

Chapter 26

Chapter 26

I was sent an invitation to see Mick Riva perform at the Hollywood Bowl that fall. I decided to go, not because I cared about seeing Mick Riva but because an evening outside sounded fun. And I wasn't above courting the tabloids.

Celia, Harry, and I decided to go together. I would never have gone with just Celia, not with that many eyes on us. But Harry was a perfect buffer.

That night, the air in L.A. was cooler than I had anticipated. I was wearing capri pants and a short-sleeved sweater. I had just gotten bangs and had started sweeping them to the side. Celia had on a blue shift dress and flats. Harry, dapper as ever, was wearing slacks and a short-sleeved oxford shirt. He held a camel-colored knit cardigan with oversized buttons in his hand, ready for any of us who were too cold.

We sat in the second row with a couple of Harry's producer friends from Paramount. Across the aisle, I saw Ed Baker with a young woman who appeared as if she could be his daughter, but I knew better. I decided not to say hi, not only because he was still a part of the Sunset machine but also because I never liked him.

Mick Riva took the stage, and the women in the crowd started cheering so loudly that Celia actually put her hands over her ears. He was wearing a dark suit with a loose tie. His jet-black hair was combed back but just slightly disheveled. If I had to guess, I'd say he'd had a drink or two backstage. But it didn't seem to slow him down in the slightest.

"I don't get it," Celia said to me as she leaned in to my ear. "What do they see in this guy?"

I shrugged. "That he's handsome, I suppose."

Mick walked up to the microphone, the spotlight following him. He grabbed the mic stand with both passion and softness, as if it were one of the many girls yelling his name.

"And he knows what he's doing," I said.

Celia shrugged. "I'd take Brick Thomas over him any day."

I shook my head, cringing. "No, Brick Thomas is a heel. Trust me. If you met him, within five seconds, you'd be gagging."

Celia laughed. "I think he's cute."

"No, you don't," I said.

"Well, I think he's cuter than Mick Riva," she said. "Harry? Thoughts?"

Harry leaned in from the other side. He whispered so softly I almost didn't hear him.

"I'm embarrassed to admit I have something in common with these shrieking girls," he said. "I would not kick Mick out of bed for eating crackers."

Celia laughed.

"You are too much," I said as I watched Mick walk from one end of the stage to the other, crooning and smoldering. "Where are we eating after this?" I asked them both.

"That's the real question."

"Don't we have to go backstage?" Celia asked. "Isn't that the polite thing to do?"

Mick's first song ended, and everyone started clapping and cheering. Harry leaned over me as he clapped so Celia could hear him.

"You won an Oscar, Celia," he said. "You can do whatever the hell you want."

She threw her head back and laughed as she clapped. "Well, then I want to go get a steak."

"Steak it is," I said.

I don't know whether it was the laughing or the cheering or the clapping. There was so much noise around me, so much chaos from the crowd. But for one fleeting moment, I forgot myself. I forgot where I was. I forgot who I was. I forgot who I was with.

And I grabbed Celia's hand and held it.

She looked down, surprised. I could feel Harry's gaze on our hands, too.