

The Book Store

by earth_fae

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Secrets of a Labyrinth

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Much like most of my stories, this was inspired by a dream I had. I hope you enjoy it! Reviews are welcome. ^ _ ^

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"*Finally*," I whispered out loud as I watched the last person of the incredibly noisy crowd leave the building. I heard the old woman's shrieking laugh fade as the glass-paned doors closed behind her. I welcomed the silence like a warm blanket on a cold night. I let out a sigh of relief and pushed myself out of the chair I was sitting in.

Just as I did everyday, I came to this book store to find peace and quiet, a time to think freely and read without distraction. But today, I only found noise and destruction. I couldn't even hear myself think let alone read. There must have been some kind of romance novel convention because just about every woman in town from the ages of twenty five to about seventy had crammed themselves into the little independent book shop.

The store wasn't too small, but it wasn't very big either. The main floor held the books, and there was a small loft in the back that served as the shop's café.

The main floor was my favorite, of course, with its towering shelves of endless books forming a makeshift labyrinth. And what would a labyrinth have been without a secret? If anyone knew the book store like I did, then he or she would know where to find the hidden circle of comfortable chairs. There were four of them, all circled around a small wooden table, in the back corner of the shop. I had found it during my first few days in the store. I went there everyday since. And only only other person ever found it...

Though the lower floor was easily the greatest place in the store, the café on the loft had an amazing quality to it. They made the best cappuccino on the planet up there. And the café itself was a cozy place to sit in, too. Each table was draped in a white doily, and candles had been placed as center pieces. The décor was kept to soft, muted colors of browns and blues, giving a calming effect. It was peaceful.

But it still did not compare to the tranquility of my secret spot. Because it was surrounded by rows of sound-muffling books, even the crowd that came in today would not be heard there.

Today, when I had stepped into said crowd, I was immediately pushed into my friend, Clare. She worked at the shop, and she had looked just as pissed as I was.

"They are all getting kicked out in a minute," she had told me, shouting over the crowd. "It shouldn't take long, if you want to wait."

With my need to read overpowering everything else in me, I decided to wait.

I had watched as Clare began shoving her way through the crowd, shouting at everyone to leave. I remember laughing at their bewildered expressions.

They had begun making their way out of the store, and yet I somehow had been shoved back and up the stairs to the café. However, I had taken the advantage and bought the mentioned cappuccino. By the time the last woman left, I had finished my cup.

Now I was making my way down the stairs to the Fiction section to find a new book.

When I found the aisle I was looking for, I took my time to find something to read. I skimmed the titles, searching for anything that caught my eye. After a few minutes, I settled on P.S. I Love You, remembering my friend recommending it.

I turned around and took the familiar route to my hiding place. As I got closer to the chairs I heard the unmistakable sound of pages being turned.

Someone was reading in the spot... And I knew who.

Remember when I mentioned only one more person knowing the secret of the book shop? Well, his name is Xavier Hale.

I should have known he would be there. He came to this book store as much as I did, but generally not at the same time (schedules and all that).

It's not that I had a problem with him there...it was quite the opposite, actually. Everyday I silently wished he would be sitting there in his usual spot opposite mine...

I was falling for him. Hard. But there was no way I could tell if he liked me that way back without having a seriously awkward conversation.

I felt like a teenager again, getting all flustered and overexcited when I thought about him. But I couldn't help it. Xavier was everything in a man I wanted. He was mysterious, intelligent, clever, creative... not to mention beautiful.

I stopped walking just before the hidden turn into the circle to take time to calm my pulse.

I didn't even see him yet, and I could picture him just as clearly as if I did. He sat in the chair farthest from where I stood, his dark brown hair framing the smooth panes of his face, a few stray hairs falling gently over his moss-green eyes as he read...

I took a deep breath and walked into the circle, clutching my book to my chest.

As expected, Xavier flicked a glance up at me from his book, then back down again just as quickly.

"Sam." He acknowledged my presence with his smooth, velvet voice.

"Xavier," I said right back in an indifferent tone as I took my seat opposite him.

This was the routine. We would take our own seats and read. We rarely talked. If we did, it was only to greet each other, say goodbye, or occasionally we would share book-related topics. I lived for those conversations. It was nice to have someone who could keep up in discussions I had.

Even though we hadn't really talked about personal things, it was as if we knew each other like friends. Just by the books we chose and discussed, we both found out so much about each other. So, I did not feel surprised when he recommended books on music or vampires, and neither did he when I recommend books on history or art to him.

I was just about to open my new book when I heard Xavier's voice from in front of me.

"Are you going to keep your reactions to yourself, or will I have to use earplugs today?" he said sarcastically, an annoyed look on his face.

Oh. Did I mention he was the most infuriating man I had ever met? Everyday he managed to find some little thing about me to reprimand me with. As much as I liked him, he still seemed to piss me off every time he insulted me. Today, he chose to poke fun at my uncontrollable ability to react out loud when reading an exciting book.

But, you know what? Even as he teased me, even though his face showed irritation, there was always that trace of humor deep in his eyes that confirmed that he considered me not so much as an irritant, but a friend.

It still pissed me off, though.

"I'll try my best, *Xavier*, but I'm not making any promises," I retorted icily and brought my attention back to my book.

Looking through my eyelashes, I watched as a smirk play across his face. My stomach flipped.

Did he just smile? I thought to myself. He normally just went back to reading after insulting me.

I shook my head and began my third attempt at reading my book. That was interrupted also.

"Hey, Sam?" Xavier's voice startled me.

I looked up with slight shock. "Yes?"

He laughed at my expression. *He laughed*. I'd never heard him laugh before. It had a musical quality to it somehow. It sent butterflies to my stomach and took my breath away.

"Yes, I know I basically tell you to shut up everyday, but I'm going to break my own rules here." He smiled. *Dear Lord*, that smile... I lost my train of thought.

Thankfully, he used the silence I left. "I know you love to sing, but I don't think I've ever heard you."

It took me a moment to digest this.

"Y-you want me to sing?" I was still in shock, but I managed to say something audible.

His smile grew as he nodded.

I felt a blush creep up my neck as I looked away from his curious gaze. I mumbled something unintelligible about not being good, but I knew I was just trying to be modest. I had been taking voice lessons since I was thirteen, and I'd won a couple competitions, but I didn't like to brag. I *could* sing, but I was a bit shy... especially in front of Xavier.

"Um, let me find a song..." I mumbled to him as I racked my brain for a song I was good at.

Think, Sam! Think! I mentally screamed at myself.

After a moment, I found a perfect song, one of my favorites: "In His Eyes" from the musical *Jekyll & Hyde*.

I looked back to Xavier, who was staring at me intently with his gorgeous green eyes. I felt myself blush even more.

"Okay..." I said as I straightened my posture. I took a good breath and began to sing.

As always, I let the song take me over. I felt every word and sang with as much emotion as I could. I let my voice weave easily through the notes, hitting the higher ones perfectly and holding out the suspended notes without cracking. And soon, I forgot Xavier's presence.

I reached the climactic ending of the song and held the high ending note clearly, letting it reverberate from my whole being.

When I stopped singing, I found myself on the edge of my chair, breathing heavily. I had never sung that song so intensely... Then I remembered Xavier.

I turned my gaze back to his seat, but was surprised to see it empty. I hadn't been looking at him while I was singing, so I didn't notice him get up and move to the seat on my right. I suppressed a gasp as I looked into his eyes.

If I had thought his eyes were intense before, they were nothing compared to what they were then and there.

He stared at me like he was seeing an entirely new person. He stared at me with... admiration, with amazement, with *passion*.

It sent my heart into a frenzy of beats and caused my breath to hitch and become shallow.

Then it hit me.

There was a reason I got into the song so deeply. And I think I knew it, too, when I was singing, but I wasn't paying attention to it.

It was *his* eyes I was singing about. It was *him* that I was thinking about the whole time. And he knew it.

We both just sat there staring at each other. I saw that his breathing was as uneven as mine.

I didn't know what my own eyes gave away as I made this realization, but something seemed to change in him. Something changed in me, too.

What happened next triggered a series of events.

There was a sudden spark of energy between us. It wasn't visible, but I could tell he felt it just as strongly as I did. We both gasped and stood at the same time in surprise.

After a split second, he closed the distance between us in a single step, wrapping one arm around my waist and bringing his other hand to the back of my neck. He brought his face down to mine, claiming my lips with his own. I lifted my own hands to his neck, threading my fingers of one hand through his hair, and gripped his shoulder with the other, pulling myself to him.

Each kiss slid into the next as we held on to each other. It felt good. It felt *right*.

But, too soon, we broke apart, both of us gasping for air.

"Wow," I breathed.

"You don't know how long I've wanted to do that," he admitted just above a whisper. His voice was low and rough.

"I think I do," I said as I brought my lips back to his.