

WHEN IN PARIS...

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JemCon 2014 Stingers Fan Fiction Contest Entry

*When it's only me and the music
I am free, I am poetry in motion
When it's only me...
And the music...*

As Jem's voice faded into the sound of the radio DJ's recap, Riot found himself daydreaming of their ill-fated time in Mexico. While he reveled in the mental imagery of dancing on a cruise ship, lying in hammocks on a deserted beach, and Jem in his arms, he couldn't shake the feeling of regret at how it all ended so poorly. If not for the interference of Minx, would he not have Jem all to himself, even to this day?

"No matter," he thought to himself. He knew he'd regained Jem's favor by opening up to her about his relationship with his father, and by helping Ba Nee find her own father. And since then, he'd made sure to remain a presence in her life; sending her flowers, seeking her out for music collaboration, even taking her to dinner once or twice. It was all going according to plan this time, and undoubtedly, she would be his. It was only a matter of time.

"Riot!" Minx squealed as she flounced into his office at Stingers Sound. "I can't believe we leave for our European tour in less than a week!"

"Indeed," Riot responded, "and we're meant to rehearse in 15 minutes. Have you seen Rapture yet?"

On cue, the third member of the Stingers appeared in the doorway, looking a far cry from the put-together performer she normally appears to be. Rapture leaned against the door frame and began a coughing fit just as she opened her mouth to speak.

Riot rose from his desk with a look of shock and concern on his face. "Rapture, what in the world is going on?"

"She's clearly sick, Riot," Minx answered, never failing to state the obvious. Riot merely rolled his eyes at her and approached Rapture cautiously.

In a low, hoarse whisper, Rapture replied. "I've got bronchitis," was all she managed to get out before she started coughing into her jacket sleeve again.

Putting his arm around her, Riot guided Rapture to the chair facing his desk. "Rapture honey, sit down. You look like you're about to pass out."

"No, I'm fine, really," she muttered after clearing her throat.

Minx stared, looking practically aghast. "You look terrible!" she chimed while stroking her own long, blonde hair. "I don't think I've ever seen you look worse."

Riot furrowed his brow in Minx's direction, then turned back to Rapture. "Clearly, rehearsal will

have to be cancelled for today.”

“But we need to be ready for the tour!” Minx objected.

“I don’t think there will be any tour, not unless Rapture makes some sort of miraculous recovery,” Riot stated with his head hanging down.

Rapture looked up and in a rare moment, looked truly sorrowful, her eyes glistening with tears. “I’m so sorry,” she said, her voice cracking.

In a flash, Riot was by her side, kneeling by her chair. Taking one hand in his, he reassured her, “Don’t be silly, this isn’t your fault. Try not to worry about anything. I’ll figure something out.”

“But Jerrica, you haven’t even heard the whole thing!” Kimber cried as she plucked some lyrics from Jerrica’s hands. “How can you judge my song when you won’t listen past the first verse?”

Rising from her stool in the recording studio, Jerrica put her hands on her hips and let out a sigh of exasperation. “I’m tired of the same old arguments, Kimber. We discussed the direction for this album weeks ago and yet here you are, trying to change things yet again.” Jerrica paced across the room, wishing the other Holograms were around to back her up. “Whenever we decide for an upbeat sound, you want ballads. When we go for something with a more romantic melody, you want it to be exciting. You’re never happy!” Jerrica could hear her voice not only getting louder, but also quaking somewhat under the strain of their argument.

Kimber scowled. “Well, if that’s how you really feel, maybe I should just pack it in, huh?” She spun on her heels and nearly ran out of the room, knocking over Aja’s guitar on her way.

“Kimber!” Jerrica called after her, but it was too late, she’d already gone. Why did things seem like they were falling apart again? First Ba Nee left, then Shana and Anthony got engaged at one of their after concert parties. What should have been happy news left Jerrica feeling down, and, to be perfectly honest with herself, a little jealous. But now, the ongoing battle over creative differences with her younger sister was more draining than she could take right now. All Jerrica could do was lock up, and head over to meet Rio for their dinner date.

With a loud slamming of her door, Kimber shut herself in her room and threw herself on the bed. *Same old argument, eh Jerrica?* thought Kimber. *Maybe they wouldn’t be repeated if she’d give me a chance for once!* Kimber barely had time to calm herself down when her phone rang.

“Hello?” she answered into the receiver. “Oh Riot! I’m surprised to hear from you. What can I do for you?”

“Kimber dear,” he purred into the receiver, “I need to ask a favor of you. We leave for our European tour in four days and Rapture’s fallen ill. I don’t believe she’ll be able to accompany us and without her, we may need to cancel the tour.”

“Oh no, that’s terrible!” Kimber sympathized. “What’s wrong with her? Will she be ok?”

“Rapture has come down with bronchitis and has been put on bed rest. She’ll probably be out of commission for at least two weeks, but she should make a full recovery.” Riot geared himself

up momentarily for his request. “Kimber, I can’t cancel this tour. It’s too important to us to return to where we first got our break. Would you be able to accompany us, to fill in for Rapture?”

Kimber paused a moment, raising her eyebrows in surprise. “Really? Me? I...I don’t know, I haven’t played guitar on stage in ages.”

“Give yourself more credit, Kimber,” Riot reassured her, “you’re a fantastic guitarist and you know it.”

“But maybe Aja or Shana would be a better choice?” she asked, doubting herself as she so often did.

“While I did consider them both, I know you’re a better fit,” he stated.

Weighing his words carefully, Kimber dug into her gut for her answer. Most certainly, she would give anything to go to Europe, and get away from being under Jerrica’s thumb for a while would be an added bonus. There wasn’t a lot going on anyway, since the Holograms had just wrapped up a tour of the U.S. and they weren’t slated for another performance for over a month. Jerrica would flip if Kimber took off to perform with the Stingers. It was at that moment when she had her answer.

“Okay, I’ll do it!” she said happily.

“Fantastic!” Riot exclaimed. “I’ll get in touch with you tomorrow morning with further details. We need to have at least a couple of rehearsals to familiarize you with our set list. Thank you, Kimber. Your involvement is greatly appreciated.”

“Anytime, Riot. I’m looking forward to this!”

As Kimber hung up the phone, she couldn’t contain the sense of elation that spread within her. However, it was also simmered down by the faintest sense of dread, knowing she’d have to answer to Jerrica. At least she could predict Jerrica’s reaction, so that helped her prepare.

Jerrica sat at her and Rio’s table in their favorite restaurant, drumming her fingers on the tablecloth. *Where is he?* She thought. *This isn’t like him.* She had already looked over the menu three times and ordered a glass of Riesling, and he still hadn’t shown up. Biding her time for a few more minutes, she observed her surroundings: A couple holding hands a few tables down, a bus boy clearing tables, and tripping on his way to the kitchen. Finally, with the last sip of her wine, Rio appeared and made his way towards her.

“Sorry I’m late,” he said breathlessly, “First there were problems in the studio. Then traffic was a nightmare, there was an accident on the I-10.”

“Wow, I’m glad you made it in one piece,” Jerrica replied. While she felt empathy, she couldn’t help but also feel a bit annoyed regardless. Over the last few months, the excuses for Rio’s lateness or even absences seemed to be coming much more frequently. She had tried to talk with him about it, but he’d always either apologize profusely or display clear annoyance at her “nagging”. So for this occasion, she chose not to bring up the issue again.

They enjoyed their dinner and had just ordered dessert when she decided to broach the subject of their relationship. "Rio," she started after taking a deep breath, "I wanted to talk to you about, umm..." Her voice trailed off after she cleared her throat.

"What is it, Jerrica?" Rio asked? He felt his stomach flop, as his premonition indicated where the conversation was going.

"Well, you know we've been together a long time. I wanted us to talk about our future." She paused to drink some water and noticed Rio's brows furrow a bit. Still, she continued on. "Rio, it's been nearly 10 years since we've started dating and well, I'd like us to get married."

He was right. *Not this again*, he thought. He loved Jerrica, but ever since he met Jem, he'd found himself so confused about things. He just couldn't commit to Jerrica right now. "Jerrica, everything's great the way it is," he said, it was the only way he could think to word it right now. Taking her hand, he continued. "You and I have a great thing going. Why would you want to change anything, cause undue stress and headache, throwing a wedding into mix?"

Jerrica's heart sank, it was a similar response anytime the issue was brought up, ever since Jem had become a part of their lives. A sense of panic quickly starting running through her body. Their waiter was just arriving with the dessert she felt that she had to get out of there. "Thank you for dinner Rio. I need to go."

Before he could react, Jerrica had gotten up from her chair, grabbed her jacket and purse and made it a few tables away. He flew up from his chair and turned to pursue. "Jerrica, wait!" he called out, but it was too late; she was out the door.

Jerrica ran to her car as her heart beat so hard, it nearly leapt out of her chest. As she approached home, she could feel herself begin to calm down. It went as she expected, and that was probably why she reacted the way she did. She knew all along what Rio would say, or what he would do, it was more of the same. What she needed was something different in her life, maybe even someone different, because now she could see for sure that Rio would never commit to her.

The next morning, bright and early, Jerrica sat in her office at Starlight Music, working on her never-ending pile of paperwork. She welcomed the distraction after last night's scene. Strangely though, she didn't find herself overly upset anymore. Perhaps she was too used to the situation; nothing seemed to change. A moment later, there was a soft knock at the door. "Come in," she said, business as usual.

"Jerrica?" Kimber's voice said quietly as she opened the door. Entering with trepidation, she stood just a foot or two within the room, clasping her hands in front of her. "I'm sorry about yesterday. I...I guess I overreacted."

Jerrica had all but forgotten her argument with Kimber, it didn't seem to matter as much anymore. "Oh Kimber, don't worry about it, ok?" she said, feeling a wave of calm and love for her sister. She approached Kimber and they hugged, both smiling in relief.

"Good," Kimber exhaled. "I wanted to talk to you about something else. I got a call from Riot

yesterday. Rapture's very sick; she's got bronchitis. So she can't do their European tour."

"Oh no, that's terrible!" Jerrica said. "What are they going to do?"

"Well, that's why Riot called me to tell me about it," Kimber replied. "He asked me to join them, to take Rapture's place."

Jerrica raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Wow! What are you going to do?"

Kimber was a little taken aback; she expected Jerrica to be completely against the idea, right from the start. "Well, I'd like to go. I think it would be fun, and it would be a great experience."

"Well, if you think so," said Jerrica. "How long would you be gone?"

"I'm not totally sure," Kimber replied, "but I wouldn't think longer than two or three weeks."

"As long as it doesn't interfere with our benefit concert next month, it shouldn't be a problem," Jerrica told Kimber.

"Really?!?" exclaimed Kimber with a huge smile on her face. "I wasn't sure you'd be ok with my going."

"Oh Kimber, of course I'm ok with it," reassured Jerrica. "I think it'll be good for you."

"Thank you, Jerrica! Thank you!" Kimber cried out as she jumped over and gave Jerrica a huge hug. "I'm so excited!!" With that, she ran out of the room to start packing, leaving Jerrica to her still massive stack of papers.

It was well after eight o'clock in the evening when Jerrica finally returned home to the Starlight Mansion. She had barely gotten into the door and dropped her keys when Terry came running towards her. "Jerrica, Jerrica!" she cried as she waved around a slip of paper, "there's a phone message for Jem!"

"Oh, okay," said Jerrica. "Who's it from?"

"It's from Riot!" squealed Terry. "What should I do with it?"

Jerrica's heart skipped a little. "You can give it to me, I'll make sure Jem gets it." She took the paper from the Starlight girl and said, "Thanks Terry." She then made her way to her office within the mansion and sat down in an arm chair that faced her desk. Turning the phone towards her, she took a deep breath. *Wait, this doesn't feel right*, she thought. Putting her fingers to her red Jemstar earring, she spoke, "Synergy, it's not Jerrica Riot wants to talk to."

"As you wish, Jerrica," she heard in her ear. A moment later, she felt herself relax, as she often did as her alter ego. She then picked up the receiver and dialed Riot's number.

"Jem," she heard him say in his melodic voice, "I'm so glad to hear from you."

"I don't think I was as glad as Terry was to give me your message," she replied. "She was practically jumping up and down."

Riot chuckled, "well, she may have sensed the exciting reason for my call. Jem, Rapture's fallen ill and will have to miss the first leg of our Europe tour."

“Yes, Kimber was telling me about that,” Jem replied. “You’ve asked her to fill in for Rapture.”

“Indeed.” Riot began, “Jem, I wondered how you’d feel about accompanying us for the first two weeks. We’ll be in Paris, London, Rome, Berlin, which are all beautiful this time of year. And you could keep an eye on Kimber that way.”

“Oh wow,” said Jem, “that’s quite an offer. I guess it would be a good idea to be around to watch over Kimber yeah. I’m not sure she’d appreciate it though.”

Again, Riot chuckled. “Don’t do it for her, do it for me.”

He didn’t have to be right in front of her for her to be mesmerized by his charm. He was talented, that man; he knew what he was doing and used everything at his disposal to get what he wanted. Something told Jem it wasn’t the best idea to fly off and gallivant around Europe with the Stingers. For one thing, Rio would not be impressed in the least. But reflecting on that in light of what happened last evening solidified her answer.

“Yes,” she said with a smile, “I’ll tag along.”

“Brilliant!” Riot was ecstatic. “Will you be ready if I send a car for you and Kimber by 8:00 a.m. Friday morning?”

“I think we can make that happen,” replied Jem. “I’ll see you then.”

“Thank you, Jem. You certainly won’t regret this,” Riot assured her. “We may even be able to squeeze some fun into this trip.”

It was Jem’s turn to giggle. “Oh, I’m sure we will. Good night, Riot.”

“Good night, my dear Jem.”

The next few days just flew by; Jem had broken the news to Kimber that she was to accompany her. However, Kimber was still too excited to really care that she’d sort of have a chaperone. The Starlight Girls and Starlight mansion would be left in Aja’s care while they were gone, and Shana would begin wedding planning. She and Anthony had set a date for four months from now. “Why wait?” Anthony had asked her. Shana couldn’t help but agree.

The time was a virtual whirlwind for Kimber, who not only had to pack, but also had to cram in three rehearsal sessions with Riot and Minx. The next thing Jem and Kimber knew, it was 7:55 a.m. Friday morning. Jem’s suitcase was waiting by the front door while she helped Kimber fling a few more things into Kimber’s already stuffed three-piece suitcase set.

“Kimber c’mon,” Jem pleaded, “the car will be here any minute.”

“I just need to find my blue sequined tank,” Kimber said as she moved back to her closet.

Jem raised an eyebrow. “Wait, is Riot not forcing you to wear black and yellow?” she asked cheekily.

“Oh Jem, I won’t be on stage the whole time you know. Wait! I know where it is!” Kimber exclaimed as she shot down and stuck a hand between her nightstand and bed. Lo and behold, out came a shiny blue tank top.

“Finally, can we head down now?” Jem asked.

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” said Kimber as she threw in the tank and zipped up her case.

The Benton girls ran down and were greeted by a limo that brought them to the airport. They were escorted to a private plane, and there, standing at the bottom of stairs was Riot, one leg resting on the first stair, as though he was posing for their arrival. Once their car stopped, he approached and went right to their door. “Ladies,” he said as he opened it and extended his hand to help them out.

“Hi Riot!” Kimber greeted with a huge grin. Then she looked at the plane. “Wow! Our own jet?”

“But of course,” Riot confirmed. “Nothing but the best.” He helped her out of the car, then reached in for Jem’s hand. “Good morning, Jem,” he said, holding her gaze, then breaking it to kiss her hand.

Blushing, she said “Good morning, Riot.”

“Come, the plane will be departing shortly,” he said, as she took her arm and lead her and Kimber inside the plane. It was more grand and exquisite than they could have imagined; white leather seats, a bar, full flight attendant service. It was certainly more than they expected.

Minx was already inside. “Well hello there,” she cooed. “I see Miss Kimber has a baby sitter.”

“You know Minx,” Kimber started to say, but Jem put her hand on her shoulder.

“It’s not that,” said Jem, “I couldn’t pass up a European vacation.”

“Oh, it won’t be all fun and games, Jem,” said Riot as he took a seat across the aisle from Minx. “I’ve also commissioned Jem to be my personal tour guide in Paris. After all, you did film one of your earlier videos there, ‘n’est-ce pas?’” he finished, in perfect French.

“This is true,” admitted Jem. “I suppose there are worse jobs,” she joked as she sat down facing Riot.

“I’ll say,” said Kimber, taking the seat facing Minx and across the aisle from Jem. “Is that our first stop? Paris?”

“Yes it is,” replied Riot. And with a wink at Jem, he added, “We should be there by twilight.”

Several hours later, after a couple of movies, great meals, champagne and good conversation, the plane touched down in Paris. The four musicians disembarked the plane, were whisked off to their hotel and were shown to their rooms. Not surprisingly, Riot had arranged for Jem and Kimber to have a two-bedroom penthouse suite, with his and Minx’s suite on the same floor. The hotel was situated two blocks from the concert venue, as they would be for the entire tour. The Stingers’ first show was to be the next night, with a day off and then another show following. Riot was eager to spend some time with Jem in the City of Love.

Jem was expecting it as well; why else really did he want her to join them on tour? To be Kimber’s chaperone? Really? And still, she said yes. The Rio situation had to be the root cause. Why should she wait around for a guy who wouldn’t commit when Riot had such a talent of

making her feel like the only woman in the world. Sure, he and Rio both seemed to want Jem over Jerrica, but while Rio constantly wavered between Jem and Jerrica, at least Riot was consistent. It was a shame neither seemed to just want Jerrica for who she was; that jealousy of her alter-ego was easy to hide behind. However, she kept thinking back to Syngery's reminders that Jem was indeed a part of Jerrica, just the part that was more free to be herself and have fun. She was also the more mysterious part, and mystery often attracts others. It was becoming easier to be Jem, and for longer periods than being Jerrica. *If only there was a way to merge the two*, she mused. However, she wouldn't be left alone with her thoughts for much longer, as she was interrupted by a knock at her door. Opening it revealed Riot standing in her doorway.

"Are you all settled in okay?" he asked once Jem let him in.

"Oh yes, thanks," replied Jem. "It would be hard not to settle right into somewhere this exquisite."

"Only the best for you, my dear," he said as he held her head in his hand and kissed her cheek.

"Come, you have work to do. You have yet to show me around Paris and our time here is short."

Jem smiled. "As if you need a tour guide. Although, I'm still happy to oblige."

A walk along the Seine River and a quiet dinner in an outdoor café was all Jem needed to unwind after their long flight. They'd taken in some sights along the way, but Riot wanted to keep it low-key given how everyone was pretty tired.

As they approached their hotel again, Riot stopped and took Jem's hands. "Thank you for joining us, Jem. It means a lot to me, the time we get to spend together."

"You don't have to thank me," she said as she looked up at him. He had a very soft look in his eyes, not a look she was used to when she first was getting to know him. "I have to thank you for inviting me along."

Riot now held her around the waist. "Jem, I have to tell you, I've really come to care about you. You're the most amazing person I've ever met." He pulled her a little closer and continued. "I know things are complicated, with Rio and whatnot, but I had to tell you how my feelings for you have grown."

Jem searched his eyes, but she could find nothing but sincerity. The change was extremely welcomed, for in all his pursuits earlier in their relationship, that sincerity just didn't seem present. It seemed he had finally let his guard down, so perhaps it was time for Jem to let hers down as well. "Rio...is Jerrica's concern, not mine." She then brought her hand to his cheek, pulled his face to hers, and gently kissed his lips.

They kissed with all the emotion that lacked in his previous attempts; she was right there, returning his affection. He didn't have to chase anymore, and knowing that was almost overwhelming. It almost meant there was more to lose.

Watching from the lobby, Minx stood with crossed arms and a smirk on her face. *Rio's not going to like this...*

The Stingers' first shows in Paris with special guest Kimber Benton of Jem and the Holograms went very well. In fact, reviews rolled in heralding the fusion of two of music's biggest acts as one of the most ingenious moves within the music industry. On their day off, Jem, Riot, Kimber and Minx spend some time at the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, and other tourist attractions. After another great dinner, they all went dancing at a popular Parisian nightclub. Jem didn't feel any need to shy away from Riot now for Kimber or anyone's sake; she didn't care who knew. Kimber took note of their dancing closely from across the room, the giggles, the caresses, and the happiness emanating from each of their faces. She wasn't sure when she last saw Jem that happy. Surely she was at some point in her relationship with Rio, but things had been different for a while. Kimber came to respect Riot. She was even starting to appreciate certain parts of Minx and Rapture, sometimes.

Taking a break from dancing and flirting with French men, Minx sauntered over towards Kimber. "Well, it looks like Rio will soon be a single man."

Kimber gulped. The situation was beyond complicated, given the dual-identity factor. Still, she responded the only way she could. "Jerrica is Rio's girlfriend, not Jem."

"The way he pines after Jem though, surely Jerrica can't stand it. I don't understand why she puts up with it." Minx shook her head and rolled her eyes. "And then there are those times when he's easily persuaded to spend time with me."

"Which doesn't happen often, does it?" Kimber asked.

Minx glared. "He'll change his mind once he sees he's lost Jem to a real man. He'll be so distraught, he'll forget Jerrica even exists, then he'll have no one. Which is what he deserves." With that, Minx flounced off, in pursuit of another drink, another man.

Letting out a sigh, Kimber headed towards Riot and Jem. She tapped on Jem's shoulder and over the music said, "I'm gonna get back to the hotel room, okay?"

Riot put up his hand. "Hold on, Miss Benton, we will escort you."

"Oh no, I'll be ok," she protested.

"I'm afraid you have no say," Riot insisted, "it's done."

Jem smiled, reassured at the care and protectiveness Riot showed towards her younger sister. As they turned to head back to the hotel, grabbing Minx on the way, Jem squeezed and held onto Riot's arm, feeling more secure than she had in a while. Before they parted ways for the night, Riot asked Jem, "Come on stage tomorrow night? I think the fans would love to see you."

"Oh Riot, they've paid and clamored to see you and Minx," she replied. "Besides, I don't have anything prepared."

Riot lifted her chin to meet his gaze. "It would mean a lot to have you join us for a song. Whichever you'd like, we'll back you up."

"You sure have a way of convincing a girl. And it's a good thing you already know so much of our material. Alright, Mr. Llewelyn, I'll join you for a song."

"Lovely, thank you," he said, before kissing her goodnight. "You'll knock them dead."

An hour later, Minx was lying on her bed, thinking about what to say. Finally, she picked up her hotel phone. "I'd like to dial out to America please," she told the operator.

"Hello?" asked a voice once her call was connected.

"Rio!" greeted Minx, "how nice to hear your voice! It's been too long."

Rio knew her voice anywhere. He was flooded with questions that perhaps she shouldn't be subjected to; why Jem had taken off, where was Jerrica. He'd been given the brush off before Jerrica left, something about seeing family out of state. And when he tried talking to Aja or Shana, they were politely evasive. Maybe he'd get answers from Minx. Never failing to get straight to the point, he jumped right in, "Minx, where's Jem? Why is she over there on your tour?"

"My, aren't you the gentleman. Not even a 'Hi Minx, how are you? I hope you're enjoying Paris.'"

"Cut to the chase Minx. I know you didn't call to make small talk. What's going on?"

"Oh Rio, you know me so well," she cooed into the phone. "I thought you might be interested to know just how good of a time Jem is truly having in Paris," she paused for effect, "with Riot."

Rio immediately started seething, feeling too much anger to reply.

After a moment, when it was clear he would say nothing, Minx went on. "I thought it only fair for you to know that it looks like Jem and Riot are now a couple. They've grown very close during this trip. I hope this news doesn't upset you. Think of it this way; now, you'll be free to move on to a more worthy woman. Like me."

"You know, Minx, you're unbelievable," Rio said through clenched teeth. "You're in Paris now, right?"

"Why yes, yes we are. We have a show tomorrow, well, tonight now. Then we leave for London in the morning."

"Thanks, Minx. Thanks a lot for the info."

Minx's final word from Rio was the sound of the line gone dead. But she knew what was going to happen next, which brought a smirk to her face.

After another day of rehearsals, sound checks, and some relaxation, Kimber and Jem prepared in Kimber's dressing room for the show. Kimber adjusted her makeup, adding some winged black eyeliner to her trademark pink shadow. While Riot didn't suggest she wear black and yellow, as the Stingers have been known to add in other colors now and then, she did incorporate some into her stage fashions. She chose a pink and black zebra-printed tank, yellow-gold leather jacket, and black sequined leggings, topped off with silver glittered stilettos.

As Jem did not pack stage-worthy clothing for the trip, she went shopping for a gown for her performance. She dazzled in a gold sequined, one-shouldered mermaid number, perhaps

another subconscious nod to her musical hosts. As she finished the last touches on her ringleted hair and shimmery smokey eye makeup, she noticed she was feeling butterflies in her stomach. This was a special occasion; she was basically going to be confirming her and Riot's romance to their fans. She wasn't scared though, nor was she hesitant. She was merely content and excited.

"You look gorgeous, Jem," Kimber said. "I have to ask though, what's going on with Riot?" She knew darn well, but obviously was curious as to what Jem would admit.

Smiling to herself as she turned to Kimber, she said "I guess he's just finally won me over."

"Well, you seem happy to finally be caught. I have to ask though, what about Rio?"

Ordinarily, Jem would easily be deflated by such a question. However, she found herself feeling rather confident in her decision. "Rio is on the verge of leaving me, well, for me. Although he's Jerrica's boyfriend, he doesn't seem to let that stop him from chasing after Jem." She paused and turned to face Kimber.

"He won't marry me, Kimber. I mean, he won't marry Jerrica. I can't handle the triangle between him, me and myself, it's too much. Riot, he loves me for me, or for the person who I want to be. And isn't that what love is? True love not only shows you who you actually are, but also who you can be for the right person. Riot and I do that for each other."

Kimber stared at Jem wide-eyed. "Wow, it's so complicated but at the same time, it makes so much sense. You have my full support, Jem." She then went over and hugged her sister. "I love you."

"Thanks, Kimber," said Jem. "I love you too."

Just then, there was a knock at the door, and they heard the voice of the stage director. "Three minutes until show time, ladies."

"We'll be right out," answered Kimber. "C'mon," she said to Jem, "we have a show to do!"

Riot didn't have a chance to see Jem before the Stingers took the stage. They'd performed two-thirds of their set when it was time for Jem to join for her number. As she emerged down a set of stairs to take center stage, the opening notes of her song began as Riot introduced her. Immediately, the crowd recognized their special guest and the arena filled with thunderous applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Jem!" Riot said, as he looked up at Jem descending the stairway. She was a vision, and he could feel himself falling harder as she reached the microphone and began to sing.

Falling in love with a stranger

Can be a strange affair

Suddenly you see a stranger, and strangely enough, you care

You see him in your daydreams, you dream of him each night

Falling in love with a stranger

Can strangely be all right

Jem took the mic from its stand and moved towards Riot, as he strummed his guitar.

All at once, it's all about warmth and affection

All at once, your life strikes out in a bold new direction...

Falling in love with a stranger

Is not so strange at all

Suddenly you meet a stranger and suddenly you fall

It hurts you when you leave him

You hate to be apart

For you've fallen in love with a stranger

But a stranger is no stranger to your heart...

As the final notes were played, she put her hand on his shoulder, followed by a kiss on his cheek. The crowd roared as they observed Jem's confirmation of her and Riot's relationship. Riot's heart soared, fueled by her presence, her actions, and the crowd's support. He let his guitar drop by its strap to the side of his body, took Jem into his arms, and dipped her, giving her a kiss that seemed to have drawn enough applause from the crowd to blow the roof off the concert venue.

True to form, it was at that moment when Rio made his way backstage. Anger enveloped his very being when he saw Riot's arms around Jem, and worst of all, Jem's arms around Riot. It took every ounce of self-control he had to stop himself from bursting onto that stage. But he couldn't make such a public scene, not on a concert stage in front of thousands of people. He'd have to wait to duke it out with Riot later.

The remainder of the concert was a success, the musicians all on a high from the energy of the crowd. But none more so than Riot and Jem, who held hands in the limo on the way back to the hotel. Guards ushered the group through the hotel doors and into the lobby, where a dark figure caught Jem's eye. "Rio?!?" she said, approaching him quickly. "What are you doing here?"

Minx snickered gleefully as she propped herself up on a column to observe the show. This didn't go unnoticed by Kimber, who hissed at her, "You did this, didn't you?"

"Oh what does it matter? It was going to happen sooner or later, I just sped things along."

Rio got up from his seat. "I came after Minx called. She told me things have been going on, that you and Riot are...together." He nearly spit out the word. "I saw for myself after your song. You sure made a spectacle of yourself."

Riot glared at Rio's harsh words, but he held himself back. He simply decreased the distance between himself and Jem, as he wanted to display his support for her.

Jem felt his presence next to her. She appreciated him being close, but maintained her own space while she dealt with Rio. Furrowing her brows, she asked, "You saw that? You saw the show?"

"I saw what I needed to see," he replied. "What are you doing with him?"

"What does it matter to you? You have no claim to me."

"That's not what you've said before. You like stringing us along, don't you? Allowing yourself to be seduced by him," Rio pointed at Riot, "then running back to me when you think your honor and virtue have been threatened."

Jem's cheeks burned, partly with anger, partly with embarrassment.

It was at this point that Riot's desire to be a silent supporter flew out the window. "You have no right speaking to her this way," he said, stepping in between Jem and Rio. I think it would be best if you left. Now!"

"Don't you tell me what to do!" shouted Rio as he lunged toward Riot's face with his fist, a move countered by Riot, who blocked the action and pushed Rio backwards.

Jem cried "Rio! No! Leave him alone!" as Kimber and Minx, as well as a growing crowd of onlookers, watched the scene with wide eyes and gaping mouths.

A security guard came running over. "Stop, or I'll have to call the police!" he ordered, which snapped Rio out of his rage.

He turned back to Jem, who was by Riot's side, checking him over. He took a few breaths, then said, "Jem, we have too much history for you to do this. Please don't throw us away. If you ever want to see me again, you'll come home with me. My plane leaves first thing in the morning. I want to bring you home."

"Rio, I..." Jem started.

"Come with me, or you'll never see me again," he repeated, then he turned and stormed out of the hotel.

The next morning, soon after the sun rose, Jem sat back in the airplane seat, letting the sun's rays caress her cheek. She had made the right decision, she felt it. As sure as she knew the sky was blue and the clouds were white, she knew she was meant to be with him. She looked over at him, smiled sweetly and took his hand, she noted a familiar song playing in her headphones.

It's destiny, the dreams I dream are destined to be

I can see the future and I'm satisfied

You and me, it's destiny

Fate is on my side...