

# A ROCK CHICK VALENTINE

## *Dilithium Crystals*

"NDY, YOUR PHONE is ringing!" Jet called from the book counter at my store, Fortnum's Used Books (and Coffee Emporium).

Yes, I'd added the "(and Coffee Emporium)" (with parenthesis) because Tex had threatened to go on strike if I didn't.

And if he went on strike, I'd sell way less coffee and therefore might have to curtail indulging in my cowboy-boot, lip-gloss and sexy-underwear habits.

So I'd change the name.

I headed that way and saw Jet staring at my phone like it was a snake about to strike, and I knew who was calling. Duke was behind the counter with her, and he was looking like he was about to impart sage wisdom, as was his way. But I was in no mood.

When I got close, Jet swiped up my phone and held it out to me, arm long and straight, like she was offering me a stinky diaper . . . and yeah.

I knew who it was.

I checked the display anyway and saw I was right.

Because it said, ICE Lee Nightingale.

This was one of the five thousand, two hundred and fifty-three numbers my husband had personally programmed into my phone.

It said "ICE" because it was the number to call in case of emergency, but it actually wasn't his number.

It was Shirleen's desk phone at his office, Shirleen being my friend, and his office manager.

And it was this because, even if Shirleen wasn't there twenty-four seven, someone picked up when that number was dialed, and it would be someone trained to take care of an emergency, no matter what that emergency was, make no mistake.

And that someone would be able to find Lee, and fast, make no mistake about that either.

I hit the screen to take the call.

"Yo," I answered.

"Girl, you know I wanna be making this call like I wanna be in the Nightingale Torture Room having my nails torn out by the roots," Shirleen said as greeting.

My husband did not have a torture room at his private investigation offices.

Okay, maybe he did, kinda.

But he, or his men, didn't pull people's nails out by their roots in there (I didn't think).

"What?" I asked.

"Lee told me to tell you he's gonna be done doin' what he's doin' earlier than he thought and wanted me to let you know he's pickin' up the kids so you don't have to."

She paused, I waited, hope springing eternal because I was an idiot, then she finished, sounding like she was, at

that very moment, having her nails torn out by the roots.

“And he says he’ll take ’em home and order pizza. You guys are havin’ a family movie night.”

And hopes were not only dashed but shot in the head and kicked in the teeth.

Then spit on.

It was Valentine’s Day.

I didn’t want to have a family movie night on Valentine’s Day.

I wanted to have a great meal followed by a sex-a-thon with my husband on Valentine’s Day.

Don’t get me wrong, I loved my kids, even though Suki (our daughter, whose name was actually Alison—she was named after Lee’s little sister and my best friend because we loved Ally, but also because we were forced to do this after threat that she’d never speak to us again if we didn’t) was showing alarming tendencies of being one serious Rock Chick.

I should not be alarmed by this.

I was a Rock Chick through and through.

But Suki had more of those plastic high heels and tubes of little-girl lip gloss than me and my friend Tod, who was the premier drag queen of Denver, put together (though ours were not the plastic or little-girl variety).

And she was not in double digits yet and she’d already gone through a Stevie Nicks phase (demanding I buy her a webbed shawl made of gold yarn which she wore while twirling around in our living room and singing “Gold Dust Woman”), a Joan Jett phase (a four-year-old with heavy black eyeliner and torn jeans was a little scary, but Lee and I had rolled with it) and a Pat Benatar phase (I had to admit, it was cute, a little girl singing “We Belong”).

Not to mention, Callum, our boy, was born a badass, like his dad.

I mean, his first word was “tactical,” and I’m not even kidding about that shit.

And don’t get me wrong, I loved my husband.

First, he was hot. Second, he was insanely good in bed. Third, he was a great father. And last, I’d been in love with him since I was five years old and he held my hand at my mother’s funeral.

Sure, the road between then and now had been rocky, seeing as I made no bones about being in love with him and began a crusade at five to make him my boyfriend.

Then, when I was older, connive to kiss him “with tongues.”

And then, when I was even older, jump his bones.

All of which he’d thwarted.

Until *he* was ready to jump *my* bones.

However, by then I was over it (lie: I was totally not, I was just pretending to be because there was only so much rejection a Rock Chick could take).

And then, I was embarrassed to say, he wore me down in just a few days, we eventually had a sexual wrestling match on his living room floor (an event we had repeated in multiple locations over the years, though not just in the living room) which ended with him carrying me to his bed and making me sing the “Hallelujah” chorus (an event *he* repeated on *multiple* occasions over the years, thank the Lord).

And now we were married with kids.

But we had never, not once, not in all the years we’d been together, been on a date.

No shit.

No dates.

Not one.

And again, today was Valentine’s Day.

Okay, so he was the top private investigator in Denver (actually the Rocky Mountain region, maybe even *the world*, he and his team were that good).

He was also a hands-on dad.

Further, he had a wife who was prone to antics with friends who had the same inclinations (antics as in kidnappings were not out of the equation, neither were explosions, no joke, though that hadn't happened in a while).

In other words, he was busy guy.

But it was Valentine's Day.

We'd had many.

But shit always got in the way.

"Indy?" Shirleen called over the phone.

"Tell him, 'whatever.'"

"Child, that boy is not gonna like 'whatever,' you know that."

"Whatever," I said, then took my life in my hands and hung up on Shirleen, and this was taking my life in my hands because she might be my friend, but she was a badass too and she didn't like people hanging up on her.

I felt bad about this because it wasn't Shirleen's fault my husband was a busy guy and a Valentine's-Day-forgetting jerk.

"You okay?" Jet asked, and I looked to her.

She reared back on seeing my face, but she was Jet. She'd endured a lot in her life. She was no wilting violet. So she might rear back, but she stood her ground.

"What are you and Eddie doing for Valentine's Day?" I asked.

"Um . . ." she mumbled but said no more.

Which meant her husband, Eddie Chavez, was doing what he always did on Valentine's Day for his wife and the mother of his own brood of badasses.

Pulling out all the stops.

"Unh-hunh," I muttered.

"Indy—" Duke started.

"In no mood," I cut him off and moved toward the coffee counter.

Tex was standing there.

Tex had been voted #1 Best Barista in Denver in *Westworld* for eight years running.

If they had the categories, Tex would also be voted #1 Craziest Dude in Denver and also #1 Scariest Dude in Denver and then those categories would be named after him because he was just that crazy . . . and scary.

Case in point, me being in the mood I was, him turning his crazy-man stare at me and his lips in his bushy beard boooming, "Do not get near me, woman! You'll mess with my V-Day mojo! Me and Nancy got plans to adopt a cat and then go out to dinner. No one's gonna mess with my cat-adopting, dinner-with-my-woman, V-Day mojo!"

One could say I was over the moon Tex had found late-in-life love with Nancy, Jet's mom and an all-around great lady.

But.

"Tex, you and Nancy already have fifty cats."

"No, we don't. We have eleven of 'em."

"Tex, you and Nancy already have eleven cats," I amended.

"So?" he asked.

That was it.

So?

I had no answer. The man was crazy. He looked like a serial killer. He made the best coffee I'd ever tasted, and I was a coffee fanatic. The only things I loved more were my husband, my kids, my family of actual family, but also

Rock Chicks and friends, and last, rock 'n' roll, and I loved all of that *a lot*, a lot.

But with all of that, Tex had the biggest heart of anyone I knew (and that was saying something) so he had a room in it for everybody.

Including twelve cats.

My phone in my hand rang.

I looked at it and saw it said, 111 Lee Nightingale (Husband).

Yes, he'd programmed that too.

This was his cell.

"Yo," I answered.

"Whatever?" he asked.

Yep.

He did not like the W-word.

Enough he was too busy to call so he made Shirleen tell me his Valentine's-Day-forgetting plans, but when he heard the W-word, he called.

He also did not like the F-word, and I wasn't talking about the F-word. He used that word all the time.

I was talking about the word "fine."

He hated that word.

Primarily when his wife used it when she was not referring to his ass.

*It's Valentine's Day! I wanted to scream. How could you forget? Every badass in your office has a woman and they've made special plans. I know. Those women have told me about them. And I know Shirleen reminded you and you got busy or ignored her.*

I did not say this.

I said, "Actually, not 'whatever.' I'm picking up the kids. You don't have to worry about it."

I did not share I was picking up the kids so I could dump them on my dad, who, with his girlfriend Lana, was going to watch them.

Along with Lee's brother Hank and his wife Roxie's kids, and Ally and Ren's kids, because it was Dad and Lana's turn in rotation. It was this, seeing as Lee's folks, Kitty Sue and Malcolm, had this year off from Valentine's Day babysitting duties.

I also had reservations at Barolo Grill, my favorite restaurant (Lee loved it too).

My man and I had made reservations there three thousand, eight hundred and thirty-two times.

All of them eventually cancelled.

But I had not forgotten Valentine's Day.

"Babe, I'm gonna be done soon. I can pick up the kids."

"Don't worry about it. I've got them."

"I can get them."

"I've got them, Lee. Go to the office. Do some paperwork."

Heat wafted through my phone, enough it was a wonder my screen didn't melt.

This, hearty indication about my husband's feelings about paperwork.

He was not a sit-at-your desk man.

He was an action man.

There were no complaints from me there, *for certain*.

"Or, grab a beer at Lincoln's with Luke," I made an alternate suggestion.

Though Luke would not be available because Luke had plans to take Ava to a B&B in Morrison that had cute cottages with hot tubs, and there they might eat something, but they'd mostly have a sex-a-thon.

Grr.

“I can pick up the kids, Indy.”

If he picked up our kids, he’d spoil the surprise!

“I’ve got the kids, Lee!” I snapped.

“Okay, baby.”

God!

It was *so* annoying he could give in and call me baby and I wanted to rip his clothes off through a phone even if I was irked at him he’d forgotten Valentine’s Day.

“Later,” he said.

“Later, Lee.”

We hung up.

The bell over the door rang.

I looked that direction to see Ally and our friend, plus her office manager, Daisy (Ally was a PI too) walk in.

Daisy looked like Dolly Parton, including the big, blonde hair and the huge bazungas.

And Daisy was in Valentine’s Day mode.

This meant she was wearing a scarlet-red tube dress that had a heavy scattering of diamante across the boobs—boobs, by the by, that were barely contained by the material and thus serious cleavage was showing—a stone-washed jeans jacket (that had a heavy scattering of red diamante across the shoulders) and red go-head pumps with marabou feathers wafting over her toes.

And I knew, in a little over an hour, she was boarding a private jet, and her husband, Marcus, was flying her to Aspen for dinner and nookie.

She was probably just here to grab a coffee for her and Marcus for the flight.

Bah!

Daisy took one look at my face and said, “Sugar.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” I announced, turned on my cowboy boot, and prowled into the rows of bookshelves that made up most of Fortnum’s Used Books but was not where hardly anyone went.

Because they didn’t come here for used books.

They came there for the Coffee Emporium.

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“Indy, I’m home!” Lee yelled.

I did not answer because I was in our bathroom, lining my lips with long-wearing liner, and every girl knew, you needed concentration when doing that shit.

It took a while for my husband to find me, mostly because we had a huge-ass house.

We’d moved out of the duplex where we’d lived in the beginning because, one, I got pregnant and our two-bedroom duplex did not accommodate kids, my penchant for stuffing my desk full of girlie stationery, my closet full of clothes, Lee needing space to sprawl, drink beer, and watch the Broncos, and our sex life.

There was also a reason two.

Reason two was that the duplex did not communicate via Lee *“I provide for my wife and children”* (with italics).

Therefore, he’d bought us a thirty-five-hundred-square-foot mini-mansion.

I had protested this because, a) this meant Tod and Stevie were not on the other side of us, and as such, who was going to put on my fake eyelashes when I needed that (and who was going to do the yardwork, because Stevie did not do bad yard but Lee nor I did yard at all)? And b) I did not have the desire to clean our one-thousand-square-foot

duplex, I *really* did not have the desire to add two thousand five hundred square feet to that.

Lee, being Lee, hired a cleaner, a gardener and told me I looked as gorgeous without makeup as with it so who gave a fuck about fake eyelashes.

I still drove to Tod and Stevie's when I needed my eyelashes put on.

By the by, that evening, I'd had to pop by Tod and Stevie's for an emergency eyelash fitting, which Tod fit in before they took off for their Valentine's Day plans.

I was swiping on my long-wearing lipstick when I heard Lee say, "Indy, I called—"

He stopped speaking abruptly, primarily because he'd hit the doorway to our bathroom and caught sight of my ass.

I was tall and had never been svelte.

My husband, fortunately, got off on curves, and equally fortunately, *way* got off on the additional ones I did not quite lose after I gave him two children.

But it wouldn't matter.

I looked the shit. I might have ass, a belly, big tits and arms you could not see the sinews of my muscles in, but I fucking rocked it.

So I was in a kickass body con dress because I knew my husband would dig that.

And I was in kickass body con dress because I kicked ass in that dress.

It was bright red.

It was midi-length.

It had a deep plunge at the neck that went past my cleavage well to my midriff and showed breast curve *big time*.

It led down to legs that ended in high-spike-heeled, matte-gold strappy sandals.

And it was worth a repeat, it was body con

As in, *skintight*.

I looked through the mirror at Lee and said, "Hey."

He did not reply.

He was focused.

And as he'd been special forces trained by the Army, his focus was *focused*.

This on my ass.

This was proved when he moved into the room and put both hands on said ass, slid them around to my hips, my belly and looked over my shoulder into my eyes in the mirror.

Seriously.

He was hot.

Melted chocolate eyes.

Thick, wavy brown hair.

Tall.

Built.

Beautiful.

"Hey," I repeated.

"Hey," he replied.

Okay.

So I was weak.

But all was forgiven with that look on his face, his hands on me, his heat hitting me at the back, and his deep voice saying, "Hey."

"Where are the kids?" he asked.

Translation: I'm going to fuck you in two minutes, so I need to know the whereabouts of the children so I know if I need to lock the bathroom door and how much noise we can make.

"With Dad. It's Valentine's Day. Surprise. We have reservations at Barolo Grill and those reservations are soon," I told him. "You need to change."

"It's Valentine's Day?"

Okay, I was back to being pissed.

"Yeah," I snapped.

He smiled at me, and I was even more pissed, regardless that my nether regions quivered at seeing his smile.

Lee had been voted best smile in high school. He also would have been voted most likely to get in your pants, if the school administration had allowed that category.

This because he was hot.

Also because his smile was *that good*.

He bent his head, kissed my shoulder, and murmured, "I'll change."

He then moved away.

I finished my lipstick, grabbed my perfume and spritzed it in the air before walking through it, like the dudes on *Queer Eye* taught me.

I then ignored my husband changing because I might have curves, but he kept ultra-fit due to his career choice, his personal choice, and his need for his wife to want to jump his bones at any given moment, and I did not need to be witnessing that, or we'd never go on a date.

(Just to say, preemptory jumping of bones was eighty-nine-point-nine percent of why we never went out on dates.)

I grabbed my evening bag, dumped in my lipstick, checked its contents, then moved into our room, then the hall, down the stairs, and kept motoring.

But I stopped dead at the dining room table.

This was because there was a massive spray of perfect red roses on it, under which sat a heart-shaped box of chocolates festooned in red cellophane paper with a big red bow.

He'd given me hearts and flowers.

My husband, Badass Lee Nightingale, had given me, Rock Chick Indy Nightingale, hearts and flowers.

He hadn't forgotten Valentine's Day.

Oh.

My.

God!

He'd given my hearts and flowers!

Shit.

I was gonna cry.

I did *not* do tears.

His arms were gliding around me from behind, and when they'd fitted me to his body, he whispered, "Happy Valentine's Day, baby," in my ear.

"You're a jerk," I said through deep breathing.

"Right," he said through what I could tell was a smile.

"We're going to dinner. We're not canceling Barolo Grill. Not again. I'm not going to let you do me on the dining room table," I declared, even though I *so totally* wanted him to do me on the dining room table.

Gah!

"I'll do you on the table later."

"That's a plan." I turned in his arms, pulling out of them, and grabbed his hand. "Let's go."

I marched him to the garage door and into the garage.

FYI: Our house was three thousand five hundred square feet.

Our garage, I didn't know, I didn't get out the measuring tape, but at a guess, it was five thousand.

This was because I'd upgraded my dark-blue VW Beetle to a light-blue convertible VW Beetle.

This to the extreme distress of my husband.

But I did it.

He flatly refused to drive it, ride in it, and as far as I could tell, look at it or acknowledge its existence.

He also forbade our children to be transported in it due, he said, to safety reasons.

I allowed this ban since he bought me a rad, red Volvo SUV in which to cart our kids around.

This left the Beetle for joyriding, which I still did, frequently, with one or several Rock Chicks.

Callum, by the by, his father's son, also refused to acknowledge the Beetle's existence.

But Suki had made me write out (in pink glitter pen, which meant she meant business) my intention to leave her the Beetle in my will.

Once we hit the garage, as was my husband's way, I was no longer leading. His longer legs overtook me, and he guided me past the Beetle, the Volvo, his company Ford Explorer, to his sleek black Maserati.

It had been a sad day when we'd retired his Crossfire.

Though it wasn't retired, as such.

It was in storage since neither of us could bear to part with it and we didn't have space to fit it in our garage.

But as you could see, what we had meant we had a four-bay garage.

And that didn't count ample space for holiday decorations, mine, Lee's and the kids' clothes I couldn't bring myself to give away (I totally needed to KonMari), and Lee's Ducati.

We got in his killer car.

Lee hit the door opener then made the car purr.

He backed out.

And away we went to Barolo Grill.

*Finally.*

Yippee!

Since my lipstick had set, I was applying the overlayer of lip gloss when it struck me we were not headed to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

We were headed downtown.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"What?" he asked back.

I turned my head, ignored his crisp, steel-gray shirt and the kickass blazer he wore (for I knew he looked so good in them, it would give me the desire to take them off), took in the planes and angles of his handsome face, his square jaw, his fantastic head of hair . . .

And said, "Liam Nightingale, love of my life, father of my children, often supreme pain in my ass, *where are you going?*"

"Gotta do something real quick."

Oh boy.

Downtown was where his office was.

"Are you taking me to your office on Valentine's Day when we have," I dug my phone out of my purse, checked the display, and finished, "T-minus ten minutes to make our reservation?"

“Cool it, baby. We’ll be good.”

Okay, there was a rule in Rock Chick Land.

A guy, even a guy as hot as Lee, did not get away with “baby” when it was preceded by “cool it.”

“Lee . . .”

“Indy,” he reached for my hand, brought it to his mouth, touched my knuckles with his lips, and finished, “trust me.”

Shit.

He could totally get away with that because I did that.

I trusted him.

And the lip touch was sah-weet.

Though I would find, in short order, we were not going to his office.

We were going somewhere else.

This I knew when he pulled smoothly to a stop in front of Hotel Teatro.

Okay.

All right.

So we were going to The Nickel.

The food was good there.

And maybe hitting a show or the symphony after (or before) at the Denver Center for Performing Arts.

This meant he *really* hadn’t forgotten about Valentine’s Day.

It wasn’t Barolo Grill, but I’d deal.

The valet opened my door.

I got out.

Lee commandeered me and walked us into the hotel.

We did not head to The Nickel.

We headed to the reception desk.

Oh boy.

“Nightingale, Liam. Reservation,” he rumbled at the reception lady.

She stared up at him, ignoring my existence, and did it with an expression that said she was trying not to drool.

I tapped my (blood-red, SNS, coffin-shaped, hell yeah, I was a Rock Chick) fingernails on the reception counter somewhat patiently impatient because I had practice with this.

A lot of it.

A man walked behind the desk, stopped dead, stared at my hair, then my tits, then jerked when he felt the scorch of my husband’s eyes, and turned on his fancy, trendy brown shoe and walked away like he needed to go check if his hair was on fire.

All right, then.

“You’re all set, Mr. Nightingale,” the woman said, eyeing me enviously and handing Lee a little envelope with key cards. “The Chancellor’s Suite is waiting for you.”

The Chancellor’s Suite.

Okay.

Well, apparently Lee *really* had not forgotten Valentine’s Day.

Lee looked down at me. “I cancelled Barolo Grill.”

Obviously, he knew my plans.

Equally obviously, Shirleen (and probably others) were in on this.

I said nothing and didn't even get a little mad, because . . .

Chancellor's Suite!

Lee then walked us to the elevator.

But he didn't speak again until we were in it.

"You know, I'm gonna expect you to do that thing with your mouth."

We were going to the Chancellor's Suite.

My husband had not forgotten Valentine's Day.

I was *oh so totally* doing that thing with my mouth.

"And that dress is on the floor," he continued, "but you're wearing those shoes until I make you pass out."

Another nether region quiver.

A good one.

I turned my head and smiled up at him.

His eyes dropped to my smile, his face grew dark, and his hand tightened around mine.

The elevator doors opened, and he walked me out.

To our room.

Into our room.

And I saw there was a fireplace, a living room, a full kitchen and a dining room table that seated twelve.

Nice.

Options.

Lee did not bother with the fireplace, the kitchen or anything else.

He put out the do not disturb sign, closed the door, threw the security latch, and took hold of me again to walk me to the bedroom.

He stopped us at the foot of the bed, but I was in a trance.

I was this way because each nightstand had a crystal globe filled with fresh, tightly-bunched red roses. One nightstand had a plate of petite fours, a small plate of truffles, two sparkling champagne flutes, and standing on the floor in front of it was a bucket that held two bottles of Dom. The other nightstand had a charcuterie board and a crystal bowl of cashews.

The bed was covered in red rose petals.

And there was a long, thin burgundy velvet box on the end of the bed.

With no ado whatsoever, Lee swiped up the velvet box.

"Because you're a great mom," he started.

Oh shit.

Shitshitshit.

I was *totally going to cry*.

He flipped open the box.

"Because you're beautiful."

He pulled a twinkling diamond bracelet out of the box.

"Because you're dynamite in bed."

Lee grabbed my wrist.

I started hyperventilating.

He clasped the bracelet on.

It was *amazing*.

He looked in my eyes.

“And because I love you.” He slid an arm around me and bent his face to mine. “Happy Valentine’s Day, Indy.”

“You suck,” I whispered.

And got The Smile.

“And you’re a pain in my ass,” he replied.

I wish I could deny that

But I couldn’t.

I put my evening bag between us, unsnapped it, and pulled out the item I’d taken out of the box (since the box didn’t fit in my purse) and wrapped in an eyeglass cleaner.

I unfurled it and showed it to him.

It was a Piaget watch, limited edition, rose gold, wood and leather marquetry dial, brown alligator strap, and it cost so many of Tex’s coffees, I couldn’t think about it or I’d faint.

I felt bad about the gators, but that watch was *awesome*.

Lee was not a watch guy.

Lee was a blowjob guy.

But he was staring at that watch like I’d shown him I’d discovered dilithium crystals.

“It’s engraved,” I shared and flipped it around.

I knew Lee read the *Since I Was Five* after he growled, took the watch from me, tossed it on the bed, then tossed *me* on the bed.

And wasted no time joining me there.

I sang the “Hallelujah” chorus six times that night.

I also gave my husband spike-heel marks in his shoulders, his ass and the backs of his thighs.

We drank all the champagne.

We decimated the charcuterie, cashews, petite fours and truffles.

We tried out the fireplace.

And we *totally* broke in the dining room table.

I did that thing with my mouth (twice).

And it was a Rock Chick Valentine.

*The End*