# The Girl Worth Fighting For

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# Dedication

Love is a peculiar thing.

It can carry us to the highest highs,

Show us the brightest lights,

Make us feel wanted and good about ourselves.

But it can also do the opposite.

When people we love hurt us,

We are dragged down to the lowest lows,

See the darkest darkness,

Feel unwanted and undeserving.

This book is dedicated to all of you who have felt unloved and undeserving of affection.

Be strong and believe in yourself.

Be strong and believe that you are worth it.

Because you are.

You are worth fighting for.

Bruises fade.

A cut can be damaged.

A broken bone healed.

But when you know someone you love

Doesn’t care…

That is a wound you cannot recover from.

Or can you?

# Chapter 1

## Ten Years Ago

## The Night That Changed Everything

All I could hear was the roar in the arena, people screaming and shouting, chanting my father’s name. I watched on the screen as he walked to the ring and was a little relieved that I wasn’t sitting in the crowd. Even from back here the noise was overwhelming, the anticipation so intense it was almost scary. I was sitting in front of the TV in the small room across the hall from the dressing rooms, away and out of sight of the actual goings-on, tucked away safely with my nanny, Mona, watching over me. I had begged and begged my parents to let me be here, so I could be there for Dad, but the only concession my mother was willing to make was letting me watch the fight on the screen in the catacombs of the huge Las Vegas arena.

My stomach flip-flopped as I watched my dad step through the ropes and enter the ring to defend his Light Heavyweight title. I watched in happy anticipation as he took his robe off and handed it to his trainer, then kept watching and waiting for him to do what he always did: lift his glove-clad right hand first to his chest then to his lips to blow me a kiss as he stared straight into the camera. It was our ritual. It was his way of telling me that he got this and I didn’t have to be worried. Because I always was and he knew it. I was scared for him to get hit too many times, terrified that he would get seriously hurt. I was a daddy’s girl. I loved my dad more than anything in the world and couldn’t stand seeing him get hit. Which made his being a pro boxer hard since he got punched pretty much every day. To fight my fears and worry, my dad had taken me to the gym almost every day since I was six, watching for the first few months, then learning and training myself. I could count myself lucky to be trained by association by one of the best teams out there and to have a world champion father as my dad. I was only fourteen years old now, but I probably knew way more about boxing than most adults in this arena. And practicing the sport myself helped a lot. Knowing all about it, knowing about Dad’s strengths and his defense tactics did help alleviate my fears, though it didn’t mean I stopped worrying completely.

Now this was usually where Mona would turn off the TV and turn on a movie in the hopes of distracting me. Which never worked, of course. It only made me more nervous. Or so I’d thought. The nervous energy swirling inside me now made my heart beat in my throat and my hands sweaty. I fidgeted on the couch beside Mona, willing the fight to finally start so it would be over sooner.

“It’s gonna be okay, Rainey. He’s got this. He always does,” Mona reassured me.

“I know,” I whispered. “It’s just…that guy looks so mean and big.” And he did. I knew he couldn’t be heavier than my dad since they were fighting in the same class, but he looked huge. And the expression on his face couldn’t be described as anything but hostile, which escalated my nervousness even further.

He looked like he was out for blood.

Finally, the bell rang and the fight began.

They started off slow during the first round, both testing each other, trying to work around each other’s defense. I shouted, “Yes!” and, “Get him, Dad!” whenever he landed a hit, and flinched every time a jab got through his defense and landed in his face or ribs. My mom was right; this was so very different from anything I had seen during any of the training sessions, even the ones during the past few months when his training went up a notch and he started fighting his partners almost for real in the practice ring. In the fifth round, blood started to flow on both their faces. I hid behind my hands when my dad’s lip split open, then jumped up cheering and shouting when he countered with a quick left hook to his opponent’s temple in revenge, drawing blood as well.

It was looking good. Even though they were only in the fifth round, I knew my dad was winning. He won at least three of those rounds and was leading this one as well. Though they were evenly matched in their technique and power, my dad was faster. His fighter name was *Rapid* for a reason. He was going to win this fight. I was sure of it. And so was he, I could tell. A huge grin spread across my face then turned into a flinch when out of nowhere, a vicious right hook caught him at the side of the head, right on the temple, and he stumbled backwards. He shook his head and kept moving, but I could see something wasn’t right. Before he could shake it off, he caught another hook in the exact same spot.

“Put your fists up!” I shouted. “Up, Dad! Put them up!” But it was no use. I watched helplessly as he got pummelled over and over again. I checked the clock counting backwards at the bottom of the screen: twenty seconds until the bell. “Come on, Dad! Come on!” I was crying now as I kneeled in front of the TV. “No, no, no, no, no,” I whispered.

Then with one last hit it was over.

My heart stopped as I watched him go down and he landed face first on the canvas, his body bouncing until he lay there unmoving, his eyes closed, blood streaming down his face.

“No,” I whimpered, my heart breaking at seeing my dad like that, beaten and defeated, hurt. Then Mona snatched me up in her arms and buried my face against her chest. “Dad,” I cried.

That night was the worst night of my life.

It was the night everything changed.

# Chapter Two

## Rainey

“Oh my god! Look at him!”

I rolled my eyes at hearing the girls swooning and giggling yet again. I was on my way to Lizzy’s office and passed the common room, where a group of girls was sitting on the couch, staring at the object of their fascination: Logan Danvers, our newest, high-profile volunteer.

If I looked at it objectively, I could see where they were coming from. Logan was hot. No doubt about it. He was six feet (at least that was my guess) of pure muscle, with dark blond hair and blazing, blue eyes. The jeans and shirts he wore always fit him perfectly, too perfectly. And his smile. Jeez, if I allowed myself to go there, that smile could be my undoing: it was perfectly straight, showing off his equally perfect white teeth; it was warm and looked sincere. And those dimples. Jesus, I didn’t know that dimples could be sexy on a man. I had always thought they were too boyish to be attractive, but on Logan’s handsomely chiselled face they were sexy.

But he and I could never happen. I had a rule I lived by, a rule I wouldn’t break for anyone. I knew men like him, arrogant and self-righteous men who fucked everything up if things didn’t go their way—or even when they did. The risk was just too high. I had been subjected to that once already in my life, had been helpless and too scared to do anything about it, then disappointed and angry and so many other things I don’t need or want to revisit. Ever. I had sworn to myself to never end up in that position again. So there was no way Logan and I would ever get involved, no matter how hard he tried.

And he had tried.

Oh boy, had he ever.

Every day he showed up at the shelter and tried to charm me into going out with him or talking to him, but I brushed him off. Every. Single. Time. In the beginning, I had politely declined, but as he kept at me, I had become ruder and ruder.

Now, I was almost hostile.

I wasn’t a rude person in general. I was actually nice and understanding, compassionate and caring. That was one of the reasons why I wanted to work with underprivileged children and had ended up studying Social Services. I had been hired by this shelter in the bad part of Boston right after I graduated from college two years ago, and loved it. I loved to be able to make a difference in the kids’ lives. No, it wasn’t all roses and rainbows. Far from it. But if I could make one kid feel safe even for a few hours a day, that was all I wanted. So no, I wasn’t a rude person. But Logan pushed my buttons the wrong way, and I couldn’t help but lash out at him whenever he tried to chat me up.

You’d think he would have got the hint by now, but he was the most persistent and frustrating male I had ever turned down. Usually, a few snide remarks or the silent treatment after the initial letdown worked wonders, but not with Logan. He seemed to find my behavior amusing and only came after me harder, as if I were some kind of challenge, which in return fueled my anger more.

I was no one’s challenge.

I walked down the hallway to Lizzy’s office without looking at Logan, even though I could feel his eyes on me, knocked on her door, then opened it when I heard her say, “Come in.”

Lizzy was a beauty in the true sense of the word. Her green eyes sparkled at me with annoyance when I closed the door behind me and sat down in front of her desk in the free chair beside the object of her annoyance: her husband Cole. Cole and Lizzy got married in July, just a few months ago. Without asking what was going on, I already knew why Lizzy was annoyed. She was five months pregnant and her protective and overbearing husband was driving her up the wall. It was a daily occurrence. Cole would come in at some point during the day to check on his wife and baby, make sure she had eaten, even bring some kind of healthy food or a smoothie. In the beginning, Lizzy had been happy and delighted with her husband, but it didn’t take long for that happiness to turn into frustration. I didn’t blame her. Cole was a great man, perfect for Lizzy. He loved her with everything he was and would do anything in his power to make her happy. Anyone could see that by the way he looked at her and by the way he treated her every day. Every minute of the day.

But he could also be an idiot.

Lizzy was an independent woman, a spitfire. She and I had that in common, which is probably why we got along so well. We understood each other and didn’t take offense. Cole knew this about her. They had grown up together, and I’d heard enough stories about his frustrations with her stubbornness and need for independence. That hadn’t changed just because they were married. It was hilarious to watch on most occasions, but I could tell by the look on her face that Lizzy was on the verge of exploding.

“Liz.” Cole’s voice was reprimanding. Lizzy’s eyes snapped from me to her husband. Oh dear. Now he had done it.

“Let it go, Cole.” That was a warning. Probably not the first one she had given him, judging by her seething tone.

“I’m not gonna let this go. You need to—”

“I don’t need to do shit, Cole. I swear to God, if you don’t let this go right now, I will move out until this baby is born.” Yowza. That was a low blow, but I could tell she was serious.

“In fact,” her eyes came back to me, “Rainey, you live all alone in that cute house of yours. Mind some company for the next four months?” My eyes bulged. *Why is she pulling me into this?* Before I could react though, Cole’s eyes narrowed on his wife as he ground out, “You and my baby aren’t going anywhere. You belong with me. In our house. End of story.”

They were locked in a glaring contest. “Back off. I mean it.”

I considered my chances of sneaking out without being noticed when Cole broke the stare down and sighed, disgruntled. “All right, I’ll back off.” Then he got up and went around the desk. He cupped Lizzy’s face tenderly, as if they hadn’t just been in a massive argument, and kissed her deeply. I averted my eyes and smiled to myself. Those two were completely crazy.

“I love you,” I heard Cole whisper softly. “No matter what. Never forget that.”

“I love you too. And I won’t,” Lizzy murmured back.

When I looked up again, I saw Cole’s head bent over Lizzy’s stomach. “And I love you, baby girl. Always and forever.” Then he placed a kiss right on her protruding cute little baby bump. My heart melted at the same time it cracked. Memories flashed through my mind of my father saying those exact words to me in a soft, loving, and adoring voice. By the time I could shake it off, Cole had left the room and Lizzy’s eyes were on me.

“Are you okay?” she asked me, concern in her voice.

I plastered a smile on my face. “Of course I am.”

Lizzy’s eyes narrowed on me. “You know, you’re a shitty liar, Rainey. Spill.”

I sighed.

This opening up to your girlfriends thing was still new for me. After that fateful night ten years ago and with what happened after, I had started to close myself off. I didn’t make friends easily, didn’t trust people enough to share my feelings. But Lizzy and I had become good friends, especially in the past year or so. She was like me: a no-nonsense girl who didn’t have patience for fake people, who said what she thought and did what she thought was right. It was refreshing. There weren’t many women like that out there. The only two friends I’d had for so long were my mother and Ben, our neighbour, who had become somewhat of a father figure to me, at least as much as I let him. But they were the only two people I had trusted for so long that it was hard for me to open up to anyone else. Lizzy understood, but she also knew me well enough to know that I needed a little push every now and then, that I needed someone to push me just right to share something. Anything. Push, but not push too hard. Lizzy was a master at it, but then again, I already trusted her. We had shared our stories with each other, making her the only person aside from Ben who knew who I was.

“Cole is going to be a great father.”

Her eyes softened on me. She understood. I knew she would.

“Yeah,” she whispered. Then her voice turned annoyed again when she said, “But I swear to God, I’m gonna cut his balls off while he’s sleeping if he keeps this up. I’m not gonna go through this again.”

I laughed. “So you’re having a girl?”

Lizzy grinned. “Yes, we’re having a girl. And let me tell you, ever since we found out during our ultrasound last week, Cole has been even more impossible. Now he has two girls to watch over. He’s turned into the specimen of male protectiveness. He’s like a caveman. It’s driving me absolutely nuts!”

I laughed some more. “He’ll get over it. And you’re always welcome at my house if you need a break. Though you’ll probably have to sedate him if you expect to actually stay the night. You know he’ll just drag you back to his bed.”

Lizzy sighed, resigned. “I know. Fucking caveman.” Now we both laughed. “So what brings you to my office?”

“I was wondering if you were free for lunch?” I asked, trying to be nonchalant.

Lizzy smirked at me. “Ah, let me guess. Logan is here.” She threw me a knowing smile, but I kept my face impassive. “So I’m gonna be your excuse for fleeing the shelter so you can escape Logan’s advances again?”

I kept my eyes on her but didn’t react to her taunting. I knew there was no need to pretend she didn’t know what was going on. We had talked about it more than once. Still, I couldn’t help myself.

“You know he’s not gonna give up.”

I shrugged.

“Rainey, don’t you think—”

“No, I don’t,” I interrupted her. I had heard it before and wasn’t about to change my mind.

Lizzy sighed as she gave in. “Fine. Yes, I’m free for lunch. We should ask Bobby to join us. It’s been over a week since we all got together.”

Bobby was another new friend I had gained this past year. She was an attorney who only worked child abuse related cases. She was a shark, known as such, and always fought for what was best for the children involved. I admired her. I wanted to be her when I grew up.

“Sure. Sounds great. Chinese?”

“Ugh. You always want Chinese.”

“And you don’t?” I raised my eyebrows at her, challenging her to disagree with me.

“You know I do, but I should really try harder to eat healthier food.”

“Nobody forces you to order the sticky, unhealthy stuff. Get some rice and veggies.”

Lizzy’s face turned into a grimace. I grinned, knowing that would never happen. Another thing we had in common: we both loved food and didn’t hide it.

“Meh. I’ll have a side salad and get a fruit smoothie on the way back.”

“Yeah. That should make up for it,” I said under my breath, earning me a mock glare. I got up, smiling, and went to the door. “In an hour?”

“Yeah. Sounds good.”

I left her office and went to the staff room to grab another coffee. I had a lot of paperwork sitting on my desk and needed more caffeine to get through it. I was still smiling when I turned the corner, but that smile froze on my face when I saw who was standing by the coffee machine fixing his own coffee.

“Has anyone ever told you that you have the most beautiful smile?”

Said smile faded quickly at his line and turned into a sneer. “Has anyone ever told you that dumb pick-up lines only work on bimbos and skanks who don’t make enough use of their miniscule brain matter to know better?”

Logan chuckled at my nasty remark, his eyes flashing with amusement.

“And you’re extremely sexy when you’re pretending to be a bitch.”

That did it. What did a girl have to do to get rid of a guy she wasn’t interested in? “Ugh! What do I have to do? What will it take for you to leave me alone?”

“Go out with me.”

I rolled my eyes. “Going out with you would be the opposite of you leaving me alone, now wouldn’t it?” I replied sarcastically.

Logan just grinned. “Go out with me. One date. If you don’t want to see me again after that, I’ll leave you alone.”

I thought on that for a moment. Would it really be that easy? Go out with him once to be rid of him? I doubted it. He wouldn’t just accept it if I told him to get lost after the date. He was too much of a cocky bastard to be rejected like that, which was proven by his smirk and self-assured glint in his eyes as he waited for my answer, my hesitation undoubtedly giving him the impression he was getting somewhere.

*Well, you can stick that grin up your ass!*

“I’m not interested in spending any time with people like you, Logan, no matter how little time it is.”

His eyebrows went up in question. “People like me?”

“People like you. Boxers, fighters, athletes in general, musicians, actors. Anyone who strives to make it big, be famous, and become rich. Anyone who is ruthless enough to do anything to reach that goal and throw a tantrum when things don’t go their way.”

Shit. I was babbling.

I clamped my mouth shut, wishing I hadn’t opened it in the first place. It was none of his business why I didn’t want to go out with him.

*Jerk.*

His eyebrows stayed raised, now in disbelief. “Wow. That’s a little judgmental, don’t you think?”

I shrugged. “I don’t care. It’s my rule. You don’t have to like it.” *Now, go away.*

Logan’s eyes were still on me, narrowed now, scrutinizing, reading me. “So what you’re saying is, you’ve been hurt by someone who falls into that category; my guess would be by a boxer, judging by how instantly your friendliness turned into indifference and rejection the second you learned I box. You’ve been hurt by a boxer and promised yourself to never go back there again.” His eyes didn’t move from my face, and I knew I hadn’t been quick enough to hide the pain in them. I turned my back to him and busied myself with emptying the last of the coffee in the carafe into my mug, then got on to the task of brewing more. It was a rule at the shelter: if you dare take the last coffee, you better make sure you brew more. I tried to ignore feeling Logan move in closer behind me, but it was hard since I could literally feel his hot breath on my neck.

“What did he do? Cheat on you?”

I laughed a bitter laugh and shook my head. “No, he didn’t cheat on me.”

The air in the room turned heavy. “Did he hit you?” His voice was now a low, angry growl. Flashes of shouting and glass flying, smashing against the wall, ran through my mind’s eye. I closed my eyes tightly to shut them out. I had to get out of here, away from Logan.

I opened my eyes and turned around. I was now almost nose-to-nose with him. He was too close. His bright blue eyes were piercing mine as if they were trying to see into my soul to find all the answers there.

*Not a chance.*

I grabbed my mug from the counter and rounded him while I said, “It doesn’t matter, Logan. What matters is that you can give up. It’s not gonna happen.”

He shook his head in frustration. “Why won’t you answer my question? Did that motherfucker hit you?” His eyes were blazing with fury. I knew it wasn’t directed at me, but it still made the hair on my neck stand on end. I straightened my shoulders and narrowed my eyes at him, determined not to let him get to me. My life was none of his motherfucking business.

“It doesn’t concern you. You’re not part of my life, so you don’t get to know shit.”

“I can see you think that,” was his cryptic answer.

“So you’re gonna leave me alone?” I asked hopefully as I stopped in the doorway and turned around.

He shook his head again. “He live in Boston?”

Yeah, he did. Not that I kept track of him, but I knew he would never leave this city. It’s where he grew up. It was in his blood. But I wouldn’t share that with Logan. I stayed silent as I glared at him. This guy was unbelievable.

His eyes roamed my face and his stance relaxed. Then he answered my question. “Not a chance. I’m gonna let this go for now. But get me, Rainey, I might not yet know what exactly that scumbag did to make you dislike ‘people like me’ so much, but I will find out. And once I do, I will prove to you I’m better than him. Right after I pay him a visit and teach him a lesson. Now that I know it’s not me you don’t like but what I do for a living, I’ll do anything I can to make you realize I’m not like that asshole who screwed you over.”

I shook my head and laughed bitterly once again. “Good luck with that.” Then I turned around and went to my office, closing the door firmly behind me, but not before I heard him shout after me, “Mark my words, Rainey Miller. I have connections. I will find out.”

Dread settled in my gut at his words, but then I took a deep breath.

*Cocky bastard.*

*Fine, let him try. He won’t get very far.*

The only people who knew about my past and who I was were my mother, Ben, and Lizzy. My mother didn’t talk about our past to anyone but Ben and me, ever; Ben would never cross paths with Logan; and Lizzy would never tell. I was carrying my mother’s maiden name as my last name; she had changed it back as soon as the divorce was final, as per my father’s request in the settlement, so Logan had no way of finding out anything I didn’t want him to know.

Relieved and reassured, I pushed him out of my mind and dove back into work.

Logan

Logan watched as Rainey walked through the door and to her office, and kept watching as she closed the door behind her without sparing him another glance.

He had been fascinated by her from the moment he laid eyes on her, before she had even noticed him. There was something about her. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, but she unearthed feelings in him he had never felt before. He had walked into the common room that day almost a month ago and had stopped short at the sight in front of him. Rainey had been sitting on the couch with her guitar on her lap, a handful of kids sitting around her, their amazed and admiring eyes watching her in awe as she played and sang a beautiful song. She was so lost in the song that her eyes were closed and the emotions were playing across her face: pain, heartbreak, confusion, then relief and peace. Then she’d opened her eyes and his breath had left him. They were deep blue, like the sky, with a hint of violet around the edges. He could tell it took her a second to find her way back to reality. Then a huge smile split her face and that tinge of purple spread with the sparkle that lit her eyes. Coupled with her raven black hair, those eyes were magnificent.

And he’d been a goner.

There was something in her eyes, a vulnerability that spoke to him, pulled him in, that he felt he had to protect.

Right then and there, Logan knew he had to get to know this woman, that he would do anything in his power to be close to her. He hadn’t known the song she’d played, had never heard it before, but he had listened to it every day since, trying to figure her out.

It usually wasn’t hard for him to get the woman he wanted. He wasn’t a player, far from it. He respected women too much to use them like that, but he’d never really had to chase any of the women he’d been interested in.

Rainey was different.

For the first time in his life, he had to work for it, prove himself, and he was only too happy to take on that challenge. Though he had to admit it was getting slightly frustrating. A month of flirting and being charming, teasing, helpful…nothing had helped him in cracking that hard shell Rainey had surrounded herself with when it came to him. He’d been watching her constantly, trying to see a pattern, trying to find a weak spot that would let him get through her defenses, but he’d been unsuccessful to say the least. That initial spark he had seen in her eyes when they were introduced had not only disappeared, it had turned into extreme dislike and distrust, almost hostile. He’d had no idea what had caused that instant animosity when she’d learned his name. They had never met before, he had been sure of that. There was no way he would have forgotten those cerulean eyes. Or that raven black hair. Or that absolutely heartbreaking smile.

No, they hadn’t met before.

So why was it that she was dead set against getting to know him? For weeks, Logan had racked his brain, not coming up with an answer or even the slightest clue. He had played with the idea of asking Lizzy. Rainey was her friend and Logan had caught Lizzy looking at either Rainey or him or both of them knowingly more than once. So he knew she knew why he wasn’t getting an in, but Logan wasn’t going to ask her just yet. He hadn’t given up on getting through to her.

And today, for the first time, she had given him a clue.

It wasn’t about who he was.

It was about what he did for a living.

*I can work with that.*

He smiled to himself.

Then his smile vanished when he remembered the pain that had flickered through her eyes when he had hit the nail on the head before she could hide it. Someone had seriously hurt her. The thought of someone physically causing her pain lit a fire of fury in his stomach he had trouble controlling. She hadn’t denied it. She also hadn’t admitted it. In fact, she hadn’t acknowledged his question at all. Still, someone had hurt her one way or another, he was sure of it. Hurt her so much that she was closing herself off from letting people in. No, wait. The only person she wasn’t letting in was him. She was open and caring with everyone else around her, smiling, laughing, teasing, and advising in that caring and passionate way of hers. Though there was something about her she was keeping to herself, he could tell. He had watched her closely and intently. With the kids, she was always open, her smiles always reached her eyes. But when she interacted with the adults, her smiles were just that little bit less bright, the spark in her eyes that little bit more dimmed. She was a private person. But she was always kind, respectful, and sincere, and everyone loved to be around her. The kids at the shelter adored and respected her, trusted her, and her co-workers sang high praises all the time, talking about how involved she got, how passionate she was about every single child who showed up at the shelter, how she worked long hours and weekends to give the kids a sense of safety and home, a place where they could go and feel loved and appreciated, where they knew they could find support and let their guard down, even if just for an hour a day. He admired that in her, how she could make disillusioned street kids trust her, quickly, how she could make them feel loved and cared for.

That’s why he hadn’t understood how she could be so hostile towards him.

But now he knew she treated him like that because she had been burned by another boxer. What was it she had said? *People like you. Boxers, fighters, athletes in general, musicians, actors. Anyone who strives to make it big, be famous and become rich. Anyone who is ruthless enough to do anything to reach that goal and throw a tantrum when things don’t go their way.* That was it. The man she’d been with had done everything to reach his goal, to become famous, rich, and had left her when he succeeded. Or he never made it that far and had changed, maybe even blamed her or some shit like that. He was sure some version of one or the other was true.

Determined to figure out which one it was, he started to smile again. The boxing community in Boston was big, but Logan had connections. Good connections. He would find out which asshole had hurt the woman he was falling for even though she wanted nothing to do with him, and then he would teach him a lesson and prove to her he was nothing like that, that he would adore the ground she walked on, that he would never sacrifice her for anything.