was the only person on earth who knew of her performance anxiety.

"Anyway, I don't want to talk about the show." Lexi let a smile cross her lips. "We're on vacation." The smile got bigger as the waitress came for the drink order. A few drinks in, Lexi started rubbing her eyes again.

"Why don't you just take them out?"

Lexi nodded. If she wanted to avoid the bloodshot eyes of an alcoholic, she needed to take out her contacts. She left Raj at their table and went to remove the contact lenses before they became permanently fused to her eyes.

She plucked out the green tinted lenses in front of the bathroom mirror and appraised herself silently. She hated her eyes. As JT had suspected, they weren't really green. In fact, they weren't even the same color. Lexi had been born with heterochromia, which while noticeable, wasn't a serious condition. In fact, her vision was twenty/twenty. Instead of having two hazel eyes, one was pure hazel, the other was half blue. It was an immediately noticeable attribute and Lexi had been covering it up with disposable contacts since she was a teenager. She tossed her latest two and decided to stick to dark bars for the rest of the evening.

Raj laughed when she got back. "It always throws me when I see the two different eyes."

"It did to the kids in school too. What was it they used to call me?" Lexi tilted her head.
"Oh yeah, mutt."

Raj gave her an absent smile as he sipped a beer. "Yeah, our class was full of assholes, wasn't it?"

"Where do you think I learned to be such a bitch?"

Lexi and Raj met in high school. Lexi was a drama department trouble maker who spent a lot of time in the principles' office. She wasn't really a bad kid, just a class clown. Raj had been the overachiever who couldn't satisfy his parents. Both class misfits, they'd been drawn together and had been best friends since they were seventeen.

Now, Lexi was a famous shock jock and Raj was her faithful, straight-man producer. Raj liked to call himself the gay-straight-man producer. Raj was satisfied with his circumstances, while Lexi was a little less accepting. Neither of them had spoken to their families in years. They had each other.

Raj looked down at his cell phone. "Andrew Flaxman is texting me. He said he tried to reach you four times."

Lexi smirked. "Screw him. I'm on vacation."

Raj read his screen. "He says you're not technically on vacation until midnight."

Lexi sighed as her cell phone beeped again. She tugged it out of her pocket. "What?" she barked into the phone.

"Is that any way to treat the man who made you a millionaire?"

"My parents made me. You just take 10% of it."

"Now Lexi," her agent began.

"Don't 'now Lexi' me. The last time you did that, I wound up on a billboard. Do you have any idea how annoying it is to see my face plastered up on the side of the road every time I drive to work? It's fucking creepy." Lexi shuddered. "And Raj is on a metro bus with a swastika spray painted on his forehead!"

"That was a little disturbing," Raj agreed.

"No more billboards," her agent promised. "Lexi, how do you feel about the internet?"

"Like porn?"

Raj picked up a pretzel. "Andrew wants you to do porn?"

"Not porn," Andrew sighed. "Facebook, Twitter, Podcasts, all those things?"

"I already have those. Raj did them. I mainly just play that game where you buy chickens."

"Farmville," Raj provided helpfully.

"Yes, but we want to create a social media brand. Make you the Perez Hilton of politics, so to speak."

"That sounds terrible."

"What sounds terrible?" Raj asked and she put Andrew on hold so she could tell him about it. "That would probably be a very good idea."

"Exactly my problem with it." Lexi sighed and got back on the phone. "I'm not doing it."

"We have a meeting tomorrow to discuss it," Andrew said sternly into the phone. "Lexi, you're contracted. You have to be there."

"So if I'm not, they'll cancel my show?" Lexi breathed into the phone. For the first time, the tension started to lesson in the pit of her stomach.

"It's a possibility, Lexi." Andrew clearly felt he had gained the upper hand. "JT wants to do this while you're still popular, still in the public eye."

"So if I wasn't popular anymore, wasn't 'in the public eye', he wouldn't want me to do it?" An idea started to take form in Lexi's mind. An escape clause. She promised Andrew that she would be at the meeting with bells on and promptly hung up the phone.

"I could get my show canceled." Lexi breathed out a sigh.

"Can I ask you a question?" Raj asked suddenly. "Why is it ok to let your show fail, but it's not ok for you to just quit?"

"It's just different. If the show fails because I'm being pressured to go too commercial, it seems ok. It doesn't feel right to just walk away from it, though. That's different."

"But why?"

"Just because," Lexi answered stubbornly. "Let's just say, after everything that happened, my heart isn't in it anymore, but I don't want to let it go. If it gets taken, fine by me."

Raj didn't respond. The fact that Lexi was talking about the past at all was shocking. He pasted on a smile and changed the subject. "What do you want to do with all this time off?"

"Disappear," Lexi mumbled as she brought her beer to her lips for a sip.