



# CHAPTER ONE

## Katy

### I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED FALL.

It's the perfect season, especially in New York: the colors, the brisk weather, all the fashion-layering opportunities. Plus, there's the September issue of *Vogue*, New York Fashion Week, beautiful new displays in all the department store windows . . . But I've loved fall since before I could even pronounce "Anna Wintour." It's probably because of back-to-school shopping.

Every year, my mom took me uptown to Lacy's so we could browse the sale racks. But more often than not, we'd just look at the glamorous window displays for inspiration, then go home so Mom could create her own versions of the outfits we couldn't quite afford, teaching me how to sew at her side. Bergdorf and Bloomingdale's and Barneys may have their devoted followers, but none of those stores even come close to Lacy's. Every time I walk through her

famous double doors with the stained-glass panels, designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany himself, I get the sense that nothing bad can happen to you there.

Lacy's is high-end enough to be aspirational, but timeless enough to be accessible. If Lacy's was a person, she would be a woman in a perfectly tailored suit. Something classic, that would never go out of style.

Lacy's is an American icon.

But despite all this, my favorite part will always be the windows. Mom and I came every year to see the displays change with the seasons, back when I was small enough to be strapped to her chest in a baby carrier. But this was the first fall I was at Lacy's on my own.

No Mom.

I clutched my coffee a little tighter, blinking as I focused on the window display. Mom wouldn't want me to cry at Lacy's. It would be all wrong, like crying at Disney World.

The mannequins in the window all had silk scarves trailing from their necks, almost like Amelia Earhart. Little-known fact: Amelia Earhart actually designed a fashion line in the 1930s, and they carried it exclusively at Lacy's. I stepped closer to admire a pair of high-waisted tweed pants, a pair of oxford heels peeping out from under the hems. Absolutely the kind of thing a daring aviatrix might sport. Amelia would definitely approve.

"Happy fall, Katy Keene."

I turned, and there was my boyfriend, KO Kelly,

standing in the middle of the busy sidewalk, holding a donut. There's something about a six-foot-one heavyweight boxer holding a confection covered in pink frosting and rainbow sprinkles that's just too perfect for words. He folded me into his arms, careful to keep the frosting from rubbing against the red Peter Pan collar of my wool coat, resting his chin on top of my head. There's no safer place than wrapped in KO's arms.

Well, except maybe Lacy's.

"I know I'm not your mom, Katy, but I didn't want you to be on your own for the unveiling of the Lacy's windows."

*So sweet.* I rose up on my tiptoes to kiss him, and I melted a little, just like I always did.

"Is that donut for me?" I asked.

"Oh yeah." KO blushed. "I, uh, ate mine on the walk from the subway. But here." He handed over the donut, and I bit in, relishing the sweet sugar rush. Delicious. "Nothing but Plunkin' Donuts' finest for my girl."

"So," I asked in between mouthfuls, "what do you think?"

I gestured to the window in front of me, and KO turned to contemplate it fully.

"This is really . . ." His brow furrowed as he looked in the window like he was hoping an answer might fly out of the caramel-colored beret on the mannequin closest to us. "Um . . . pants? Those are some nice pants?"

"Oh, yes, I agree," I said seriously. "Very pants."

“I’m sorry; my fashion expertise is limited to boxing gear!” He picked me up and spun me around as we laughed, sprinkles scattering onto the sidewalk.

Being here, with KO, was the first time since Mom died that I felt like I could remember her without the beep of machines, the faded fabric of her hospital gown, and the smell of the terrible food. I remembered her here, at Lacy’s, sketching what she saw in the window on a crumpled napkin or the back of a receipt.

“Well? Shall we?” KO offered me his arm.

“Shall we what? Go in?” I raised an eyebrow skeptically. “Unfortunately, I’m not exactly in the market for a new fall wardrobe right now. Number one priority is figuring out how I’m going to pay the rent.”

I was still in the apartment on the Lower East Side that I’d grown up in, but I had a feeling that wouldn’t last for much longer. I was doing my best to find a job, but at the moment, I could barely scrape together what I owed each month. And although the landlord had been really understanding ever since Mom got sick, from our last couple of conversations, I was getting the sense that Mr. Discenza was thinking of selling the building. He could probably make a lot more money selling it to some developer than he was currently collecting in rent, now that the neighborhood was getting increasingly trendy, even as far east as we were. A spin studio had opened up on our block last week, which meant it was really the beginning of the end. It was no longer the Delancey Street of my childhood.

“You’re taking ‘window-shopping’ a bit too literally.” Gently, KO tugged me toward the revolving doors, and we squeezed in together, KO’s bulk taking up most of the space. “You’re allowed to look at more than just the displays.”

As we emerged onto the marble-tiled floor, the atrium expansive above us, I breathed in the scent of hundreds of perfumes commingling.

“Ambition by Rex London?” a spritzer asked. I paused, admiring how chic her high-necked black blouse was, with the small, surprising floral detail at the collar that kept it from being too staid.

KO sneezed in response.

“No, thank you.” I smiled, steering my boyfriend to the less-scented air of the clothing departments. He was still sneezing as we stepped onto the escalator, his normally clear blue eyes red.

I gripped KO’s arm excitedly, wondering what they’d have upstairs. Obviously, I was excited to see the new designs, but it wasn’t just about a new pair of suede boots. It was about what those boots *represented*. The changing of seasons. Saying good-bye to the old to bring in the new.

A fresh start.

And this year, I really needed a fresh start.

“You know what I decided?” I said as we rode up to women’s wear, the sounds of the perfume hall disappearing behind us.

“What’s that?”

“I’ve decided this is going to be the best fall ever.”

My final year of high school had been swallowed up by the pain of slowly losing Mom, knowing there was nothing I could do. I barely even remembered last fall. But this was a new season, full of nothing but possibility, and I was going to do everything I could to make the most of it.

“The best fall ever, huh?” KO grinned, hopping off the escalator behind me. “I don’t know about that. What about the fall of freshman year, when I saw the prettiest girl I’d ever seen, walking down Second Avenue in a bright red coat?”

“Better than that.” I grinned, too, remembering how I’d almost walked into a trash can because I’d been so distracted by the cute boy in the Western Queens Boxing Gym jacket.

“What about the fall of sophomore year, when I finally got the courage to ask her out?”

“Even better than that.” I flung my arms around his neck and kissed him, right there in the middle of women’s wear. “It’s going to be perfect. We’ll watch the leaves change color in Central Park and sip hot cider, and we can take the train to that pick-your-own apple orchard on Long Island . . .”

“And we’ll eat, sleep, and breathe pumpkin spice,” KO finished for me, suppressing a laugh.

“What are *your* plans for the most fabulous fall ever?” I punched him on the arm jokingly. I doubt he even felt it.

“Probably spending most of it inside. At the boxing

gym.” KO shrugged sheepishly. “Now that I’ve graduated, I can really get serious about my career. The journey to Madison Square Garden starts now, baby.” I laughed as he shadowboxed the mannequin in front of us, throwing a neat cross toward her cashmere-clad torso. “Actually . . .” KO pulled his phone out of his pocket, checking the time. “I’m meeting Jinx to train in just a couple hours.”

“Jinx?” I asked. I knew all of KO’s sparring partners—sometimes we’d go out to the Starlite Diner together after a match, either celebrating their victories or drowning our sorrows in the best milk shakes in Queens—and I’d definitely never heard the name Jinx before.

“Newest boxer at the gym. Absolutely incredible.” KO’s eyes lit up the way mine did when the silk charmeuse was on sale at Mood Fabrics. “I’ve had to seriously step up my game. It’s been awesome.”

Well, whoever this Jinx was, he must really be something. Usually the only thing that made KO gush like this was Starlite’s chili cheese fries on days that he didn’t have a weigh-in.

“Well, thanks to Jinx for sparing you, and thank *you* for coming all the way in from Queens before heading right back out there again.” I squeezed his hand, and he kept hold of it, his fingers threading through mine.

“Forget it. A little interborough travel is nothing. I would cross oceans for you, Katy Keene.”

His tone was joking, but I knew he meant it, cheesy as it was. He’d done something much harder than cross an



ocean for me. He'd been by my side, every step of the way, while Mom was sick. He'd held my hand in the hospital waiting room. He'd brought dinner on all those nights when I'd forgotten to eat. And when Mom was gone, he'd refused to let me be alone; he brought me home to his family on Long Island, where I could disappear for a bit into the warmth and noise and love of the Kelly family.

If it hadn't been for KO, I don't know what would have happened to me.

"I don't want to disrespect your beloved Lacy's, Katy, but the clothes you make are way better than ninety percent of the stuff I've seen on the racks today. They should be selling *your* designs." KO tugged on the sleeve of a sweater near us, frowning distastefully. "What even is this?"

I frowned at the sweater right along with him. One sleeve was covered in sequins. The other was entirely mesh. And there was a saguaro cactus appliquéd on the front that appeared to be bleeding.

Well, not all fashion risks paid off.

"You're very sweet, KO, but I'm not a real designer." I made almost all of my own clothes, and my ultimate dream was to have my own fashion line someday, but that still felt like such a long way off. The idea of Lacy's selling my clothes seemed about as likely as one of my dresses being modeled on the moon. "Not yet, anyway. Someday, I hope, but—"

My phone vibrated in my purse. I jumped, scrambling to open the tricky vintage clasp, thinking it might be the

hospital, before remembering that they had no reason to call me anymore. Shoulders slumping, I realized this was only the first of many times I'd forget that Mom was gone.

"Are you going to get that?" KO asked.

"Yeah; I'm sure it's nothing." I pulled the vibrating phone out, then stared at the screen in confusion. "Huh."

"Who is it?"

"It's Veronica," I said. "Veronica Lodge."

I hadn't heard from Veronica in a while. We'd had that wonderful shopping day together when she came in for her Barnard interview, and she'd sent me a very tasteful fruit basket when Mom died, but we didn't usually talk on the phone. We were more the make-plans-over-text types, and then once we were together, in person, it was like no time had passed at all.

Veronica Lodge. I stared at the phone. *What could she possibly have to talk to me about?*

Well, there was only one way to find out.

I pressed "accept" and lifted the phone to my ear.