



Sometimes the  
biggest risk  
is playing it safe...

# CHANCE *of a* LIFETIME

AN ANDERSON BROTHERS STORY

MARISSA  
CLARKE



*Sometimes the biggest risk is playing it safe.*

Gen Richards is tired of living down to her family's expectation of the helpless blind girl. Resurrecting her high-school bucket list that begins with "kiss a total stranger" seems just the thing until she finds herself in a panty-melting lip lock with her big brother's best friend.

Chance Anderson thrives on adrenaline, but Genny's the one risk he's not willing to take. His recklessness a decade ago landed her in the hospital and ejected him from her life. He's bad for her and everyone knows it—especially her big brother.

Chance reluctantly helps Gen complete her bucket list in order to keep her out of trouble. Running through a freezing fountain, playing spin the bottle while fending off a mad horde of stinging insects, and skinny dipping with homicidal attack swans don't hold a candle to the real danger: falling for the one person he can never have.

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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**LOVE**  
→-struck→

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*For Laine*  
*Who gave me a real-life happily ever after.*



# Chapter One

Gen took a long pull on her beer, perversely enjoying her wallow in self-pity. It was a luxury she never allowed herself. Today, though, was different. All her buttressing against any show of weakness or self-doubt over the years seemed wasted, as did the protective cocoon she'd erected to appease her family. Today had brought home just how misdirected her entire life had been to date.

Sally, the receptionist for the recording studio, had been twenty-six—only one year older than her. *Boom. Done. Just like that.* Dead with no warning in a freak accident.

She downed the rest of her beer in harsh gulps and set the glass on the tiled bar. At least Sally had *lived* before she'd died. More than Gen could say for herself.

“Hot guy at two o'clock,” Sherry, her best friend and coworker at Decibels Sound Studio, whispered from the barstool next to her. “Oooh. He's hella fine. Same guy as before. All tall and lean and badass broody.”

“Why don’t you go say hi?” Gen suggested, not ready to give up her self-indulgent pity party.

“Another beer?” Andy asked from behind the bar as he swept her glass away with a staccato scrape across the rough surface.

She liked the bartender. His voice had a musical quality and he smelled of Old Spice deodorant—she knew because it was what her brother used—and whiskey. Today, the whiskey scent wasn’t as pronounced, but it was early yet. By the end of his shift, he would sport at least an ounce of various liquors. The smell of alcohol reminded her of someone else—someone she didn’t allow herself to think about anymore.

She ran her fingers across the small, jagged tiles of the bar and pulled a pretzel from the paper-lined plastic basket situated between her and Sherry. “Sure. Another beer would be great.”

The crunching of the pretzel drowned out the click and fizzle of Andy pulling the tap on her beer, but not the appreciative yummy noises Sherry made with regard to the guy she’d mentioned earlier.

“Don’t look now, but he’s watching you.”

Gen snorted at her friend’s joke. Sherry was the only one who felt comfortable enough to kid with her about a topic everyone else considered taboo. “Don’t worry, I’m not looking.”

“Here you go.” Andy set her glass down in front of her, gently pushing it against her hand.

“Who’s the guy at the corner table?” Sherry asked.

“Oh, that’s the doctor. He’s been hanging out here on Tuesday nights for a while.” Glasses clinked as he moved

them behind the bar.

Sherry shifted on her stool with a rustle of fabric. “Tuesdays. That’s *our* night here. A *doctor*. Did you hear that, Gen?”

He laughed. “No. That’s our nickname for him because he always orders a Dr Pepper. No booze. Ever.”

Rubbing her finger around the rim of the glass, Gen sighed. No alcohol would probably have been a good choice for her tonight, considering her mood.

Andy leaned close enough for the air to move across her face and arms. “You okay?”

Funny. That was probably the number one question people asked her. And she always answered the same way. Hundreds—no, thousands—of times, she’d answered yes. But she was lying. She wasn’t okay. She’d never been okay. She never *would* be...not unless something changed. Unless she *made* it change before it was too late and she ended up like that poor girl at the receptionist desk who choked on a mint.

Nothing reckless. Nothing dangerous or daring. Simply a mint. Just like that.

“No, I’m not okay,” she answered. “I’m horrible, in fact. Never been worse.”

“We lost a coworker,” Sherry explained. “It was unexpected.”

Andy cleared his throat. “I’m sorry.”

“Me, too. She was supersweet.”

She regretted not hanging out with her more. Sally had asked her to go out after work several times, but she’d always declined. She’d been too busy keeping to her routine. Following her brother’s wishes. Playing it safe. Never

stepping outside her circle of safety.

Safety. For what? Sally was a fun-loving, outgoing girl who had recently become engaged. And she died because she choked on a mint, not because she did something dangerous like ski down some uncharted vertical slope or jump out of an airplane—or in the case of Gen, simply cross the freaking street.

Which just went to show, no matter how careful she was, no matter how protective her brother was of her, something unexpected could come along and end it all in the blink of an eye.

*No more.* From now on, no more playing it safe. She reached to get her purse off the next stool and accidentally bumped her cane, which fell to the ground with a metallic *clang*. When Sherry made to retrieve it, she stilled her with a hand on her shoulder. “I’ve got this.” After righting the cane, she rooted in her purse until she found what she was looking for. She flattened the scrap of paper on the bar and slid back onto her stool.

“What is that?” her friend asked.

Gen closed her eyes and remembered how excited she’d been in high school when she created this. Life had so many possibilities at fifteen. Funny how ten years could turn that around. “It’s my bucket list.”

The paper crinkled as Sherry picked it up. “What’s on it?”

She didn’t even need to read it to know what it said. “Things I intend to do as soon as possible. Starting with number one right now.”

The list had sat dormant for ten years. But not anymore. No more waiting for a mint to off her.

Sherry squealed through her nose like she did at the studio when she was really excited. “You know I can’t read braille. What’s first on the list?”

A smile stretched across her face. “Number one: Kiss a total stranger.”

## Chapter Two

Once Sherry stopped squealing and clapping, and the list was tucked carefully back inside her purse, Gen took a deep breath and a fortifying swallow of beer.

Yep. She was really going to do this, and no big brother or an overabundance of caution or fear was going to get in her way. “Where’s the doc?”

“He’s in the corner still.” Sherry rotated her forty-five degrees plus a little more.

“Obstacles?”

“Nothing right now. Do you want your cane?”

“No. If I’m clear, I’m going hands-free.”

And for a moment, her heart seemed to stop beating. This was way out of character for her. As if sensing her doubt, Sherry leaned closer. “Good idea. As smokin’ hot as this guy is, you’re definitely going to want your hands free.”

The encouragement did the trick and her heart kicked in again. “How far away?”

“Twenty feet, max,” Andy said.

“Standing or sitting?”

Sherry giggled. “Sitting on a stool. His face is perfect height for a lip-lock.”

For a moment, a lump rose in her throat. *Nuh-uh*. She’d suppressed all signs of life for years now. *No chickening out. Not ever again*. After another deep breath, she raked her bangs out of her face. “Get me within six feet of him and point me in the right direction,” she instructed her friend, who immediately offered her elbow.

Consciously loosening her death grip on Sherry’s arm, Gen took a step forward, and then another until she counted ten steps, which should put her within five or so feet of him.

“Straight ahead,” Sherry mumbled under her breath then pulled her hand away.

Gen tilted her head and listened, but picked up nothing other than her friend’s retreating steps and the regular sounds of the bar early on a Tuesday night. “What’s up, Doc?” she asked, finally.

No answer. Not even breathing. Odd. Usually, people answered her—sometimes almost yelling because of a bizarre prevalent assumption that blind people must not be able to hear either.

With one arm bent in front of her face at eye level and the other making slow sweeps straight out in front, she shuffled closer to where she was told he was sitting on a stool.

A slight rise in temperature registered through her fingertips, indicating she was close, and then contact. Soft cotton jersey over hard muscle.

*Damn.*

Skimming lightly, her second hand joined the first in a

sweep over the surprisingly solid planes of his chest. And still, he said nothing.

Laying her palms flat on his pecs, she could feel his rapid, strong heartbeat, which accelerated by the second. He might not be speaking, but he was certainly surprised. The quiet type. She liked that.

She trailed her fingers higher, over his clavicle, up the sides of his neck, where soft hair brushed the tops of her hands. Long hair. She liked that, too. And his smell was fabulous. Minty and clean with an overlay of Gain laundry detergent—the same one she used.

Slight stubble like what would happen over the course of a day covered his angular jaw, and her thumbs roamed over full, soft, parted lips.

*Shit! What was she doing?* She was standing in a bar fondling the face of a perfect stranger, that's what. Completely perfect, she concluded, as his rapid breaths blew across her fingers. Her hands trembled and a spike of longing pierced her control.

For a fleeting moment, she almost stepped away, but then remembered how carefree she'd been a decade ago when she'd created her bucket list. She could live that way again, waking up every morning excited for what the world would bring, rather than simply plodding through the days, ticking off tasks on her schedule, counting steps, and making her family happy.

It was time for a change, and this was the first step to taking her life back. This kiss. Right now.

At some point during her internal deliberations, he had stood, making her reach up in order to keep her fingers on his lips. She slid her hands down his neck to the top of his

shoulders and pushed hard until he sat on the stool again, then caught his jaw in her hands.

For a moment she paused, and her customary caution crept in.

*No.* No more playing it safe. This was it. Her first step to a new life, and hell or high water, she wouldn't wimp out now. She covered his mouth with hers, surprised by the softness of his lips compared to the hard muscles of his chest. As if frozen, he didn't react to her mouth moving across his. But when she ran her tongue along the seam of his lips, he made the first sound since this whole business started—a cross between a whimper and a groan—and placed a hand in the center of her back, splaying his fingers wide between her shoulder blades. Then he tilted his head and finally kissed her back.

And, man, oh, man, could he kiss. Like nothing she'd experienced before—not that she'd kissed a ton of guys, but she'd kissed a few. Enough to know this wasn't a garden-variety encounter.

She ran her fingers through his soft hair and scraped her nails across his scalp. This time when he made a noise, it was more of a growl, filling her from head to toe with a heady buzzing electric sensation, culminating in a warm flush in her belly. He pulled back breathing heavily, like her.

No more caution or careful planning. From this point forward, she wanted to feel like this. Alive and sensual and needed—not needy. Though honestly, she *was* needy, but in a physical way—not an emotional, dependent way.

“Don't stop,” she said, tightening her grip in his hair. He responded by wrapping his arms around her, pulling her between his thighs until their bodies touched and his hard

bulge pressed against the front of her jeans.

His tongue stroked hers in a rhythm her body recognized instinctually, and that hot flush in her belly happened again.

Yes. This was living. This was who she was, not some timid, fractured creature reliant on others to assure her safety and happiness.

On and on, the kiss continued, their tongues tangling as their bodies heated until she was sure she'd combust right there in the bar in front of everyone...

*Oh, damn.*

Yeah, they were in front of people, making out like horny teenagers. *Double damn.*

And as the world came back into focus, punctuated by clinks of glasses and nineties music, the buzzing in her body receded, and she took a reluctant step back. The cool air swirled where his hot body had just been, making her shudder. What should she do now? Was she supposed to say thank you? Or maybe, "Holy shit, buddy, you can kiss!"

Was there a protocol for addressing a stranger she'd walked up to and kissed? Probably not, so she simply cut her losses and walked away, heading straight back in the direction from which she'd come.

"Genny."

She stopped dead in her tracks, pulse hammering in her ears. No one called her that. At least not in the last ten years. She swallowed hard. *No. It couldn't possibly be...* His face was too angular and he was too tall and muscular to be... *Chance Anderson.* Just saying the name in her head made gooseflesh rise on her arms.

He'd been only seventeen back then, still just a boy. This was a man.

And he smelled nothing like Chance, who had been cloaked in cigarette smoke and suntan lotion, and reeked of adventure and freedom.

This guy, with all his sharp angles and hard planes, smelled of toothpaste and clean clothes. His scent was refined, but his kisses certainly weren't. She raised her fingers to her lips. God. Had she just kissed her big brother's best friend? Surely not...

"Genny," he said again in his rich, nuanced saxophone voice, and as he moved within reach, recognition funneled through her in a sickening trickle all the way down to her toes. The voice was almost the same. She'd know it anywhere.

How could this have happened? Of the thousands of people she could have randomly kissed in this city, it had to be Chance.

And as instinctively as her body had responded to his kiss, her mind and heart reacted to his voice. She reached out and laid her palm on his cheek, and then, with no prelude, she drew back and slapped him as hard as she could.

*The asshole.*