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**Author's Note:**

*Rock My Body* Is Book Two in the Mondez series. The storyline runs parallel with *Rock My World* and it is therefore advised that each book be read in chronological order to avoid any spoilers.

Much love,

Lee x

## Chapter One

*Was it something that I...?*

*Or was it...?*

*There's something in the way you move.*

-MONDEZ, "Stranger"

My running shoes pounded the hard sand as I kept my eyes locked on the horizon. On a day like today, any rational person would pause and slowly breathe in the cool ocean spray of Geographe Bay, Western Australia—spring in these parts was especially beautiful after all. They would then probably marvel at the white sandy beach as it stretched uninterrupted for miles in front of them, before casting their eyes toward the sparkling aquamarine water which mirrored the endless blue sky above.

I wasn't that person.

Hell, in that moment I was the physical embodiment of internal pandemonium. And I tried so hard to remember everything my psychologist, Doctor Powell, taught me about working through my anxiety induced panic attacks—they had become more and more prevalent in the past few months—only nothing came to mind except the bleeding obvious.

*Breathe Riley, just breathe.*

Way to be helpful, Doctor Powell.

So instead, I ran. Yeah, Doctor Powell was not going to be impressed. She always told me that rather than fixing the problem, avoidance exacerbated it because sooner or later I would have to deal with the issue I was trying to evade anyway. She was right, of course, the memory of my horrendous morning at work refused to dissipate. I shut my eyes for a split second as the recollection of my patient's beseeching voice sent a sharp lancinating pain through my stomach. "Nurse, what's wrong with my baby? Why is he so quiet? Answer me, *please*."

I stumbled, righted myself and then forced my legs faster. Stupid stomach.

The salty sea breeze whipped straight blond hair into my eyes and I agitatedly brushed it aside, for once not caring if I was channeling my inner Angora Rabbit.

Her cries were unrelenting. "Nurse, please. Help. *Help*."

Only I couldn't.

It was hopeless.

And if she was being honest with herself, my patient knew it too. After all, it was obvious from the twelve-week scan that the eventual outcome was never going to be good.

*Why didn't she listen?*

Her obstetrician and I continuously spoke to her, counseled her, even bluntly told her the likelihood of her son surviving delivery was slim-to-none. But she persisted anyway. Faith, she called it. I snorted. More like delusion.

Tears stung my eyes. I hated feeling helpless, and that's exactly what happened in the labor ward today. As much as I tried, I couldn't force the little heart to beat, I couldn't take away his mother's agonizing grief. Hours later, I couldn't even block out her hysterical sobs.

I couldn't do a goddamn thing.

So, rather than find a quiet spot to sit with the tormenting emotions and analyze each of them in turn like a scientist with OCD, I escaped to the beach for a run. There was no doubt about it, avoidance was definitely my coping mechanism of choice. However, in my defense, it turned out to be one heck of a workout. Surely, that was something, right?

Right?

I shook my head.

If someone happened to be strolling along the coastal promenade at that very moment and glanced down at me on the shoreline, it would have looked like I was being chased by an imaginary rabid dog which had just been burned with a branding iron. And then stung by a bee. Honestly, the speed I maintained was ridiculous, even by my standards.

I'd never pushed my body so hard. Even in my darkest days I always kept a little in reserve, but not in that moment. Heck no. Instead, I forced my legs faster again, ignoring the lactic acid as it slowly burned its way up my calves. My lungs were almost bursting and my vision blurred dangerously but still I didn't stop.

At break-neck speed, I blindly rounded the rocky outcrop. It jutted toward the ocean like an old woman accusingly pointing her crooked finger up at the sun.

And then wished I hadn't.

*Oomph.*

I hit a cement pillar. Well, one which swore like a drunken sailor. Even my best friend and housemate, Grace—arguably the most foul-mouthed woman in the history of the universe—would have been impressed. I flew through the air and landed flat on my back, sprawled out on the damp sand. I couldn't breathe. Literally. Rolling over until I was

crouching on all fours, I gasped, choked and quite possibly retched, pleading with my lungs to filter through some much-needed oxygen.

“You all right?”

I was too busy heaving to reply to the deep, male voice. Probably for the best, his gravelly tone sounded like sin-wrapped temptation. Instead, I dropped my head onto the sand, begging my breathing to return to normal. Unfortunately, when it finally did, embarrassment set in along with my ever unhelpful inner monologue.

*Oh my God, I fell over in front of a total stranger, who does that? Maybe he was looking the other way and didn't see? Who am I kidding, he totally did. Probably filmed it and everything. Knowing my luck, by this time tomorrow I'll be an internet sensation, there'll be memes and everything. Sweet Lord in heaven, I actually want to crawl into a hole and die.*

“You okay to sit up?” His low, husky voice cut through my internal meltdown.

“No,” I mumbled into the sand, ignoring the fact that my thighs instinctively clenched together at the sound.

Is he kidding me? There's no way I can face him. Not only will he think I'm the most uncoordinated woman alive, but his voice is sexy enough to feature in a Kendrick Lamar song for God's sake. I'm not strong enough to deal with that shit.

“You ever gonna sit up?”

“Nope.”

He snickered again. “So, you're gonna stay like this until the tide takes you out?”

“That's the plan.”

I could almost hear the man smile and felt heat rushing to my cheeks, though didn't for one second forget my weakness for badass musicians—real or imagined—and my consequent decision to steer clear of them at all costs.

“Look, if you sit up I'll promise not to say a word about the epic fall you just had. Okay?”

I swore under my breath. Mortified, that's what I felt. Completely. Fucking. Mortified.

“Come on.” His large hands gently gripped my shoulders, shifting me to sitting position. I inhaled sharply as the contact of his fingers against my bare skin sent a shiver of pleasure down my spine.

*Please don't moan, please don't moan, please—*

And then he laughed.

*Fuck.*

It was deep, throaty and by far the most panty-obliterating sound I had ever heard. I squirmed in the sand. Nope. The movement did absolutely nothing to ease the sudden tension between my legs.

“Open your eyes, angel.”

“Do I have to?”

“At some point, yeah.”

I sighed, peeked out the corner of one eye and then forgot to breathe. Again. My other eye instinctively popped open and I’m pretty sure my mouth did too.

*Holy shit.*

Two bright blue eyes gazed laughingly down at me. His straight nose, full lips and chiseled jawline led to what was in all seriousness, the most stunning male physique I’d ever had the pleasure to ogle.

Wow. I mean... Just wow.

I swallowed.

A grey t-shirt slick with sweat stretched across the most unbelievably ripped upper body in the history of pecs and abs. This guy was strong. Not bodybuilder strong, more like I’m-gonna-push-you-up-against-the-wall-and-have-my-wicked-way-with-you strong. In other words, everything I’d ever dreamed about strong.

My stomach almost folded in on itself.

Through the soaked fabric of his t-shirt, I could see broad shoulders, strong biceps, washboard abdominals and—I almost groaned out loud—my most favorite of all body parts, the distinctly molded V leading directly down to...

I licked suddenly parched lips.

*Beautiful.*

He laughed again.

Slapping a hand over my mouth, I gasped. “I actually said that out loud, didn’t I?”

“Yep.”

“Oh, God.”

If there was ever an ideal moment for a king tide, it was now.

Thankfully, the beautiful stranger ignored my mammoth foot in mouth and held out a hand for me to grasp, his pupils dilating when our fingers touched. Dazed, I wasn’t at all prepared for the quick jerk of his arm and ended up face first in his muscular chest.

*Oomph.*

Again.

Seriously, can this day get any worse?

A short while later, we were slowly making our way back along the foreshore. I refused to look at the man strolling next to me, doing so would only end in further embarrassment and I'd had enough for one day. Sadly, the guy in question would not let me walk back to my car alone—I had smacked into him pretty hard—and if I wasn't so concerned about doing or saying something stupid, I probably would have thanked him for his kindness.

I sighed. If only I was one of those girls who could easily make sparkling conversation wherever they went. Don't get me wrong, Mum did everything she could to improve my awkwardness. She dealt with it like a long-term disease, one which needed continual treatment. I was systematically signed up for dress and deportment classes, hair and beauty lessons, public speaking programs, the works. Being the daughter of a world-renowned cardiologist and a bored housewife meant that from childhood I'd had to endure more glittering charity galas than I cared to remember. But despite everyone's best efforts, I still didn't know what to do with myself when surrounded by anyone other than close friends.

It sucked.

I shook my head and stared down at the imprints my shoes made in the sand. There was no way a deportment class could have prepared me for colliding with the hottest man ever to grace running shorts. And there sure as hell was no guidebook outlining what to do after openly gawking at said man and blurting out how beautiful his cock was. I bit my lip to stop an anguished groan.

"You're blushing."

I glanced up before quickly looking away again.

He nudged me teasingly. "Why are you blushing?"

I kept quiet.

"Forget it, I already know why anyway. You're not the first woman to lose her shit over my—"

I stopped and glared up at him. "Enough, okay? This has already been the day from hell and you're only making it worse."

His mocking smile slipped. "Hey, I'm just joking around."

"Yeah, at my expense."

Shrugging one shoulder, he replied, “You kinda make it easy. All I have to do is look at you and your skin flushes pink or you say something fuckin’ hilarious.”

I blushed again.

*Damn it.*

He grinned. “See?”

I made a frustrated noise in the back of my throat and stalked off in the direction of my car. I needed to get as far away from the guy as possible, his earthy scent was messing with my equilibrium and the way his lips quirked up in the corners made me want to bite something. Hard.

So I unzipped my pocket and hastily fished out some keys, only heavy footsteps chased me.

“Wait up.”

Internally, I groaned, however, not wanting to appear rude, I took a deep steadying breath and slowly turned around.

In my peripheral vision, I spied a group of bikini-clad women openly admiring the mouth-watering man candy as he winked and leisurely jogged past them. “Ladies.”

Great, a live audience. This is going to be beyond awkward.

He rounded the top step and held out a large hand while I warily stared down at it. “My name’s Dominic, by the way.”

After a moment’s pause, I reached out and clasped his fingers, biting my lip at the heated contact of his skin and the power it could wield over me if given half a chance.

“Riley, Riley Sears. It’s a pleasure to meet you,” I mumbled.

*Thanks, Mum.*

“Trust me, Riley Sears, the pleasure’s all mine.” His lopsided grin had me dumbly gaping at him for a while.

This guy can’t be for real. I mean, he’s way too attractive for his own good. He knows it too, oh yes, he knows exactly what he’s doing. He’d probably take me right here in this car park if I let him. Would I let him? *Focus, Riley.*

I scanned Dominic up and down. Yep, the man had *player* written all over him, from the tips of his unruly light brown hair, all the way down to... I had to stop staring at his junk.

I shook my head. Well, I wasn’t going to be distracted, and I certainly wasn’t going to become the latest notch in his bedpost. Besides, Doctor Powell explained months ago how unhealthy relationships were a trigger for my anxiety and she was right of course,



now that I think back. So there was no way this conversation was heading anywhere good, even if it was with someone as obscenely gorgeous as Dominic.

Sigh.

“What? Why are you looking at me like I just ran over your puppy?”

I ignored him. “Thanks for walking me to my car but I’ve gotta go, I’ve got stuff to do.”

Like removing sand out of every orifice and with any luck, the memory of his fingers touching my skin.

Fun times ahead.

“Wait, you’re leaving? Just like that?”

I heard fits of giggles and frantic whispers in the background.

“Uh, yeah.”

“So that’s all the thanks I get?” His gaze turned incredulous.

I stared at him.

He stepped in close, his voice dropping to a husky murmur. “I’d like to get to know you better, Riley.”

I consciously ignored the heat that pooled in my stomach and instead narrowed my eyes at him. “Really? And are you talking intellectually, emotionally or physically?”

“Definitely physically.”

I bit back a laugh. Damn he was forward, wish I didn’t like it so much. But, shaking my head, I murmured, “Not gonna happen, Dominic. I’m not that kind of girl.”

He stepped closer again, his eyes trained on my mouth. “You sure about that?”

Once again I forgot to breathe. This was going to become a real issue if I didn’t get it under control ASAP. So, taking a deep breath I squared my shoulders. “Look, unless you’ve planned a romantic dinner for two, got some scented candles handy and quite possibly an engagement ring...”

The man actually blanched. “Fuck no.”

I laughed. “Exactly. But I’m sure one of your admirers over there,” I gestured to the bikini brigade, “will be more than willing to, ah, help you out.”

He glanced over at the twittering women before scrunching up his nose in distaste. “I never go back for seconds.”

“I’m sorry?”

He turned back to me, his stare unwavering. “I never sleep with the same woman twice.”

“Please tell me you’re kidding.”

“Nope.” He looked over at them again. “The redhead was last weekend, the brunette two days before that, and the sisters...” He whistled. “Let’s just say I had my hands full on Monday night.”

I stared heavenward, desperately trying to rid the image of Dominic naked and in the throes of passion out of my head.

He chuckled and my stupid knees turned weak. “I’m joking, Riley.” I glared at him. “Kind of. Look, I’m not gonna lie to you, I love women.” He paused for a moment. “And it really was a fuckin’ awesome Monday night.”

*Right, then. That’s my cue to leave.*

Turning to my car, I opened the driver door before settling myself inside.

“Goodbye, Dominic.”

“You’re missing out on the best sex of your life.”

*Be still my beating heart.*

Shaking my head, I shut the door before lowering the automated windows. “See you around.”

“When?” He bent forward, his arms resting on the side panel. Once again I was hit with a wave of his masculine scent mixed with ... mint? I closed my eyes, desperately trying not to breathe him in.

This man is definitely trying to kill me. Doesn’t he know mint is my favorite scent in the whole world? I’m in serious trouble here.

When I opened them again, his face was only inches away from mine and those full, kissable lips hovered so temptingly close. My breathing turned erratic as I tried to ignore the pulse which jumped at the base of his throat.

Dominic’s smile turned wicked, plain and simple. “Same time tomorrow?”

“Okay,” I whispered.

*Hang on, what? That’s not what I meant to say. Dominic’s the type of guy to steer clear of, not agree to see again. What the heck am I doing?*

I shook my head. There was no way I wanted to become yet another random name in his little black book, the blasted thing was probably full.

His eyes promised everything I told myself I didn’t want, but so help me, I couldn’t look away. Grinning, he slowly stood and thumped the canvas roof of my convertible before stepping back. “Looking forward to it.”

I drove home in a haze.

*“No. Do it again.”*

*I sighed, before staring down at the endless row of shining silver cutlery in front of me. We were dining at the fanciest restaurant Geographe Bay had to offer but I just wanted to hide under the table, not sit at the head of it while Mum kept telling me off for stuff I didn't know.*

*I tentatively reached for the largest fork.*

*“No, no, and no.” Mum rapped my knuckles with a spoon.*

*I wanted to yank it out of her hand and hit her over the head with it, though my life wouldn't be worth living if I did.*

*“How many times do I have to tell you, Riley Jayne?” I flinched, hating it when she called me by my first and middle name. “Always start from the outside.”*

*She groaned dramatically. “How are we ever going to get through tomorrow night's dinner if you don't even remember which fork to choose first?”*

*I wanted to remind her that I was only twelve. I wanted to remind her that I didn't even want the stupid dinner or the table full of people who cared about what type of silverware I ate with. I wanted to remind her that this was an awful way to spend my birthday and I wasn't enjoying myself at all. But as usual, I kept quiet. As usual, I did my best to please her. And as usual, I failed spectacularly.*

*“You gonna eat that?”*

*I blinked. “Huh? Oh yeah, of course.”*

Grace eyed me from across the kitchen countertop. We were seated on two bar stools, eating dinner in our shared apartment and normally the conversation flowed seamlessly. I mean, she was my best friend and we'd known each other most of our lives so there was always plenty to chat about. However, tonight I couldn't stop thinking about my parents. For some reason my birthday always coincided with an unhealthy side-helping of despondency, probably because 'dysfunctional' didn't even begin to cover the breadth or width of our relationship. Anyway, I wasn't exactly Ms. Conversationalist and Grace being who she was, picked up on my silence straight away.

*“Where'd you go just then?”*

*I sighed. “Nowhere good.”*

*“Your mum?”*

*“Yeah.”*

“You know she’ll want to see you for your birthday, right?”

I sighed again. “I know, I’ll head over there tomorrow night for a bit.”

Grace nodded. “You’re a brave woman.” Then changing the subject, she asked, “So, what do you think?”

I stared at her, confused.

“Of your birthday dinner,” she said slowly. “You know, the one I’ve been slaving over for hours.”

“It’s a salad.”

“It’s not just any salad, it’s a falafel salad.” She looked down at her plate grumbling, “Didn’t even know what a fucking falafel was until this afternoon.”

My eyes softened. “It’s an awesome dinner, G, really.” I took another bite, pausing thoughtfully. “The dressing is, um, interesting.”

Grace’s eyes turned mischievous. “My own special recipe.”

I rolled the food around in my mouth before swallowing. “Can’t put my finger on it exactly but—” I stopped, staring at her. “You didn’t.”

She grinned.

“Oh, for God’s sake. You put *whiskey* in a salad dressing?”

“It adds a little something, don’t you think?”

I groaned, dropping my head onto the top. “You’re seriously unhinged, you know that?”

“Come on, Riley, I haven’t had a single drop all day. And do you wanna know why?”

“Not particularly.”

“Because I drove halfway across the fucking country to a health food store run by a guy named Rainbow freakin’ Storm Cloud, buying you goddamn organic chickpeas and scallions which, I might add, you’re not even eating.”

I raised my head and dutifully took another mouthful. After a slight pause, I grudgingly muttered, “It actually tastes really good.”

“I know, right?”

“Thank you.”

“Save the groveling for after dessert.”

My eyes lit up. “G, don’t mess with me now. You know my poor heart can’t take it.”

“How much do you love me?”

I jumped up and ran to the fridge, squealing in delight when my eyes found heaven ... in mud cake form. “No way, it’s—”

“Triple chocolate, just like you not-so-subtly asked.”

I ran back to the table and threw my arms around her. “G, you’re amazing. That thing is *huge*.”

“Happy birthday.”

Best. Friend. Ever.

Not long afterward, Grace and I migrated to the lounge room where we sat cross-legged on the couch while stuffing our faces with a cake so sweet it actually gave me a headache. Win. On the whole, I was actually pretty healthy, I ate cleanly, exercised regularly, and even meditated when the time called for it. But chocolate anything was my Achilles’ heel—along with smokin’ hot bad boys going by the name of Dominic, it would seem.

I shook my head.

Grace licked her spoon, eyeing me. “Okay, who is he?”

“Who?”

“The guy you’re thinking about right now. Who is he?”

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She snorted. “Cut the bullshit, Riley. How long have we known each other?”

After a quick mental calculation, I mumbled, “Seventeen years.”

“Exactly. You were a terrible liar when you were five and you’re a horrible one now.” She smiled. “Your ears turn pink.”

*Of course they do. Is there any body part that doesn’t?*

I swore under my breath and Grace smirked. “My smart mouth is rubbing off on you.” But then she sobered. “Come on, out with it.”

“In all honesty, I don’t really know.”

She raised a questioning eyebrow but said nothing, waiting for me to elaborate. After a moment’s pause, I took a deep breath and then told her about my disastrous day at the hospital that culminated in a desperate need to escape to the beach for a run and then literally running into Dominic’s ridiculously ripped pecs.

She was silent for a moment before asking, “Are you going to meet him tomorrow?”

“I’m not sure.”

Grace's emerald green eyes softened. My best friend was beautiful, there was no doubt about it. She was a petite, raven-haired bombshell with gorgeous curves, a heart-shaped face and a sprinkling of freckles to boot. When Grace lowered her defenses and opened up to those around her—like she was doing right now—some might even call her breathtaking. However, Grace refused to open herself up to anyone except me. Needless to say, to pretty much everyone else in existence she was a ... bitch. I hate to admit it but it was true. Let's just say she sported one very tough exterior—she had a short fuse, was blunt to the point of rudeness and often selfish. There were many reasons for this of course, but recently she'd been dealing with the unexpected death of her beloved father and the betrayal of an ex-boyfriend. Grace was presently struggling with a deep sense of bitterness, and I'm talking uncharted-chasm-in-the-ocean deep. She never took it out on me though, oh no, my best friend had only ever been loyal, kind-hearted and loving ... In her own way.

“Be careful, Riley. You have a way of letting guys get so far under your skin you can't differentiate where they end and you begin.”

I looked down.

*Ain't that the truth.*

She grabbed my hand and squeezed. “Just be careful, okay? Don't give your heart away to someone who's just going to fuck you over, it's happened way too many times already.”

“You're right.”

“You deserve the world, love, don't settle for anything less.”

I stared at the gooey remains of my chocolate cake. There was no way I regretted eating so much as a bite of it, it was too damn delicious. But Dominic on the other hand? Well. A dark part of me knew I would definitely regret meeting him.