

LBRIS

We know
books

Maybe Now

Colleen Hoover



**SIMON &
SCHUSTER**

London · New York · Sydney · Toronto · New Delhi

LBRIS

We know
books

Maybe Now

LIBRIS
feel his breath and the wind against my neck as he inches us to the very edge of the plane's opening.

"I know you said you want to skydive because you're dying," he says, squeezing my hands. "But this isn't dying, Maggie! This is living!"

With that, he shoves us both forward . . . and we jump.

Chapter One

Sydney

As soon as I open my eyes, I immediately roll over to find the other side of my bed empty. I grab the pillow Ridge slept on and pull it to me. It still smells like him.

It wasn't a dream. Thank God.

I still can't wrap my head around last night. The concert he orchestrated with Brennan and Warren. The songs he wrote for me. That we were finally able to tell each other how we really felt without guilt being attached to those feelings.

Maybe that's where this new sense of peace comes from—the absence of all the guilt I've always felt in his presence. It was hard falling in love with someone who was committed to someone else. It was even harder trying to prevent it from happening.

I roll out of bed and scan the room. Ridge's shirt is next to mine on the floor, so that means he's still here. I'm a little

nervous to walk out of my bedroom and see him. I don't know why. Maybe because he's my boyfriend now, and I've barely had twelve hours to adjust to it all. It's so . . . official. I have no idea what it will be like. What our lives together will be like. But it's an excited nervous.

I reach down and grab his T-shirt, then pull it over my head. I make a detour to the bathroom to brush my teeth and wash my face. I debate fixing my hair before I walk into the living room, but Ridge has seen me in worse conditions than the present one. We used to be roommates. He's seen me in *way* worse conditions.

When I open the door to the living room, he's there, seated at the table with a notebook and my laptop. I lean against the doorframe and watch him for a while. I'm not sure how he feels about it, but I love that I can watch him unabashedly without him hearing me enter the room.

He pulls a frustrated hand through his hair at one point, and I can tell by the stiffness of his shoulders that he's stressed. Work stuff, I assume.

He eventually catches sight of me, and that seeing me in the doorway seems to ease his stress completely erases all my nervous energy. He stares for a moment and then drops his pen on the notebook. He smiles and scoots his chair back to stand, then makes his way across the living room. When he reaches me, he grabs me and pulls me against him, pressing his lips against the side of my head.

"Good morning," he says, pulling back.

I will never grow tired of hearing him speak. I smile at him and sign, "Good morning."

He looks at my hands and then back at me. "That is so damn sexy."

I grin. "You speaking is so damn sexy."

He kisses me, then pulls away and heads to the table. He grabs his phone and texts me.

Ridge: I have a ton of work to catch up on today and I really need my own laptop. I'm going to head back to my apartment so you can get ready for work. Want me to come over tonight?

Sydney: I drive by your place on my way home from work. I'll just stop by on my way home.

Ridge nods and picks up the notebook he was writing in. He closes my laptop and walks back to me. He wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me against him, pressing his mouth to mine. I kiss him back, and we don't stop, even when I hear him toss the notebook on the bar. He lifts me up with both arms, and a few seconds later, we're across the living room and he's lowering me onto the couch, and then he's on top of me and I'm pretty sure I'm going to get fired this week. There's no way I can tell him I'm already late for work when I'd rather be fired than have to stop kissing him.

I'm being dramatic. I don't want to get fired. But I've waited so long for this and don't want him to leave. I start counting to ten, promising myself that I'll stop kissing him and get ready for work when I reach ten. But I make it all the way to twenty-five before I finally press against his chest.

He pulls back, smiling down at me. "I know," he says. "Work."

I nod and do my best to sign what I'm saying. I know I'm not getting it all right, but I spell out the words I don't know yet. "You should have chosen this coming weekend to sweep me off my feet rather than a work night."

Ridge smiles. "I couldn't wait that long." He kisses my neck and then starts to roll off me so I can get up, but he pauses and stares at me appreciatively for a moment.

"Syd," he says. "Do you . . . feel . . ." He pauses, then pulls out his cell phone. We still have a huge communication barrier in that he doesn't feel completely comfortable speaking full conversations out loud yet, and I don't know enough sign language to hold a full conversation at a decent pace. I'm sure until we both get better, texting will remain our primary form of communication. I watch him text for a moment, and then my phone pings.

Ridge: How do you feel now that we're finally together?

Sydney: Incredible. How do you feel?

Ridge: Incredible. And . . . free? Is that the word I'm looking for?

I'm still reading and rereading his text when he immediately begins typing out another one. He's shaking his head, like he doesn't want me to take his previous text the wrong way.

Ridge: I don't mean free in the sense that we weren't free before we reunited last night. Or that I felt tied down when I was with Maggie. It's just . . .

He pauses for a moment, but I respond to him before

he replies because I'm pretty sure I know what he's trying to say.

Sydney: You've been living a life for others since you were a kid. And choosing to be with me was kind of a selfish choice. You never do things for yourself. Sometimes putting yourself first can feel freeing.

He reads my text, and as soon as his eyes flick to mine, I can see we're on the same page.

Ridge: Exactly. Being with you is the first decision I've made simply because I wanted it for myself. I don't know, I guess I feel like I shouldn't feel this good about it. But I do. This feels good.

Even though he's saying all of this like he's relieved he finally made a selfish choice, there's still a wrinkle between his furrowed brows, like his feelings are also accompanied by guilt. I reach my hand up and smooth it out, then cup his face. "Don't feel guilty. Everyone wants you to be happy, Ridge. Especially Maggie."

He nods a little, then kisses the inside of my palm. "I love you."

He said those words numerous times last night, but hearing them again this morning still feels like he's saying them for the first time. I smile and pull my hand from his so I can sign, "I love you, too."

This all feels so surreal—him actually being here with me after so many months of wishing it could be this way. And he's right. It felt so stifling being apart from him, yet feels liberating now that he's here. And I know he isn't saying all of what he just said because he felt like his life with

Maggie was in any way something he didn't want. He loved her. Loves her. What he's feeling is the result of spending an entire life making decisions that were in the best interest of others and not himself. And I don't think he regrets any of it. It's just who he is. And even though I was a selfish decision he finally made for himself, I know he's still the same selfless person he's always been, so there's going to be some residual guilt there. But people need to put themselves first sometimes. If you aren't living your best life for yourself, you can't be your best self for those in your life.

"What are you thinking?" he asks, brushing my hair back.

I shake my head. "Nothing. Just . . ." I don't know how to sign what I want to say, so I grab my phone again.

Sydney: This all feels surreal. I'm still trying to soak it all in. Last night was completely unexpected. I was starting to convince myself that you were getting to a point where you didn't think we could be together.

Ridge's eyes shoot to mine, and he laughs a little, like my text was completely absurd. Then he leans forward and gives me the softest, sweetest kiss before replying.

Ridge: I haven't been able to sleep for three months. Warren forced me to eat because I was anxious all the time. I've thought about you every minute of every day, but I kept my distance because you said we needed time apart. And even though it killed me, I knew you were right. Since I couldn't be with you, I forced myself to write music about you.

Sydney: Are there any songs I haven't heard yet?

Ridge: I played all my new songs for you last night. But I've been working on one. I've been stuck because the lyrics didn't feel quite right. But last night after you fell asleep, the lyrics started flowing like water. I wrote them down and sent them to Brennan as soon as I got them down on paper.

He wrote an entire song after I fell asleep last night? I narrow my eyes at him and then reply.

Sydney: Have you even slept yet?

He shrugs. "I'll nap later," he says, brushing his thumb over my bottom lip. "Keep an eye on your email today," he says as he leans in for another kiss.

I love it when Brennan makes rough cuts of the songs Ridge writes. I don't think I'll ever get tired of dating a musician.

Ridge rolls off the couch and then pulls me up with him. "I'll leave so you can get ready for work."

I nod and kiss him goodbye, but when I try to walk to my bedroom, he doesn't release his grip on my hand. I turn around, and he's looking at me expectantly.

"What?"

He points to the shirt I have on. *His* shirt. "I need that."

I look at his T-shirt and laugh. Then I pull the shirt off—slowly—and hand it to him. He's eyeing me up and down as he takes his shirt and pulls it over his head. "What time did you say you're coming over tonight?" He's still staring at my chest when he asks this question, completely unable to look me in the eyes.