

CHAPTER 12

Another boring Monday morning at school rolls around, and is creeping by as Mondays at school tend to do. I sit in history class doodling on my Civil War quiz and daydreaming about Sophie and the incredible Metallica concert. I reach in my pocket and pull out the “pic of destiny,” as Sophie had named it. I’ve officially made it my new good luck charm. As I continue to draw little swirls and stars and zone out, I feel my cell phone vibrate. It’s cruel and unusual torture for the teachers to allow us to have our cell phones on us, all the while knowing if we’re caught using them during class time, they’re taken away. It’s like giving a five-year old a candy bar, and telling him to put it in his pocket until lunchtime—virtually impossible.

I know easygoing Mrs. Smith won’t confiscate my phone, so I retrieve my Blackberry from my hoodie pocket, hold it under my desktop and click on the message screen. It’s a text from Mama.

"Hey, Forrest! U r never going to believe where u boys are gonna be playin nxt Sunday... :)"

She leaves me hanging in suspense until I retrieve the second message.

“THE DALLAS COWBOYS!! Half-time at Texas Stadium!!! :0 Woo-Hoo!”

I suddenly get dizzy with excitement. With shaking hands, I text Jake, Randy, and Cody, who are sitting in the classroom with me just five rows back. The four of us race to Mrs. Smith's desk and request hall passes in unison.

Mrs. Smith is so flustered she drops her hall pass pad and crafty, silk daisy-topped ink pen. We’re flipping out and ready to celebrate the news. One by one, she writes out the passes. One by one, we spill out into the silent, empty hallway where Jake, Randy, Cody and I begin doing an impromptu victory dance. We high-five each other and attempt to scream in raspy whispers. Two girls on their way to the office with attendance sheets see us jiggling around and “whisper-screaming.” I’m pretty sure they think we’ve lost our ever-loving minds.

We do our best rendition of Jed Clampet’s Beverly Hillbilly’s hoe down. Cody grabs one of the leery co-eds and spins her around twice as though they’re at a local VFW square dance. The bell rings. The boys and I collect ourselves into one tight group hug before we float our way back into Mrs. Smith’s classroom to pick up our textbooks.

The rest of the school day seems to crawl along, but finally the last hour arrives. I can’t wait to share the news with my football team and the coaches, and when I do, they’re all so stoked for me. Except for D.J., that is. My football buds request an 8 x 10 glossy of the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders for the locker room, and Coach Bryan is completely blown away by the fact that I’ll be standing on the same field with the Dallas

Cowboys and Baltimore Ravens. I revel in the sweet moment while D.J sulks by himself in the weight room doing bicep work. Coweta's team jerseys are orange and black, but it's clear D.J.'s only color is envy-green today.

After football practice, I head to Aunt Carmen's for band practice. I motor down the dusty dirt road with my radio cranked and flip through my iPod to find a Taylor Swift song that I've strategically hidden among my heavy rock tunes and metal music. Listening to Taylor Swift is one of my guilty pleasures. Taylor's popular tune, "You Belong to Me," blares as I belt out the chorus. There's no one here to make fun of me. Only the generic, black and white Holstein cows chewing their cud lazily in the field are witnesses to my complete insanity. I think of Sophie as I sing along—the words remind me so much of her. I wonder if she has Taylor's album. I'm sure she does. I wonder if she thinks of me when she sings along with the song. I hope she does.

When I arrive home, Dad meets me at the door. He wears a strange, controlled grin. "Bud, I'm beginning to think your rock-n-roll dream is starting to pay off. Your mom and I both are going to go with you to the Dallas game on Sunday."

Are my ears deceiving me? Is my Dad actually congratulating me on my band's success? Mama just laughs and asks Dad if his excitement has anything to do with getting to see the Dallas Cheerleaders up close and personal.

Dad smiles and says, "Maybe."

The day of the NFL game arrives with great anticipation. Our families are totally floored by the accommodations for us at Texas Stadium. We're personally escorted to a green room. It isn't even painted green, but is a term for the special waiting room reserved for V.I.P.s, or "very important persons". It's stocked with all the food and beverages we could ever want to consume.

Randy drinks five Red Bulls and is bouncing off the walls. Cody's in finger food heaven. My parents and Megan are thoroughly enjoying being exposed to "the good life." Jake and I explore the Sky Box that's reserved for us. It looks like a fancy living room, complete with an overstuffed, off-white couch, big screen T.V. and glass coffee tables. Our families are going to get to watch the game here in luxurious comfort. Servers in crisp white shirts glide in and out, refilling trays ruffled with fancy green lettuce. We feel like rock-n-roll royalty as our parents toast us with a glass of complimentary bubbly.

Just before the game begins, Mama announces that she's going to go down onto the field to take pictures of us during the half time show. She's so very sentimental and loves taking photographs. Mama always has at least two electronic devices on hand at all times to capture special moments. Her reserve includes two camcorders, a flip cam, three digital cameras, a cell phone camera, an old Nikon 35 mm camera, plus a big bag of back up batteries and chargers for them all. Megan and I have nicknamed her

“Mama-razzi”. She gets lots of, “Oh, Mom, that’s enough pictures,” from Megan and me, but our scrapbooks are fat with happy memories that we’ll cherish in the years to come.

Our band is in place and set to play two Cellar Door Is Gone songs for the Dallas half time. The Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders have even choreographed a dance to our new single, “Rocket.” The boys and I are so stoked. We aren’t as nervous as we thought we’d be, playing in front of sixty-five thousand football fans, because we get to lip-sync the songs. My vocals will be covered up by the professionally recorded track. We can all just chill and jam out.

Frank has a quick pep talk with us in the end zone. He makes an off-color remark about the Dallas Cheerleaders provocative uniforms, and then sends us on our way with a “Do work soldiers!”

Jake, Randy, Cody and I jump on the mobile stage. We’re mesmerized by the crowd. The diehard football fans look like tiny, fidgeting insects in the stands of the gigantic stadium. I inhale deeply and take in the view from the thirty-yard line. It’s absolutely breathtaking. I feel like I’m king of the world. Goose bumps rise on my forearms as my brain buzzes into killer rock mode. I shake my shoulders and jump up and down in place like a prizefighter a few times to loosen up. I realize I have a white-knuckle death grip on my guitar. One by one, I stretch and contract my fingers and now I’m ready for action. Camera lights glare, amps sputter, and producers run around frantically with headsets and walkie-talkies. There’s a frenzy of activity, and then half time begins.

The stage is immediately rushed by a predetermined group of teens who proceed to rock out with us. It’s craziness! The boys and I are really killin’ it, or so we think. We strike the last note of the last song and as the gorgeous Dallas Cheerleaders begin their synchronized exit from the field, *thousands* of football fans break out into raucous boos. I even hear the stinging phrase, “you suck,” being slung with audacity from the packed stands.

My heart begins to thud and my blood pressure climbs. I know my face is turning at least three shades of red. The boys and I practically sprint from the mobile stage and gather by the large archway that separates the field from the underbelly of the stadium. We feel so insignificant as we stand dumbfounded and numb. We watch the herd of massive NFL football players charge back onto the field for the second half.

“Man, they *hated* us! Did you hear them booing?” Jake asks, bewildered.

“Dude, I thought they were rockin’ out,” Cody says quietly. He has the same forlorn look on his face that my cocker spaniel, Stella, had when she got scolded for chewing up one of Dad’s comfy O.U. Sooner house slippers.

Randy and I are just flat out speechless. We turn to make our way back to the “Dallas blue” green room. I dread the inevitable bad review we’re about to receive from

Frank. The boys and I walk slowly, kicking at the turf when, to our surprise, the entire Dallas Cowboy Cheerleading squad in all their blue and white glory comes running our way. This traffic-stopping group of hotties is shaking its glittering, silver pom-poms and prancing in a beeline straight for us. The cheerleaders take turns high fiving and congratulating us. The Cheerleaders' coach is the last in line to hug our necks. She's all smiles and bubbly. It takes our minds off our busted performance for a moment. My buds and I are in awe but still really confused.

"Hey, Coach Keli...were we that bad?" I asked. I didn't really want to hear the answer. My face was still burning crimson red with embarrassment.

"What, honey? Noooo. You boys were fantastic! Your songs were *great!* *We loved it!*" Coach Keli assures.

"Then why was the crowd booing us so loudly?" I ask, still puzzled and numb.

"Oh my goodness, boys. They weren't booing *you*. The Dallas fans were booing the *Ravens'* team coming back onto the field. They were booing their rivals!" Coach Keli laughs and grabs me. The pit in my stomach begins to ease. She gives me a sweet motherly hug. Our embarrassment fades away with her words. "They loved you!" Keli assures.

Sweet relief floods over us all as we watch the Dallas Cowboys' cheerleaders strut their stuff down the cement walkway that leads to their locker room. Randy somehow gets caught smack dab in the middle of the group of beautiful women. His purple and red Mohawk is a static mess and zipping out in all directions as though someone rubbed his head with a balloon. The girls vigorously shake their pom-poms all around him.

"Grab my camera, Dude! Pleeeeeease get a pic of this!" Randy begs, as he's swept away by the mass of cheerleaders. The huge, goofy grin is the biggest I've ever seen on Randy's normally stoic face.

Jake, Cody and I bolt like lightening to catch up in hopes that the bevy of shapely babes in white stretchy hot pants will kidnap us as well. "Mama-razzi" multi-tasks as she snaps pictures with one hand and camcords with the other. She yells for us to us to look her way. Needless to say, we can't hear a single word she's saying—our focus is *elsewhere!*