



THE
LOST BOYS

FRAYED
STRINGS

J A L O W

FRAYED STRINGS

BOOK 1 - THE LOST BOYS

JA LOW



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HENDRIX

“**W**hat the ...” a female voice yells through our home.

“This is worse than I thought,” a male voice joins her in agreement.

“They can’t keep acting like this, Chris.”

“I know, babe. They’ve been through a lot, though.”

“It’s been six months since the accident. They are pissing their lives away,” the female says angrily.

The mere mention of the accident has my stomach rolling like a stormy sea. I crack a bleary eye open and concentrate on the fuzzy images in front of my vision. Slowly, the two silhouettes come into focus. Vanessa and Christian Taylor from our label, Dirty Texas Records, are standing in our living room, not looking happy with the scene before them.

“They lost their brother. Their friend. Their bandmate, Ness,” Christian explains softly to his wife. “If I’d lost one of the Dirty Texas guys, I, too, would be like this.”

Silence stretches between them, like being in the eye of a hurricane.

“We need to do something. I will not sit back and watch them destroy everything they’ve all worked so damn hard for. They are too talented for this shit,” Vanessa states, her anger palpable.

“What are you guys doing here?” Eli mumbles while rubbing the night before from his eyes.

“Glad to see you’re alive,” Vanessa declares sarcastically as she folds her arms across her chest.

“Barely.” Eli chuckles as he reaches down and scratches his balls right in front of them.

Christian’s eyes narrow on my friend, not pleased.

“You missed your appointment at the studio,” Vanessa reminds Eli.

“We had an appointment?” he asks as his brows pull together in confusion.

“Did Alice not remind you?” Vanessa asks.

Alice is our assistant, and she’s supposed to get us to and from places on time. But, in all honesty, she’s a groupie, more concerned about fucking us than doing her job efficiently or effectively.

“Um ...” Eli rubs his bloodshot eyes and blinks a few times. “No.”

“Where the hell is she?” Vanessa questions.

“Last time I saw her, she was riding Zeke,” Eli explains.

Vanessa’s shoulders sag in defeat. “We have to get rid of her,” she whispers to her husband.

Christian nods.

It’s a shame she has to go because Alice is a lot of fun. Maybe not responsible, but definitely a lot of fun. Plus, her mouth is like a damn Hoover. She’s also a convenient fuck when we can’t be bothered going out or are too drunk to make it past our front gates. The woman is always ready and willing. She doesn’t care if we fuck her separately or together as long as we are fucking her.

“Monday morning, I want to see you *all* in my office,” Vanessa tells Eli sternly. Her attitude is *take no shit*, and I don’t blame her; we’ve been fucking up.

“Sure,” he agrees instantly.

“I mean it!” Vanessa points at him. “If you don’t show up on Monday, I will have no option but to terminate your contract.”

Now those words gain our attention.

“What?” Eli sits up on the couch. “You wouldn’t?”

“Try me.” Vanessa stands her ground, hands on hips. “The label has given you boys so much leeway after the accident, but you refuse everything we’ve organized for you. We don’t know what more we can do. You don’t seem to care. So why should we? If you are a no-show, there will be no more chances. It will be grounds for instant termination. Got it?”

I see them nod because there is little else the boys can say right now before closing my eye once more.

Story of our lives.

People don’t give a shit unless we pay them to care, and even then, it’s only until the money runs out.

We all grew up in the foster system—Zeke, Eli, Brodie, and I—shuffling from one home to the next, dealing with drunks, druggies, and violent families. It wasn’t until we were all placed in a home together when we were fifteen that we didn’t feel alone anymore.

When the four of us met, that was it—brothers for life.

Nothing anyone threw at us could get to us. Not our foster father’s fists or another’s wandering hands. Nothing they doled out could hurt us as long as we were together. We were an armored shield around each other, keeping out the evil for as long as we could.

We lasted one year in the last hellhole until Brodie was found battered, bruised, and bleeding because our foster dad and his drunk friends used him as their personal toy. That was the last straw for us.

Zeke, Eli, and I were given detention for some bullshit thing that day, so we weren’t there. Brodie said he would go home and grab his guitar so we could practice during detention. We were going to busk in the mall later that

evening. Friday nights were when we made most of our money. We wanted to save everything we made to get out and away from our lives. When he never returned, we rushed home, and that's when we found him on his bed, unresponsive. It took everything in us not to kill our foster dad and his friends, but there was no time for that. We needed to rush Brodie to the hospital.

That night broke him.

It's what started his addiction to drugs.

He'd struggled ever since, trying to exorcise the demons inside him until that night six months ago.

We were touring with the band.

We had made it.

Our fifth number-one hit.

Our first album had gone platinum.

Billions of streams online.

We were on top of the world.

Then came the news that our foster dad had gotten out of jail. We'd pressed charges after the hospital called in the authorities. Luckily, there was enough evidence at the crime scene to prosecute *all* the men involved. The asshole had been given ten years, but unfortunately, he'd been let out on good behavior after only six years. When Brodie heard of his release, fear radiated through his body. He changed back into the shell of the guy he used to be and back on the hard stuff.

Dirty Texas Records had insisted he get clean. They hadn't realized the extent of his drug abuse when they signed us. Their label has a strict no-drug policy. They paid for his rehabilitation and did everything to ensure he was fit and healthy for our first tour. He was doing so well. Eighteen months sober this time. Shit hit the fan that night, my stomach turns remembering it. I wish it was only the threat of our foster father getting out of jail that pushed him over the edge that night, but it was so much more. I try to shake the images of that terrible night from my mind. Brodie decided it would be a

good idea to tear off on his motorbike while having an emotional breakdown and I'm guessing somewhere along the way he scored, and things went downhill from there.

We couldn't get a hold of him, and we had no idea where he might have gone. We searched everywhere, but as each minute went by, every one of us had a sinking feeling in our stomachs that something terrible was about to happen. That Brodie's trauma had resurfaced with a vengeance, and he'd retreated into the depths of hell again, where, this time, no one would be able to reach him.

Three days later, a police cruiser turned up at our home, and we all knew.

Something had happened to Brodie.

He wasn't coming home this time.

They informed us that Brodie had died, and from what they knew of the incident, he was high, it was raining, and the road was too wet. By all accounts, he had aquaplaned into oncoming traffic, unfortunately, sliding off the road and over an embankment. They found his lifeless body at the bottom of the ravine on the beach.

Losing Brodie broke us all.

The sobriety we had been living in solidarity with him disappeared in that split second.

None of us cared.

Nothing else mattered.

How could we go on? It had always been the four of us. We were never meant to be a threesome.

"We want to help you," Christian says, pulling me from my thoughts. I can hear the sincerity in his tone, and I know he means well, but we are nothing more than a commodity to the label.

"Whatever." Eli grunts. "Guess we'll see ya Monday."

And with that dismissal, Vanessa and Christian leave our home.

“Fuck that shit,” Eli grumbles, grabbing a glass of beer from the coffee table. “I know you heard all that, Hendrix ... fucking pretending to be asleep. You’re such a dick,” Eli calls out to me.

“I wasn’t in the mood for a lecture,” I grunt out the words, not caring what he thinks.

“And you think I was?”

I swing my legs off the sofa. “Fuck it! They sit in their ivory towers, living their perfect lives. They have no idea of the shit we have been through. If they are going to fire us on Monday, we might as well make the weekend count,” I yell, fired up with rage.

“Fuck yeah. Let’s go out with a bang,” Eli yells, raising the half-empty glass of stale beer in his hand and tilting it in my direction.

HENDRIX

“**Y**ou’re three hours late. Guess I should be thankful you turned up at all,” Vanessa grumbles as she enters the conference room. It’s two in the afternoon on Monday. So yeah, she should be happy we are here at all. “Isla, would you mind bringing Alice in too?” she says, turning to Isla Connolly, the head of talent for the label.

“Coffee?” Vanessa asks, pointing at the expensive espresso machine set up in the corner of the conference room.

We shake our heads.

“Water?” She points to the stocked minibar refrigerator.

“A beer would be nice,” Zeke suggests with a chuckle.

Vanessa glares at him. “Don’t you think you should give your liver an hour off?”

Zeke shrugs his shoulders in answer.

The conference door swings open, and in walks Alice and Isla. Alice gives us a broad smile and takes a seat while Isla sits to the side.

“Okay ...” Vanessa starts. “I wanted to talk to you all about what happened. Another missed studio session.” Her green eyes look over each of us disapprovingly until they stop on Alice. “Care to explain?”

Alice splutters under Vanessa’s intense scrutiny, unable to get her words out. “The boys were drunk. I couldn’t get them

to go when I tried,” Alice eventually explains which is a fucking lie.

“Really?” Vanessa crosses her arms, not buying what Alice is selling. “I heard you were too busy riding Zeke’s dick to do your job.”

Alice’s face pales at Vanessa’s comment and her eyes widen as she looks over at Zeke, who is sitting there chuckling to himself, which earns him an icy glare from Vanessa.

“We pay you to do a job, Alice, and that’s *getting the boys to do theirs*.” She raises her voice but only slightly at the end of the sentence to get her point across.

Alice nods.

“And from what I hear and see, you haven’t been doing that.” Those green eyes focus on Alice squirming in her seat under the interrogation.

“But ... I ...” Alice splutters before being told to be quiet.

“I don’t have time for excuses anymore. I’m sorry, Alice, but we are terminating your employment with Dirty Texas Records.”

“What!” Alice stands. “You can’t fire me.” She hisses, sounding like a snake. “I’m going to sue.” She points her red-nail-polished finger at Vanessa, who merely smiles.

“Oh, sweet girl. You do what you must.” Vanessa takes a step closer. “But just remember, I’ll do what I have to as well.”

“Is that a threat?” Alice blanches.

“I don’t make threats,” Vanessa tells her.

“Fuck you!” Alice throws the words at her with venom in her tone.

We snicker at the drama unfolding before our very eyes.

“Fuck you all too. Fucking shitty fucks, the lot of you,” Alice screams at us.

“Same goes to you, sweetheart,” Eli adds.

Alice goes to launch herself at Eli, but Vanessa and Isla pull her off before she can scratch his face. “Fuck you.” Alice flays her hands around as security rushes into the conference room and takes over. “I’m going to make you *all* pay.”

And with that, the door slams shut.

“What the fuck are you all smiling at?” Vanessa turns to us, and the smiles on our faces drop quickly. “You are *all* on thin ice.” Vanessa glares then moves over to the minibar and pulls out a water, taking a sip to compose herself. “Dirty Texas Records is a family. My family. When something happens to my family, we rally around them to make sure they are okay,” she tells us, placing two palms down and leaning against the conference table. “You are not alone in this,” she explains quietly. “I understand what you have all gone through.”

“How? How could you *possibly* understand?” Zeke breaks first, questioning her integrity. “You live a perfect life with your perfect family. You have no idea about the struggles we have gone through. The demons each of us try to quash daily.”

“Perfect life?” Vanessa scoffs. “You don’t know what’s happened in my life.”

Zeke rolls his eyes.

“Do you know how I met Christian?”

We all shake our heads.

“He saved me from being sexually assaulted.”

Our eyes widen.

“Some man didn’t take no for an answer and attacked me.”

Well, I wasn’t expecting that.

“Years after that attack, I was attacked again. This time by my partner, a well-known football player. He beat me to a pulp. I nearly didn’t survive.”

Shit. How could we not have known about this?.

“Then to top it all off, I was diagnosed with the BRCA gene. This meant that my chances of developing breast cancer

were about eighty percent. So, I thought fuck it and chopped off my breasts.”

What the fuck?

My eyes fall to her chest—her boobs look amazing and real.

“We had no idea,” Zeke mumbles.

“Of course, you wouldn’t. I don’t yell from the rooftops the fucked-up shit that has happened to me because it doesn’t define me,” she tells us. “I refuse to give my power to those men or to cancer. I am the one in control of my life, no one else.” Her green eyes sparkle with emotion. “I don’t know the specifics of what has happened in your lives, but I know it’s fucked up. Why are you giving these bastards all this power over you? How dare they get to dictate your life after all these years? How *fucking* dare they!” she yells, a single tear falling down her cheek. She quickly swipes it off her skin. Vanessa steps away from the conference table, composing herself as she takes another sip of her water. “I refuse to let them control you anymore,” Vanessa says quietly.

We look around at each other, feeling like dicks because she’s so damn right. They don’t deserve to live rent-free in our minds, but it’s hard to shake their shackles.

“We’ll try,” I tell her honestly as I look at my bandmates, who nod in agreement.

Vanessa turns around in surprise and glances at us all one at a time. “You’ll try?” she asks cautiously.

“Brodie gave our foster dad too much power over h-him,” I explain, the words hitching in my throat as I say them. “I don’t want to be like that.”

Silence falls between us at my confession.

“Me either,” Eli agrees.

“Same here,” Zeke adds.

A smile lights Vanessa’s face. “Are you willing to accept our help?”

I nod. Maybe Vanessa's right. We do need help. We can't keep fending off the world by ourselves. "It's hard for us to accept help as we've never been given it before."

Vanessa's face softens. "You're part of the Dirty Texas family. You never have to be alone ever again. Each and every one of you is one of us."

Family.

That word is a foreign concept to us.

We've never known what a caring family is like. We've never had anyone to rely on before except for the four of us. Maybe we should give Vanessa and her team a chance. Can't make things worse than they already are. I look over at my boys, and they give me a reassuring nod.

They agree.

"Okay. We'll do whatever you need us to," I tell Vanessa.

"You will?" Vanessa asks, surprised by our agreement.

"Yeah, we will."

Vanessa rushes over and hugs me, surprising the shit out of me. This is not at all what I would expect from a hard-ass like Vanessa Taylor, but it's nice. She moves along and hugs Eli and Zeke too, who look equally confused by the show of affection.

"I mean it when I say you're part of the family here at Dirty Texas Records. No matter what, your well-being will always be paramount to us." Vanessa's eyes narrow as she glances between us. "You may not believe it, but the money is secondary to our label. The Dirty Texas boys have, in the past, had trouble with labels taking advantage of them, and they never want another band to go through that. No matter what, you can depend on the boys and this company to do what is right for you," Vanessa explains.

She's saying all the right words, and honestly, I believe her because they did everything in their power to help Brodie. When Brodie passed away and we couldn't function anymore,

Vanessa and the label paid for Brodie's funeral. They organized it all, and it was a beautiful and fitting farewell.

"We've had no one care our entire lives," Eli explains.

"It's all new to us," Zeke adds.

"These past six months, we've dropped the ball, and I'm sorry. We thought we needed to give you time to grieve and heal. The label has been growing quickly, so our focus has been pulled elsewhere. That will *never* happen again," Vanessa reassures us.

None of this is her fault. We've been so wrapped up in our grief that nothing anyone could have done would have pulled us from it.

"Come have a barbecue at our place this weekend. I know it might not be as crazy as what you are used to, but I can assure you we all know how to have fun," Vanessa says with a smile.

With a smile of my own, I just say the one word, "Okay," in answer for all of us.

EVERLY

“Don’t be nervous,” Jackson Connolly, one of my brother’s best friends, says to me as we pull up to the palatial house of Vanessa and Christian Taylor.

“Easy for you to say. This is my first business meeting.”

“It’s a casual barbecue where business may be spoken about,” Jackson reminds me, getting out of the car.

I wish my brother Charlie was here. He would help ease my nerves, but no, he’s away on a romantic weekend with his partner. Damn him and being in love.

“Yeah, at one of the biggest rock stars in the world’s home,” I add, closing the car door after me. The teenager inside me is fangirling, giving me butterflies.

“You know who my brother is and you’ve been around the crew for a while now with Charlie. Today is no different from all the other times we have gotten together,” Jackson reassures me.

Charlie met Jackson in recruit training. We had no idea at the time that his brother was a rock god, not until we ran into his family at the hospital after their accident. We were already in shock from finding out Charlie and Jackson’s patrol had been hit by an IED and were being rushed to Germany for medical treatment. You can only imagine rushing into the hospital, hoping your brother is okay, and running right into your celebrity crush. It was surreal, confusing, and surprising.

Thankfully, they made it, but many in their unit didn't. Shrapnel had damaged Jackson's leg, which left scarring, but it's been years since the accident, and the limp he once had is almost gone.

Charlie, unfortunately, lost his leg in the accident after it was crushed as the Humvee flipped over. It's taken a long time for Charlie to recover from the accident. He suffered severely from post-traumatic stress disorder, and we thought there was a time when we might lose him again. The years of extensive therapy were hard for him to accept.

The turning point for my brother came when they lost one of their friends who survived the accident but eventually took his own life. He didn't want to be another statistic of a returned vet.

Jackson reached out once Charlie was in a better headspace and asked him to come to work for his security company in Los Angeles. After being medically discharged from the military, Jackson began his own security firm specializing in hiring ex-vets and helping them return to civilian life, especially those who were medically discharged, who'd otherwise lost their brotherhood and purpose.

It's an amazing idea—helping all those men and women who have fought for our country get back on their feet once their military careers are over.

It took a lot of convincing for Charlie to move to LA from the seclusion of our family's home in Moonlight Falls, Montana. And the only reason he did was because I agreed to come with him. Charlie hated being back in society, where people would look at him differently, especially in body-conscious LA. At least back home, everyone knew him before the accident and didn't bat an eye when he came back home different.

But everything happens for a reason. If he hadn't taken Jackson up on his work offer, he wouldn't have met his partner and be living his best life.

"I've never been to Vanessa and Christian's house before. And today could be a big deal if they are interested in bringing

me on to work with them. For my small business to have Dirty Texas on my books as my first client ...” I take a deep breath. “... it’s life-changing.”

“You’ve got this. As long as you don’t fangirl over Dirty Texas,” Jackson says, giving me a look.

“I’m a professional,” I argue back, but my voice raises an octave.

Jackson raises a brow not feeling convinced. “Just act normal,” he warns as he presses the doorbell.

Be cool, Everly, be cool.

“Jackson.” Vanessa answers the door with a glass of champagne in her hand. The sound of music and people talking filters past the open door while she greets Jackson with a kiss on the cheek.

Vanessa is gorgeous with her caramel hair pulled up in a high ponytail, and her flawless makeup-free skin. She’s dressed in a chambray dress with sky-high heels and looks effortlessly cool.

I look down at what I’m wearing and internally sigh. Even though it’s a barbecue, I wanted to look professional but not like I am trying too hard—it’s a fine line on the dress code. I’m wearing a pair of dark skinny jeans, a loose white button-down shirt, a pair of jeweled flats, and my lucky diamond necklace my parents gave me for my twenty-first birthday. I thought I looked good, but standing beside the goddess Vanessa Taylor, yeah, I’m not feeling as confident.

“You remember Everly Nash, Charlie’s sister,” Jackson introduces me again to Vanessa.

“Of course, I do, Jackson. It’s been ages since we’ve seen you,” she says, reaching out and giving me a warm hug.

“It has. I’ve just moved into my new place thanks to Charlie moving in with Derrick. I’ve been busy unpacking boxes.”

“Oh wow! How exciting. Where did you end up moving to?”

“Not far ... just off Hollywood Boulevard near Nichols Canyon.”

“Nice.” She nods, giving me a smile. “Come on in. Everyone’s here.”

We head through the large foyer and down the grand staircase with its views overlooking the pool area. We continue through the living room and out the open doors onto the entertaining deck where all their guests are hanging out.

Holy shit! My ovaries are about to explode, and I think my heart is about to stop. Is this some kind of DILF porno or something? Because there they are, in all their tanned, half-naked glory. Christian Taylor, Evan Wyld, Finn Connolly, and their kids. Just need Axel Taylor and Oscar Eriksen to finish the Dirty Texas rock star bingo card, but they are currently living overseas with their wives.

Be professional, Everly. Stop ogling the rock stars, especially in front of their partners. I shake my head to rid my mind of my wild thoughts.

“Christian,” Vanessa calls out to her husband.

The golden-haired, tanned Adonis turns around and looks up at his wife with nothing but adoration in his eyes. My heart skips a beat as the two of them exchange a heated look.

“Here ... let grandma take over,” an older woman says as she moves from the daybed to the pool, taking over the supervision of the two gorgeous little girls.

I watch in utter fascination as Christian emerges from his pool like a groupie’s wet dream, grabs his towel, and begins drying himself off.

Everly, you need to calm the fuck down.

This is a professional meeting.

You cannot be ogling a future client.

Plus, he’s married.

“Babe, you remember Everly, Charlie’s sister,” Vanessa explains to her husband.

Christian wraps himself in the towel and heads over to where we are standing. “It’s nice to see you again,” Christian says, greeting me with a kiss on the cheek, making my legs weak.

Hold it together, girl.

“Everly’s an accountability coach,” Vanessa explains to her husband.

Christian’s eyes narrow on me as he rubs the scruff on his jaw. “Accountability coach?”

Not sure Vanessa and Christian need me—from what I see.

“Yes, I’ll explain more about it later,” she tells her husband as she pats his bare chest lovingly. “Now, fire up the grill, babe. Everyone’s starving.”

“You know I can fire you up anytime you want,” he says playfully as he pulls his wife toward him and lays a kiss on her lips.

“Cut it out, you two. Let’s get this grill going,” Jackson grumbles, interrupting Vanessa and Christian’s make-out session.

“Sorry about that. Men.” Vanessa giggles as she ushers me over to a table where Sienna Wyld and Isla Connolly two of the gorgeous rock stars’ wives are sitting.

“Everly,” Sienna greets me warmly. She’s the one I’ve been around the most, thanks to Charlie. “How is your move going? Derrick told me your house is stunning. I’m dying to see it.”

“Almost there, a couple more boxes to unpack, and I’ll have you over,” I tell her as I take a seat opposite.

“Isla, do you remember Everly? She’s Charlie’s little sister,” Sienna says, reintroducing me to Isla.

“Oh yes, hi ... I think we’ve met a couple of times,” she says, giving me a warm smile.

“It’s nice to see you again.”

“Everly, what would you like to drink? Water, champagne, cocktails?” Vanessa asks.

“Water’s fine, thanks.”

Vanessa scrunches up her face. “Water? You’re not pregnant, are you?”

“What! No. I just ... um ... wanted to have a clear head when we chat later,” I answer her honestly.

Vanessa’s face softens. “Oh, sweetie, no. Have a proper drink if you want one,” she says before turning to the other girls. “Did you know Everly is an accountability coach?”

Sienna smiles and nods while Isla shakes her head.

“What is an accountability coach?” Isla asks.

“I keep my clients on track to achieving their goals. I help eliminate distractions and keep them focused. There’s so much more involved, but that’s the gist of it.”

“She’s brilliant,” Sienna adds.

Isla turns, looks at Vanessa, and smiles. “Oh, now I understand your plan.”

What does that mean?

“I know, right?” Vanessa answers Isla. “Champagne, Everly?” she asks, turning toward me.

I feel like I’m purposefully being left out of a conversation I should be privy to.

“Are the Sons of Brooklyn boys coming today?” Isla asks, changing the subject.

“No, they have rehearsals,” Sienna answers.

“The Lost Boys said they would be coming today, didn’t they?” Isla asks, looking down at her watch.

Vanessa lets out a heavy sigh as she places a glass of champagne in front of me. “They said they would, but who knows with those boys at the moment.”

Wait! The Lost Boys are coming today as well? I love them.

They are one of my favorite bands besides Dirty Texas.

I don't know if my inner groupie is going to handle all her favorite things in one room together.

"It would do them good to come to these things. They need to be surrounded by people, not locked away in their home, suffocating on their grief," Isla says as she sips her cocktail.

"I feel for them. What happened to Brodie is devastating," Sienna says sadly.

I remember the news headlines after they found Brodie's body. I couldn't believe it. I even shed a couple of tears over the music world losing such a talented guy. The gossip magazines spoke about his demons with drink and drugs, but who doesn't have a problem in Hollywood.

"It is. We've never had to deal with anything like this before at the label. I feel like we missed something with him, like we could have done more," Vanessa says, wiping a tear that has fallen down her cheek.

"It's not your fault, Ness, you know that," Isla reassures Vanessa.

"I know, but we missed it. We missed something, and I never want that to happen again. Excuse me for a moment," Vanessa says, getting up and walking away from the table with Isla following her.

"She knows it's not her fault, doesn't she? Most addicts won't seek help until it's too late," I say, turning to Sienna.

"Ness knows that. Deep down inside we all do, but it's hard when you lose one of your own. Dirty Texas Records is one big extended family, and every one of our bands is like a member of our family. These boys are talented but losing a foundation member is hard and sometimes irreparable," Sienna says sadly.

"If you need my help, I'm always here," I say.

"Thank you. Anyway, tell me, how's your love life going? Have you got back out there again?" Sienna asks, changing the subject.

“What love life? I don’t have time for men.” I sigh as I throw back the last of my champagne. “You’re lucky you found yourself a great rock star husband because there is no one out there.”

Sienna’s face lights up. “Does that mean I can set you up with someone?”

“Oh, hell, no,” I reply, shaking my head. “My focus at the moment is building my business and unpacking boxes.”

“Not even for a wild night of hot sex.”

“I have a vibrator for that.”

“Well, when you get sick of that vibrator, let me know, and I’ll set you up.” Sienna smiles.

HENDRIX

“Guys, we are running late,” I yell at my bandmates, who are emerging from their rooms after a big night out.

“When did you turn into such a suck-ass?” Zeke questions me.

“I’m not a suck-ass. They invited us to their home. It’s rude to turn up late.”

“Look at Mr. Manners over there,” Eli teases.

“Fuck you both. If you don’t give a shit, I’m going to go by myself,” I tell them as I grab a bottle of wine from the rack and head toward the door.

“Fuck you! Give us ten, and we’ll be ready. We will not let pretty boy here claim all the glory for turning up to the party,” Zeke says.

I huff and roll my eyes at my best friends.

Ten minutes later, the two of them are showered and ready. We head out the door to where our car is waiting for us and slide in.

We are all quiet for a while as we wind through the foothills of the canyons and head toward Vanessa and Christian’s home in The Hills.

“We have to try to be on our best behavior today,” I tell the boys.

“When are we not on our best behavior?” Eli says as he turns to Zeke and they burst out laughing.

“Guys, come on. This is their home. We can’t fuck anything up in their home,” I warn the two of them.

“You make us sound like we are complete fools. We know how to act,” Zeke grumbles.

“Good,” I answer, folding my arms over my chest and sinking into the car’s black leather as I watch the multimillion-dollar homes pass us by.

The ride falls into an uncomfortable silence, my bandmates clearly annoyed with me for calling them out on their bullshit. I know these two better than they know themselves. Both could get into trouble in a fucking convent.

My cell vibrates, and I pull it out of my pocket and read the message. “Are you fucking serious?” I yell while staring at the Google Alert.

“What happened?” Zeke asks.

“Fucking Alice, she’s sold her damn story,” I yell, waving my cell in their faces.

“Fuck!” Eli curses as the two of them scramble for their phones and Google themselves.

The car goes quiet as we read through the reports.

“Least she said our dicks were big.” Zeke chuckles.

“She says she has photos and videos of us fucking her.” My stomach sinks at that thought.

“How?” Eli asks.

“I don’t know, but we’ve all been pretty fucked-up when we’ve fucked her. Maybe she planted cameras throughout the house and waited for her opportunity. What a fucking bitch,” I scream, punching the seat in front of me.

“Do you think she wants to put a sex tape out there?” Eli asks.

“For the right amount of money, who fucking knows,” I say to him.

We all fall quiet again.

“Vanessa will know what to do,” Zeke adds.

“We’re already on thin ice with her. This might be the last straw.” I sigh.

“They wouldn’t drop us because of this, would they?” Eli asks.

“She’s probably exhausted from having to clean up our messes.”

“Guess we’ll soon find out.” Zeke sighs quietly.

Guess we will.

We pull into the driveway of Vanessa and Christian’s home and get out of the car, trepidation following us.

“This feels weird, like we’re about to meet the parents,” Zeke jokes.

It most definitely feels like that.

We’ve been huge Dirty Texas fans all our lives and being mentored by your idols is surreal. Now we’ve been invited into their inner sanctum, the nerves have kicked in, especially considering we have huge targets on our backs now.

I walk up to the imposing entrance and press the doorbell. The three of us wait in anxious silence until someone opens the door.

“You made it!” Vanessa says, greeting us with a warm hug and a wide smile. Her cheeks are rosy, and her eyes a little glassy—I think Vanessa might be tipsy.

Shit! Has she not seen the news?

“This is for you,” I say, handing Vanessa the bottle of wine.

“You didn’t have to do that, but thank you,” she says, taking the bottle from my hands. “Please come on in and join the rest of the crew.”

“Um ... before we go in, there’s something we need to tell you.”

Vanessa pauses. “If you’re talking about Alice, I already know. I’ve dealt with it. She won’t be a problem,” she says tightly.

Oh. That wasn’t at all what I was expecting to hear.

“I knew she’d be trouble the day she left the office, so I’ve handled it. Now, let’s forget about that bitch and have a good day.”

Wow. Vanessa is one serious badass. We all look at each other and shrug as we follow Vanessa through the foyer, down the grand staircase, then out through the open doors to the pool area. It’s a mix between a kid’s birthday party and a rock star hall of fame with the people milling around.

“Chris, look who turned up,” Vanessa interrupts her husband, who is drying off a kid.

The rock legend looks up upon hearing his wife’s voice, and his eyes fall on the three of us standing before him. “Better late than never,” he says with a grin as he stands up and shakes our hands.

“I’ll take this little one,” an older lady says, grabbing the squirming child from between Christian’s legs. The little girl’s giggles filter through the air as the woman tickles her exposed belly.

Is this what family life is supposed to look like? Honestly, it’s like a scene from a wholesome nineties sitcom.

“You guys look like you could use a beer,” Christian states and walks to where an outside bar is set up. He steps around, opens one of the tall bar refrigerators filled with bottles of beer, and hands us one each. We thank him and crack open the bottles, and I take a large gulp, feeling out of place.

“I’m glad y’all came today,” Christian says before taking another drink of his beer. “We should be doing these group barbecues more often than we have been. The label has grown so quickly, surprising all of us, and I guess we’re still playing catch-up,” he explains.

“Not sure if we would have come earlier. We’re not used to all this,” I tell him honestly.

“All what?” he questions with a frown.

“All this ... ah, family.”

Christian’s eyes widen in surprise at my answer before nodding in understanding. “If I’m honest, boys, it’s a genuine regret we didn’t pull you into the Dirty Texas family sooner. We feel like we’ve fucked up there, that maybe if we had done things a little differently ...” Christian trails off, and I can see the anguish on his face as his features are pulled tight.

Do they blame themselves for what happened to Brodie?

“Don’t think family barbecues would have saved Brodie,” Eli says sadly, fidgeting with the label on his beer bottle.

“Maybe not, but we would have noticed something had changed, and maybe we could have helped,” Christian states, his voice cracking with emotion.

“You would never have been able to save Brodie,” I tell him honestly. He shouldn’t have to walk around bearing that guilt, and I am surprised he is even taking any of the blame when there is none.

“Hey, fellas, good to see you turned up,” Jackson says, breaking up the tense moment. Christian looks relieved seeing his friend and hands him a beer. “Staying out of trouble?” he questions as he looks over at us.

I slink under his penetrative stare—I know this man could kill me in the blink of an eye; he probably killed people when he was in the military. I also know he could easily swipe my entire existence away via his security company. We need to stay on his good side. Otherwise, we could be in a world of pain.

“All good here. Thanks to you, I’m sure,” Zeke replies, implying Jackson probably took care of Alice, and not in a swim-with-the-fishes kind of way but something more aboveboard, fitting for a blackmailer.

“And don’t you forget it.” Jackson nods, his eyes narrowing on Zeke as if he is scanning his brain for lies. “Have you heard from Alice?”

We all shake our heads.

Thank fuck we haven’t because I’m not sure I could stop myself from telling her exactly what a low-life bitch she is.

“Let me know if you do. I’ll deal with her ... *again*,” Jackson adds.

I do *not* want to be on Jackson Connolly’s radar like that.

“Good to see you guys came. Great first step in the right direction,” Evan Wyld says, clapping Eli on the shoulder as he joins us at the bar with Finn Connolly, Jackson’s brother, right behind him.

Christian hands out more bottles of beer to the rock stars.

“Have you started writing?” Finn asks.

“Not yet,” I reply.

“It’ll happen. Give it time. We have faith, you will too,” Finn says, reassuring us.

“We’ve got a lot to discuss. So, enjoy tonight. No pressure from any of us but know we all have your backs and want to see you succeed,” Evan states warmly.

This warm and fuzzy kumbaya is not at all what we were expecting; we turn and look at each other. The other day, Vanessa and Christian were so upset. Maybe they have all calmed down, or maybe our turning up changed how they look at us—that we’ve shown them we *will* start playing by their rules and *are* accepting their help.

“You guys bring your board shorts? ’Cause I’m ready to hit the hot tub,” Christian asks.

The three of us shake our heads. We didn’t think to bring anything like that.

“Right, well, come with me. You can borrow some of mine. There’s nothing better than drinking beer and lazing in the hot tub,” he says with a grin.

Is this an initiation? If we say yes, does it mean we're one of them? I've never hung out with grown men in a hot tub unless there's a woman between us.

First time for everything, I guess.

EVERLY

“Ouch,” I groan as Sienna hits me on the arm.

“Look who walked in,” she says as our eyes fall on The Lost Boys as they walk past and head over to the bar with Christian. “They are *hot*.”

“You’re a married woman,” I tease Sienna.

“Married not dead,” she replies with a laugh.

My eyes fall on the three gorgeous rock stars. First, there’s Eli Pitt. Shiny, wavy, shoulder-length blond hair and a pretty-boy face that makes him look more like a model rather than a rock star. As your eyes trail down his six-foot-two, tanned, cut body, you’re greeted with arms full of twisted, colorful art. He has piercing green eyes and scruff. Today, he’s dressed in black jeans, a white tank top that’s cut low on the sides, exposing his obliques, a mountain of jewelry around his neck and wrists, all topped off with a black fedora on his head.

Then there’s Zeke Bobak. The man is a towering wall of muscle. Six-foot-four and looks like he’s stepped right off the *Vikings* set. He has long, sandy-blond hair and a thick beard. Tattoos cover his entire body from his neck to his ankles. He has pierced nipples—evident by the bumps in his T-shirt—and ears. When you look at Zeke, you know you’re in trouble. He’s dressed in black jeans and a gray T-shirt pulled tightly across his muscular body. His long hair is pulled up into a messy man bun. He also has the most insane blue eyes, like pools of arctic ice.

Then there's Hendrix Meyer, the leader. Where Eli and Zeke are the jokesters, Hendrix is the more serious member of the group. His short, dark-brown hair and blue eyes give him an edge of darkness which adds to the allure of mysteriousness of this six-foot-one rock star. He's the most closed off in the group—only showing you what he wants—which, of course, poses a challenge for many a groupie from what I've read. He indulges from time to time, but he isn't as out there with his conquests like Eli and Zeke. He's dressed in the rock star uniform of black jeans and a black T-shirt, which is not as tight on his body as Zeke's. Tattooed muscular arms peek out from his sleeves. He wears a leather cuff around his wrist, which is insanely hot. *Yeah, I'm a Hendrix girl. Shoot me.* I like the broody, mysterious guys. They are a little more interesting, or maybe I'm the one who likes men that are challenging. *Am I psychoanalyzing myself as I gawk at my celebrity crushes?*

"Pick your jaw up off the ground, Everly. You're drooling," Sienna jokes.

"So are you," I bite back.

"I know ... I wasn't hiding it." She chuckles. "If you had to choose a night with one of them, who would it be?"

"I'm not telling you that," I state as I throw back my glass of champagne.

"Come on. Evan was my celebrity crush," she says, wiggling her eyebrows.

"He's also your husband."

"Now he is, but before, he was just my celebrity crush. I'm not asking you to marry one of The Lost Boys, so spill." She grins.

I've had one too many champagnes, and the buzz is going to my head. "Fine! It would be Hendrix."

Sienna squeals with delight. "You like them dark and brooding. Now I know your type."

"My type of rock star, not boyfriend," I quickly clear up because Hendrix is not someone I would choose to date—he's

just hot.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. I’ve got to check on the kids. I’ll be back, don’t go anywhere,” she tells me as she hops up from her chair, rushes over to Evan, and takes two crying babies out of his arms.

I let out a heavy sigh at the cute image. Who would have thought the Dirty Texas guys would all become monogamous DILFs? Vanessa and Isla are distracted by their kids too, running around after them. It looks like the kids have had enough of the pool and are all in various stages of tantrums. I happily sit back and enjoy the serenity of being single and childless.

After a while, my eyes are drawn back to the pool area as Christian walks past trailed by three uncomfortable-looking rock stars dressed in various colored board shorts. Nothing but bare chests, bulging muscles, and tattoos drift past me, and honestly, it’s hard to pull my eyes away from the boys in all their near-naked gloriousness. It’s so weird that I grab my phone, take a picture of them, and send it to my brother.

Everly: My view’s better than yours.

The three little dots bounce on my message screen as he types back.

Charlie: Okay. You win. They are hot. Is that The Lost Boys?

Everly: Yes. Don’t tell anyone but I am secretly fangirling.

Charlie: I would be too. Beware they are trouble those three.

Everly: I’m looking, but there will not be any touching.

Charlie: I didn't say you couldn't touch, just don't fall for one. The rumors are The Lost Boys are great in bed. I've also heard that one of them has a pierced dick. Find out who it is for us.

Everly: What! No.

Charlie: Oh, come on, I'm intrigued.

Everly: Well, I'm not.

Charlie: Boo, you whore.

Everly: Are you drunk?

Charlie: Yes, we just got back from a wine-tasting tour of Napa. Looks like we would rather swallow than spit.

Everly: OMG stop. Please never ever say that to me ever again.

Charlie: I'll stop once I know which one of those rock gods has a pierced dick.

Everly: This conversation is finished. Go to bed.

Charlie: Don't you worry I will be *inserts winky emoji*

Everly: Gross. Hope your hangover is rough tomorrow for putting me through this mental anguish.

Charlie: Firstly, fuck you. Secondly, love you. Thirdly, now go jump on one of those hot rock stars because you need to get laid. You're wound up so tight, it would make you less of a bitch.

Everly: Fuck you, love you. Good night.

And with that, I put my cell away and decide to go for a walk to clear my head. There's some truth to what my brother said—I am tightly wound up from moving and launching this new business but also from my previous relationship that

ended badly and ruined my career. It was the driving force behind me finally taking the chance on my own because no one would hire me. I want to put those dark days behind me and concentrate on my new life. I think a walk around the gardens and checking out that insane view is what I need. It will also sober me up too. Sienna kept topping up my glass of champagne, and now, I'm feeling the effects.

I find a secluded part of the garden which has an amazing view over LA. I lean against the railing and enjoy watching the sunset over the city skyline. Closing my eyes, I suck in a couple of deep breaths to center myself, hoping to dispense the champagne fog.

The sound of a branch breaking has me spinning around, and the last person I thought I would find standing there is Hendrix Meyer. My heart starts beating uncontrollably in my chest, and I can't tell if it's from him surprising me, the champagne, or from him standing there before me.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to disturb you," he says.

The deep gravel of his voice sends vibrations through my body. *Damn, he's hot this close up.* "You're fine. I was watching the sunset," I tell him.

His dark brows pull together. "I don't know the last time I stared at a sunset."

"You're busy being a rock star."

Hendrix's blue eyes narrow on me. "Don't tell me you're a groupie?"

Excuse me. Where the hell did that come from? Did he think I scaled the fence to watch the sunset at Christian's house?

Now it's my turn to raise a disappointed brow in his direction. "You think I've scaled that fence there to come and stalk you? Who the hell would do that?"

"Desperate women."

My mouth falls open at his comment, what a dick. "You have a high opinion of yourself, don't you?" I turn my back on

him and try to concentrate on the amazing view. They say never meet your celebrity crushes because they will only disappoint you, and they aren't wrong.

"Who are you then?"

"Don't think it's any of your business who I am," I grumble as I ignore the brooding rock star behind me.

"Kind of think it is. You're at my boss's house. And you know what they say, you can't trust a groupie," he states accusingly.

I swing around quickly, offended by his observation. "You seriously think I'm a groupie?"

"Yeah."

"You're a dick."

"Sounds like you know me then. And yet I still don't know who you are," he teases.

"Someone who isn't interested in getting to know you," I bite back as I turn toward the valley and the sun that's slowly setting in gorgeous hues of pink and orange.

"Aw, did I hurt the little groupie's feelings?" He chuckles darkly.

I flip him off. Which makes him laugh louder, the deep guttural kind that makes the hairs on your skin stand up, begging for attention. *Screw you, body. Why are you betraying me like this?*

"I like my women feisty," he states from behind me.

I hadn't realized he had walked up so close until his breath slid across my neck. My body stiffens at his presence.

"Please move away from me," I ask through gritted teeth.

"Am I making you uncomfortable, groupie?"

"Yes."

"Then no."

"If you don't move back, I will make you," I warn him.

“You’re five feet fuck all. I’d like to see you try,” he says, goading me.

Don’t say I didn’t warn you, pretty boy. I close my eyes and center myself. I take a couple of quick, deep breaths, and in a flash, I have him on the ground beneath me, straddling him.

He looks at me with wide blue eyes as if he can’t quite figure out what happened. Hendrix shakes his head, then a broad smile falls across his pouty pink lips, making me frown as I stare down at the cocky rock star.

Next thing, he reaches up and wraps his hand around my neck and crushes my mouth to his in a blinding kiss.

What the hell is happening?

Why am I kissing him back?

I feel the long sweep of his tongue against my own, the taste of beer against his lips, and the feel of his hardness against me.

“What the hell!” I yell as I push myself off him and scramble to get up, brushing the dirt off me. “Who the hell do you think you are kissing me like that?”

Hendrix jumps up and glares at me. “I thought that’s what you wanted, groupie. It was the reason you got me on my back.”

“Ew ... *no*. You got into my personal space, and I wanted you to back off,” I yell at him as I wrap my arms around myself.

“You kissed me back.”

“By mistake,” I argue.

“That kiss wasn’t a mistake. You wanted it. You wanted me. Why are you playing hard to get?” he questions.

“Oh my god, how full of yourself are you? You interrupted me while I was trying to enjoy the fricking sunset. Which now, thanks to you, I’ve missed. I’m not some groupie who will fuck you on a mountain of dirt on the grounds of my friend’s home.”

“Could have fooled me,” he mumbles.

“Ugh, you are such a jerk,” I say, throwing my hands up in the air as I walk away from him.

“Hey, groupie, wait up,” he calls out to me.

“No. And stop calling me that,” I say, trying to ignore him.

Hendrix reaches out, grabs my arm, and turns me around.

“Don’t touch me,” I sneer, pulling my arm from his reach.

“I’m sorry,” he says, holding up his hands. “I honestly misread the signs.”

“A girl telling you to *go fuck yourself* means she wants you?” I scoff.

“You’d be surprised,” he says as his fingers glide through his dark-brown hair.

That action shouldn’t look hot, but it does, and my lips tingle at the memory of his against my own. *Stop it, Everly.*

“I’m not a frickin’ groupie, okay?”

“Okay, okay, I get it. You’re not a groupie,” he says, giving me a flirtatious smirk.

Fuck him and his hotness. That’s not playing fair.

“Then who are you? I should at least know your name after having my lips on you.”

Rolling my eyes, I tell him my name. “Everly.”

“Everly ...” He says my name with a deep growl as if testing it out against his lips.

I hate that it makes me shiver. Maybe I am a groupie by the way my body is betraying me.

“My brother is best friends with Jackson and is dating a friend of Dirty Texas,” I explain to him.

Hendrix stills. “Jackson scares the shit out of me,” he confesses.

His comment is so random that it makes me laugh. “He’s harmless. He’s like a second brother to me, so watch out,” I

warn him jokingly.

“I don’t think you need his help. The way you dropped me like that earlier surprised the shit out of me.”

“I’ve got more tricks up my sleeve if you don’t behave,” I say, pointing at him.

Hendrix licks his lips at my answer; I wasn’t meaning for it to sound so flirtatious. “Consider me warned,” he says, giving me a relaxed smile.

“I have to get back to the party. Try not to accost any more women in the bushes,” I say with a warm smile.

“I like accosting bushes,” he replies, his smile widening.

Ew. What a dick joke to make. I flip him off, turn on my heel, and head back toward the party.

“Everly ...” Hendrix calls out my name.

I stop and let out a heavy sigh as I turn around. What the hell could he possibly want now?

“I’m sorry I made you miss your sunset.”

That wasn’t what I was expecting him to say.

“I’ll catch it tomorrow,” I tell him, and with that, I leave the rock star behind.

EVERLY

“Hey, there you are. I thought you’d left or something?” Jackson says, pulling me from my thoughts. “Vanessa and Christian want to have a chat.”

Do they know what just happened in the garden? Am I in trouble?

Good one, Everly. They will not hire me now I’ve been caught making out with one of their rock stars in the middle of their barbecue. And I promised Jackson I was a professional. Hendrix kissed me, though.

But you liked it. This is so true. I’m screwed.

I follow Jackson back through the pool area and into the luxurious home.

“There you are. Come, let’s have a chat,” Vanessa says, greeting me warmly.

Goddammit, she knows.

Jackson and I follow her down the corridor on the lower level of her home. She pushes open a door, and we enter an office. This must be hers as I take in the feminine design. The blonde wood floors are covered with a Persian rug, complementing the whitewashed walls and white and gold accents on her desk and chair. On one side of the office is a large dusty-pink velvet sofa and glass coffee table. On the other, a round gold bar cart with an array of spirits and crystal glasses, occupies one corner. The walls are lined with old

Dirty Texas tour posters and magazine covers of the band. Behind her desk is a white bookcase filled with books and personal photographs of her and her family. And right in the center of the room is a glass bubble chandelier.

“Take a seat, guys. Christian will join us in a moment,” she says, pointing to the pink sofa before walking over to the bar cart. “Would you like anything to drink? Beer, champagne, juice, or water?”

“Just water, thank you,” I answer.

“Me too,” Jackson adds.

Vanessa nods and grabs a couple of bottles of water for all of us from the refrigerator beside the bar cart and takes a seat on the sofa across from us.

“I’m here,” Christian says, bounding into the office.

“How about you put a shirt on first?” Vanessa tells her husband as she looks up at him.

He gives her a lazy smile and a flirtatious wink before turning his attention back to Jackson and me on the sofa. “My wife can’t control herself when she’s around all this,” he says with a chuckle as he runs his hand over his six-pack abs.

I swallow as my mouth turns dry.

I can feel the blush heat my skin.

Keep it together, Everly.

Vanessa shakes her head at her husband.

“I’ll be back in five.” Christian grins and heads out of the office.

Vanessa grins as she takes a sip of her water. “Sorry, it’s taken me all night to find a moment to catch up with you properly, Everly. I hope you’ve had fun tonight?”

I think back to Hendrix’s kiss in the garden before I reply, “I have, thank you.”

Christian enters the room with a beer in his hand and takes a seat beside his wife. He places a tanned, tattooed arm over

the edge of the sofa behind her.

“Jackson has been singing your praises. Then Sienna told me you’ve recently gone out on your own as an accountability coach and you might be exactly what we need,” Vanessa states.

“They are all too kind. It’s true I’ve recently gone out on my own. I’ve been working for other people for a while now, but I enjoy having more flexibility with my own clients.” She doesn’t need to know the real reason.

“How did you get into something like this?” Christian asks as he takes a long sip of his beer.

I try to shake the thoughts of his lips wrapped around the bottle from my mind. Quickly, I take a sip from my bottle of water as my throat has turned into a sandpit, before answering Christian’s question. “Because of Charlie.”

Vanessa and Christian both nod and stay quiet. They know what happened with Jackson and are also friends with my brother.

“Seeing Charlie struggle so much after his accident broke me. I knew I needed to help him. I deferred going to college to help with his recovery, wanting to make sure he always had someone with him at hospital visits and physiotherapy appointments, someone he could trust.

“He hated asking for help, especially from Mom and Dad, who didn’t know how to cope with another son injured while serving overseas. We could see Charlie retreating into a dark place. We lost our oldest brother, Lyle, to suicide a couple of years earlier after he came back from Iraq. We didn’t know he was suffering until it was too late. I remember never wanting my family to feel that pain ever again. I didn’t want to lose another brother,” I explain, my voice cracking from emotion.

“I’m so sorry,” Vanessa says quietly.

I take another sip of my water to steady myself. Talking about my brother is always hard.

“I could see Charlie was struggling, so I made it my mission to always be with him. Making him accountable to get

better, no matter what.”

“That’s an admirable thing to do,” Vanessa adds.

“It’s what you do for family,” I say with a shrug.

“Everly was a hard taskmaster. She kicked my butt several times,” Jackson says, giving me a nudge with his shoulder.

I can’t help but smile at him.

“So, you have no problems telling a man or multiple men what to do?” Vanessa asks me.

“No. A client is a client. They are all treated equally.”

“Even if they are bigger than you?” Christian questions.

“Everly studied Krav Maga and Muay Thai kickboxing. Everly can literally kick anyone’s ass,” Jackson adds with a smirk and a sense of pride.

Vanessa and Christian look surprised by Jackson’s comment.

I understand what they think. I’m five foot nothing, but I can take anyone down if provoked, as I proved earlier. I think it’s important for women to feel powerful. Just ask Hendrix about that. He learned not to mess with me.

“I teach my female clients many forms of self-defense during our sessions, especially here in Hollywood. I think the female celebrities need to know how to protect themselves in case their security can’t get to them in time.”

Christian’s hand tightens around his wife’s shoulders.

“Wish I had that in my life ... things might have been different,” Vanessa says quietly.

“Everly also has degrees in counseling, personal training, and nutrition,” Jackson adds, moving the subject away from something that is clearly sensitive.

“For someone so young, you have accomplished a lot. You’re qualified for what we are looking for. You’re perfect, actually,” Vanessa says, turning to her husband.

“If anyone can turn those three around, it’s her,” Christian states.

Three?

What are they talking about? I thought I was here for them.

“We need your help, Everly,” Vanessa declares. Her brows are pulling together, conveying a worried look. “We have a band that is really struggling, and we have tried everything to help them. But they are all on a self-destructive journey because of the pain they are all in due to a personal matter. They have agreed to the help, but I don’t know if they are too far gone. This is their last chance with us, but if I’m honest, I don’t want to let them down. Everyone in their lives so far has done that, and I don’t want us to be like everyone else. They deserve greatness, but I think deep down inside they don’t believe they do,” Vanessa explains to me.

This was not at all what I thought was going to happen. My mind runs a million miles an hour as I try to figure out exactly who she could be talking about, and then it hits me.

The Lost Boys.

Oh no.

My stomach sinks, remembering what just happened between Hendrix and me. Then I remember the news reports of groupies selling their stories. It mentioned something about gang bangs, copious amounts of drugs and alcohol, and all the basic rock-star stuff. I guess they have gone off the rails by all reports, but they have lost their bandmate.

To be fair, it was shocking when I heard the news, and I couldn’t believe it. The media went crazy. Then add in the hysterical groupies—vigils by candlelight out the front of the boys’ home, the mountains of flowers and teddy bears attached to their gate—who also lost their minds over Brodie’s death. It’s no wonder Hendrix has a disdain for groupies.

I’m a big fan of the boys’ music, I pump it loud as I work out, but I’m glad I never told Hendrix that. Otherwise, he truly would think me a groupie.

“We’re asking a lot from you, we know. Jackson reassures us you’re the best person for the job. And honestly, I don’t know if we could trust anyone else to do it,” Vanessa explains.

“You’re talking about The Lost Boys, aren’t you?” I ask, needing to clarify my suspicions.

Vanessa and Christian both nod in answer.

Shit.

“Is that going to be a problem?” Christian asks, noticing my hesitation.

“No, not at all.” I need this job, and one stupid kiss with Hendrix will derail nothing.

“And you think you can handle the three of them?” Christian asks.

“They can be difficult,” Vanessa adds.

No shit. Hendrix was a jerk in the garden. “What man isn’t,” I say, cracking a joke, hopefully masking my thoughts.

“We haven’t had much luck with assistants. Not sure if you’re aware what their last assistant told the media. It was on TMZ today,” Vanessa says with a sigh.

“I saw.” Seeing it come up on my timeline as I was scrolling on my phone earlier.

“You understand what we are dealing with then?” Vanessa adds angrily.

“Are you wanting me to be their assistant?” I ask, clarifying what role they see me playing. It’s not what I do, but the job has elements that cross over.

“Kind of. Not on a full-time basis. We would run all of that from our office, but we would need your help at the start. Fewer distractions, the better. Each assistant we have had seems more interested in sleeping with the boys than doing their job. That’s not the kind of assistant we need,” Vanessa explains.

Oh shit. Am I just as bad as all those previous women who have worked for The Lost Boys? *No, he kissed you.* And that

was before I knew about this offer. I thought they wanted me to work with Dirty Texas or any other number of bands but not them.

“We have a non-fraternization clause in the contract. Will this be a problem?” Vanessa asks, arching a curious brow at me.

Technically, Everly, you fraternized before signing the contract.

“No. I have the same clause in my contract. You are not very accountable if you’re sleeping with a client,” I explain, and that’s the truth. *Had to learn that the hard way.*

Vanessa smiles, her shoulders sagging with relief as she nods. “This would be an unusual job, working irregular and long hours, which might be different from what you’re used to.”

“The life of rock stars, hey?” I chuckle.

“Yes. Exactly. We would ask a lot of you in a short amount of time,” Vanessa reiterates.

“I’m up for the challenge,” I tell her confidently. *I can do this.* I need this. I have so much to prove, not only to myself but to others.

“Good to hear that. We would require you to move into their home. They need constant twenty-four-seven monitoring.”

Um, what? This gives me a moment of pause. I wasn’t expecting that.

“We don’t trust them on their own, not yet anyway,” Christian adds.

“We will compensate you well as we are asking a lot from you,” Vanessa states. She scribbles on a bit of paper and pushes it toward me.

I open it up, and my heart almost leaps out of my chest. They want to pay me this much to be a glorified babysitter?

“We are looking at hiring a full-time chef who will work with you regarding their nutrition. A drug and alcohol counselor will need to be seen once a week to get them clean again. We want them fit and healthy so they can finish their second album. We know you can do all these things too, but I think keeping them motivated will be hard enough, let alone counseling and cooking for them on top,” Vanessa explains.

“You don’t have to give us an answer today. We understand we are asking you to give up your life for the foreseeable future,” Christian adds. “But, please say yes. We’re desperate.” Christian pouts, which makes me smile.

“I have a question ...” Vanessa and Christian nod for me to continue. “Do you think Los Angeles is the best place for their recovery?”

The room falls silent.

“All their triggers, vices, and temptations are here.”

Vanessa and Christian look at each other. “Maybe they need to get away from here. From the memories,” Christian comments.

“Like a fresh start?” Vanessa asks, mulling over my question.

“Yes. Somewhere far away from the excesses of being a celebrity. In this town, people won’t say no to them, no matter how much they should. They need somewhere they can focus on recovery, healing ... give them space to focus on their music without their normal crutches of women and partying.”

The room falls quiet again as Vanessa and Christian think about my suggestion.

I hope I haven’t pushed them too far.

Maybe it’s a stupid idea.

Vanessa claps enthusiastically. “I love it. You’re right. This city is one enormous temptation for them. We could send them up to our place in Big Bear,” Vanessa says, turning to Christian.

“Or we can shove them in the dungeon at Olivia and Axel’s castle in England.” Christian chuckles.

Sounds a little extreme but it could be an option.

“I think Everly might be thinking of Montana? Don’t think you could get more remote than your family’s ranch,” Jackson suggests as he turns and looks over at me.

He’s not wrong. It’s an idea that popped into my mind as I thought about The Lost Boys and what their needs might be. Moonlight Falls is remote, and my family’s home is on the outskirts. If I got into any trouble with the boys, I’d have people to call on who would be there in an instant, like the Price boys. My oldest sister, Faith, is best friends with Lacey Price, their sister, and we’ve grown up around them. They are true country boys. Jesse is an ex-football star and now cattle rancher, and Austin, his younger brother, is a rodeo star. I know they could rustle up these city slickers if I need them to.

“My family has a ranch in Moonlight Falls, Montana. It’s in the middle of nowhere. Your closest neighbor is miles away. The fresh air, the rolling hills, and the tall peaks of the mountain ranges provide solitude. We hardly use it anymore since everyone’s moved out and away from there. It’s one of my favorite places in the world, though.”

“Moonlight Falls,” Vanessa repeats. “Why does that sound familiar?”

“River Jennings, the country star, comes from there,” Jackson informs Vanessa.

“That’s right,” she says, shaking her head.

“Moonlight Falls is a brilliant town. Everly knows everyone. They also don’t give a shit about celebrities either,” Jackson states.

“When River goes home, he’s never bothered. They leave him alone,” I add.

“That sounds amazing. The last thing we need is a town full of groupies or paparazzi,” Vanessa observes.

“Maybe hanging out in cowboy country might turn these boys into men.” Christian chuckles.

“The men in the town won’t tolerate rock-star egos,” I explain with a smile. My mind wanders to Hendrix and trying to picture him squaring up against a cowboy from Moonlight Falls. He would fail miserably, and that would take that inflated ego down a couple of notches.

“Are you suggesting they stay at your family home? Would your family be okay with it?” Vanessa asks.

“Yes. My parents are in Europe for the summer, and when they come back, they will probably settle in LA for a bit. They will be happy for someone to use it.”

“The guys could get back to nature ... cutting firewood, cooking, and cleaning for themselves.” Jackson chuckles.

“Love it. It’s like what we did when I bought our Big Bear cabin,” Christian states.

“The label would pay your parents to use it,” Vanessa says seriously.

“Knowing my parents, they will not take a single cent.”

My parents had contemplated selling the ranch because it was too much for them to look after, but I begged them not to. Instead, they hired a house manager to take care of it for them so that if I ever wanted to use it, it would always be ready. My sister lives on the other side of town with her own ranch and my brother Charlie is now settled in LA and has created a life for himself there. He’d only come back for a holiday, not full-time. That leaves me the only one who would pack up and move to Moonlight Falls, but there isn’t much call for an accountability coach out there.

“If everything is okay with your family letting us use your ranch, you’ll take on The Lost Boys? You’ll try to give it your best shot to turn them around?” Vanessa asks eagerly with hope written all over her face.

“Yes. I’ll do it,” I say, and moments later, Vanessa is engulfing me in a tight hug.

“Thank you. You have no idea how much this means to us.”

I hope I don't let the Dirty Texas guys down. I want The Lost Boys to succeed, and I'll do everything in my power to achieve it.

HENDRIX

The damn paparazzi are camped out the front of the label's headquarters. We were able to dodge them all weekend, but I guess our luck has run out. *Fucking vultures.*

"Fuck her for making our lives worse," Eli seethes as our car drives through the gate to the back entrance of Dirty Texas Records.

"I'm going to miss her mouth, though," Zeke adds with a chuckle.

I punch Zeke in the arm for his crassness.

"Ouch, you fucker," he says, rubbing his arm.

We get out of the car and head into the building for our meeting with the team. Apparently, they have some news for us. I'm not sure yet if it's good or bad.

"We should have never put ourselves in that fucking situation. Getting so fucked up that someone could take advantage of us." I curse as we step into the elevator.

"You didn't care when her mouth was wrapped around your dick," Eli states simply as he presses the button for the desired floor.

"I'm sorry I care that all of this could be gone in a fucking instant," I remark dryly, waving my hand around the elevator.

The boys still and glare at me.

“Everything we worked so hard for could be gone because of our stupidity. Everything Brodie worked hard for—”

“Don’t bring Brodie into this,” Eli demands coldly.

“As if the label would drop us. They invited us to their home.” Zeke scoffs.

“That means nothing. Did you even read the fucking contracts? They can terminate it if we are in breach. Us not having the second album completed *is ... in ... breach*,” I stress angrily at him.

“Shit!” Eli swears quietly.

“But it’s extenuating circumstances,” Zeke moans out the well-worn excuse as the elevator doors open.

We step out into the main reception area and head toward the conference room, where everyone is waiting for us.

“How long are we going to use Brodie’s death to justify our behavior?” I ask them honestly.

Both stop, turn, and stare at me, surprised by my comment. It’s the fucking truth, though. Have they read what people are saying about us online? Even our own fans are asking us to work out our shit.

“How fucking dare you!” Zeke growls as he charges at me, catching me off guard. He grabs my T-shirt in his fists and pushes me up against the wall. “He was our fucking brother. We loved him. And he loved us.”

“He’s dead, Zeke. If he loved us, he wouldn’t have fucking died. He chose to get on his bike. He chose to speed. He wanted to die. He wished this upon himself. He wanted to teach *me* a lesson,” I scream back at him.

“You’re a fucking asshole,” Zeke swears as his eyes widen with anger; then he punches me square in the jaw.

Fuck, that hurt.

He lays his fists into me repeatedly. The tears fall down his cheeks as he screams at me for saying all those things about our brother.

I don't defend myself. Instead, I slump against the wall, letting each punch's pain infiltrate my body.

I deserve this.

I'm the reason Brodie's dead.

Me.

I deserve everything Zeke is dishing out. I need it to numb the pain inside my chest. The big gaping hole that Brodie created when he died.

"He fucking loved us," Zeke screams at me.

"Get the fuck off him!" Christian screams down the corridor, right as Jackson comes barreling in, ripping Zeke off me.

Blood is pouring from my nose and lip. I can feel the bruises blooming under my skin as I blink furiously, trying to regain my vision.

"What the fuck is going on?" Christian stares at each of us.

"Family disagreement," Eli states coolly.

"Nothing is this bad that you would want to fight with your brother like that. This is the time you should be banding together, not ripping each other apart," Christian spits angrily.

"You have no idea how bad it is," Zeke pants out, trying hard to catch his breath.

"Attacking each other will not solve it either," Jackson says, shaking his head in disappointment.

"Sure made me feel good." Zeke sneers angrily at me.

"Not much of a fair fight when only one person's fighting," Jackson quips back.

Zeke huffs and grumbles at Jackson's comment.

"Come with me, boy," Christian says, pulling me by my T-shirt and shoving me into the visitor's bathroom situated off the corridor we were standing in. "Clean yourself up. We have places to be," he says angrily before slamming the door shut, rattling the hinges.

Why am I in trouble? I didn't start this.

I walk over to the basin and wash my face, watching as the water turns a deep red and the smell of copper fills the room. Grabbing a paper towel from the rack, I wipe my face clean. Then I look up in the mirror and assess the damage. I look like shit. The bruises are already forming, discoloring my skin, but they will eventually disappear.

Zeke's probably beating himself up over our tussle in the corridor now that the adrenaline is wearing off. He shouldn't feel bad. I deserved his anger. He would do a lot worse to me if he knew the truth. They both would. My shoulders slump as I stare at myself in the mirror; my lip curls in disgust while I look at my reflection. "I'm sorry, Brodie. I wish things were different."

Shaking the memories of that night from my consciousness, I walk out into the corridor and see Jackson alone, waiting for me.

"They're all in the conference room," he tells me, and we head in that direction. "Hey," he says, stopping me before going into the room. "Vanessa and Christian want the best for you. They aren't your enemies. Trust the process," he says cryptically.

I give him a nod and head into the conference room where Eli and Zeke are sitting huddled, whispering to each other.

Zeke looks up as I enter, and his face drops, seeing the bruises percolating.

"I'm fine," I reassure him.

Zeke shakes his head and scrunches his brows together as he pulls himself out of Eli's embrace. "I'm sorry, brother," he says gruffly.

"It's all good," I tell him.

"Now that's all sorted," Christian says, pulling our attention to him seated at the head of the table, and Jackson takes a seat beside him. "The label has decided in light of your most recent scandal that it's best you leave LA."

We look at each other.

What the hell does that mean?

“Ibiza, here we come,” Eli jokes, trying to break the serious mood.

“Keep dreaming, dickhead,” Christian tells him. “We think it’s best you get away from the temptation this city offers.” This does not sound good.

We like the temptation.

Temptation is good.

“We have found a great place for you to concentrate on your next album without the distractions of LA,” Christian explains.

“Where are we going? Hawaii? London? Australia?” Zeke asks.

“Montana.” Christian smiles.

“What the actual fuck?” I state, staring at him.

“What the fuck is in Montana?” Eli asks.

“Cowboys and shit,” Zeke adds.

“I don’t mind the odd cowboy or cowgirl.” Eli chuckles, wiggling his brows at Zeke.

“Reverse cowgirl is a favorite.” Zeke laughs as they high-five each other.

Fucking idiots.

“You’re leaving us in the wilderness ... hoping for what?” I ask Christian.

“Hoping the second album gets written, but right now, I’d be happy if you just got your shit together,” Christian tells me.

Silence falls across the conference room.

“When will this boy scout camp start?” I question angrily.

“Today,” Christian answers with a knowing smile.

Today? What the fuck!

“What about all our shit?” Zeke asks.

“I’ve got people packing bags for you as we speak. You won’t need much. Everything is provided for you,” Jackson explains.

“If we’ve missed anything, I’m happy to send it over to you once you’re settled in,” Christian advises.

“You’re going to shuttle us off into the wilderness?” I question.

“Are there bears in Montana?” Eli asks.

“Yes,” Jackson answers with a grin.

“Fuck!” Eli curses.

“What about cougars?” Zeke asks.

“Probably,” Jackson states.

“Cougars are my favorite,” Eli jokes.

“Mine too.” Zeke grins, and they high-five each other again.

Christian looks over at me and raises a brow as if to ask, *Are they always like this?*

I wish I could say this was a one-off, but it’s not. They’re always like this. I shrug my shoulders.

“Good luck with that.” Christian chuckles while he stands, as does Jackson. “Boys, good luck in Montana. Make us proud. You can do this. Dirty Texas Records has faith in you.”

I wish I did.

An hour later, we are rolling up to Van Nuys Airport, a private airport where the Dirty Texas jet is waiting for us.

“So, they’re serious about sending us into the middle of butt-fuck nowhere.” Zeke moans as he stares at the private plane.

“Of course, they were. We fucked up, guys. I told you this is it. We continue to keep fucking up, and they *will* pull our contract.”

“Someone else will pick us up.” Eli huffs.

“Not if they think we are a liability. When we were young we dreamed of working with Dirty Texas, and now we are throwing it all away because we’re being stubborn?” I argue.

“We’re not doing it on purpose,” Zeke grumbles.

“I know,” I answer softly. “But we need to think about moving forward.”

“I don’t want to without Brodie.” Zeke sighs.

“None of us do.”

“It was so fucking selfish of him to die on us like that. Why the fuck did he do it?” Eli mumbles angrily as he kicks a stone across the tarmac.

Guilt slides over my skin. I can’t tell them the real reason he ran that night. I can’t lose them too.

“Welcome to your flight.” The male steward smiles at us as we enter the plane.

Of course, he would be male. They are serious about taking away our temptation. Not that it would stop Zeke and Eli.

“Would you like something to drink?”

“I’ll have a Jack and Coke, please?” Eli asks.

“Sorry, sir. This is a dry flight. No alcohol will be served.”

We all look at each other.

“Fuck! They are serious.” Eli swears as the gravity of what’s happening to us finally sets in.

“Three Cokes, please,” I answer for the guys.

The steward nods and heads to the back of the plane.

“Thank fuck, I still have some edibles. Who wants in?” Zeke whispers, pulling out three balls that look like candy.

“Me,” Eli says, grabbing one out of Zeke’s hand before popping it in his mouth.

Zeke shakes his hand, and I grab the other ball.

I'm going to regret this, but I need it to get through this flight with all my bruises. I pop it in my mouth, and it doesn't take long until the stress, tension, and pain subside, and I relax into the leather seat.

Maybe this will not be as bad as we think it is.

We need to concentrate on writing, and getting away from LA might be exactly what we need.

Two hours later, we descend into the fucking mountains, where there's nothing but pine trees and wide-open plains before us. We land on some nature strip that looks like it's out the back of someone's house. A black Jeep pulls up beside the plane.

Who the hell is that? I can't see through the tinted windows. They wait until the plane's engines have stopped before jumping out.

"What the fuck?" Zeke curses as his face is plastered to the window.

"Holy shit! She's cute," Eli adds.

Wait, she?

I turn to the gorgeous blonde who's standing there dressed like Cowgirl Barbie. She's wearing a pair of dark shades and is now walking toward the plane. She's dressed in short cutoff jeans, showing off her long, tanned legs. A red and black flannel shirt is tied at her trim waist over a white singlet that hugs her generous tits and dips low, giving us a perfect view of her cleavage. Her blonde locks are pulled back into a high ponytail, and she has white Converse on her feet.

Maybe not *all* temptation has been taken away.

The steward lowers the stairs, and she jogs toward the plane, which makes her tits bounce and my dick twitch.

"Howdy, boys," she greets us as she steps onto the plane and takes off her glasses.

What in the hell is she doing here? That's the groupie from Vanessa and Christian's place. Is she stalking me? *Like you*

care, you haven't stopped thinking about her. That's not true. Bullshit, it is! You jerked off to her that night. Whatever.

“Howdy, gorgeous,” Zeke says as his eyes roam all over her body. And I can see his interest firing up in his blue eyes.

The smile falls instantly from Everly's face. “That's not what's going to be happening here. There will be no ... gorgeous, babe, beautiful, sexy, or any other misogynistic remarks you would like to throw my way. Do you understand?”

The plane falls silent as we listen to the petite firecracker.

I try to stifle my laugh, but it slips out.

Everly looks around Zeke and Eli directly at me sitting in my seat. Her bright green eyes widen as she takes in my bruised and battered face. The anger that was radiating off her moments ago from Zeke's comment is now gone as her brows pull together, assessing me.

“Don't worry, groupie, I still look pretty underneath all this,” I say, waving my hand over my face.

Zeke and Eli look over at me, and I can see questions on their faces as they catch the familiar way I spoke to her.

“Who the hell are you?” Eli questions her.

“I'm Everly Nash. Your accountability coach,” she answers sweetly.

“Wait! What did you say?” Zeke asks as he looks between Eli and me.

“Accountability coach,” I repeat to Zeke, my comment dripping with disdain. It sounds like a made-up job to me. Is that why she was at the barbecue? Was she spying on me? On us? She needs to go back to LA and look after bored housewives. Surely, they must be the only morons who would hire some bullshit hippie shit like this. “This is a joke, right? Vanessa and Christian are pranking us, aren't they? Where's the real coach?” I ask.

Everly's face turns red at my comment. I guess I've pissed her off.

I think I've found my new favorite pastime—making Everly furious.

“This isn't a joke. I'm the boss of the three of you. Vanessa and Christian have given me full access to do whatever I see fit to get you guys writing again. There won't be a thing that you do that I won't know about,” she says, pointing her finger at us all in warning as her green eyes narrow on us.

“So, you'll know when I'm jerking off over you then?” Zeke asks her crudely.

I don't mean to laugh, but thanks to the edible I consumed earlier, I do.

Everly gasps at Zeke's comment as a red hue creeps up her chest and neck.

Oh yeah, she's angry.

“Get the fuck off this plane,” she screams, sounding more like a drill sergeant than the tiny little bird she looks like.

We all stare at her in confusion. Also, the edibles are making our reactions slower.

“I'm not speaking fucking Japanese. *Get. The. Fuck. Out.* Or I'll make you run behind my car the whole way back to the house.”

Zeke and Eli jump up and rush out of the plane.

Everly and I stare each other down.

“Were you spying on me in the garden?” I ask.

“No,” she answers curtly.

“Did you know you were going to be our accountability coach when we met?”

“No.”

“Bullshit,” I bite back.

“Vanessa and Christian wanted to talk to me about hiring my services, but I thought it was for them. I had no idea it was for you three.”

“Don’t believe you,” I state, more out of frustration. *Are you upset because you have an accountability coach, or are you upset that Everly’s off-limits?*

Her blonde brow twitches in annoyance. “I don’t care if you do or you don’t. I have a job to do, and I’m going to do it with or without your help. So, you either get off this plane like the other two, or I’m going to leave you behind, where you can have your tantrum in peace. It’s your damn choice,” she states clearly.

My brow pulls together, daring her to punish me because I know she won’t. The label will be upset if she leaves their prize rock stars in the wilderness to get eaten by bears.

“Suit yourself,” she says, turning on her heel and jogging back down the plane’s stairs.

“I think she’s serious,” the steward tells me from where he’s standing.

“She’s not,” I tell him cockily.

The steward’s forehead crumples as he stares out the open door. “No, she’s serious.”

This time, I jump up and rush to the door, stop at the top of the stairs, and stare out across the vast plains of nothingness.

Everyone’s in the Jeep. It looks like they have packed all our bags in the back seat beside Eli. Everly winds down the driver’s window, then places her bronzed arm lazily on the edge before her head pops out. She then looks up into the endless blue sky toward the sun. “You’ve got a couple of hours before sunset. Better get going. The wolves are mighty hungry out here.” She chuckles before putting the Jeep into gear and punching the accelerator. She floors it across the open plains, leaving me in a cloud of dust.

Fuck.

She left me.

I can’t believe she fucking left me.

I can’t believe Zeke and Eli did too.

Fuck.

HENDRIX

“I’m sorry, sir, but I have to ask you to get moving as we have to take off again,” the steward states.

“You’re going to leave me here?”

“Those were my orders. Good luck!” the steward says as he gives me a salute and pushes me out the door.

I’m stunned as I stumble down the stairs and away from the aircraft. *Am I in a fucking nightmare?* This seriously can’t be happening.

“Get moving. She’s right about the wolves,” the steward calls out as he pulls up the stairs to the jet and secures the door.

I rush out of the way and stand beside a cluster of pine trees as the pilot fires up the engines. I watch in disbelief as the plane taxis along the grass, and moments later, it’s airborne.

What in the fuck!

I’m literally in the middle of fucking nowhere.

“Fuck!” I scream at the top of my lungs.

What the hell do I do now?

Panic and paranoia take over thanks to the edibles. My heart beats out of my chest. *Am I having a heart attack?*

Breathe, just breathe. It’s going to be okay. This is not like the other times you were left alone. You’re safe. Maybe. Fuck.

I don't fucking know. Panic starts to consume me. I pull out my phone to call 911 or the state troopers or whoever the hell you call in the wilderness, but when I stare down at my phone, there is no fucking reception.

“Motherfucker!” I curse as I throw my cell in anger.

Fuck, *fuck*, *FUCK*.

It's going to be okay, Hendrix. You have this. You can do this. It's not the first time you've slept rough, but it will be my first time sleeping with the threat of wolves and bears eating me in the middle of the night. I inhale a deep breath and try to calm my anxiety. Stupid fucking edible.

Now think. What direction did they go?

I stare down and see the Jeep's tire tracks.

Yes!

I follow the tracks and head off down the hill in the blazing sun.

I can't believe she left me.

What kind of person leaves another human being in the middle of the fucking wilderness? Everly Nash, that's who.

When Vanessa and Christian hear about this, Little Miss Cowgirl is going to be fired and sued for gross endangerment. Maybe I should call them and tell them what's happened. Once they know they will turn the jet around and come rescue me. I reach into my pocket to grab my cell and realize it's not there.

That's because you threw it away, stupid.

I backtrack and scramble around in the grass, looking for it. I can't be out here without a phone. I'll need it to call for help when I reach reception. Eventually, I stumble upon it and raise it up in the air like a beacon of hope. This edible is not helping my mental state right now. I should be chilled, enjoying a fucking walk in the sunshine, being at one with nature. Instead, I'm a ball of fucking anxiety, and every little noise is making me jump.

I continue following the Jeep's path down the hill for what seems like forever.

Fuck nature and its sounds.

Fuck the sun, too, which is beating down on my skin.

I grumble as I continue to stomp, each step making me angrier. *What kind of person leaves someone like me in the middle of nowhere?* A mentally unstable one, that's for sure. Why the hell did I think Everly Nash was hot? She's insane.

Some time later, I need a break. So, I stop near a cluster of pine trees and shelter from the sun's rays. I pull out my cell and dial Vanessa's number, hoping on a wish and a prayer that it connects.

It doesn't connect.

I scream at the top of my lungs again and pray a bald eagle comes down, snatches me from the ground, and eats me, putting me out of my misery.

I collapse beside a pine tree and swipe the sweat away from my brow. It feels like hours since I was abandoned. Is she seriously leaving me here to die? Does she hate me after that kiss the other night? I curl up into the fetal position, trying to shake the dark thoughts from my mind.

The sound of a car's engine echoes through the valley.

Yes.

I'm saved.

The same black Jeep from earlier is hurtling toward me. I stand up from my cool spot under the pine trees and wave it down, which is pathetic. The Jeep skids to a stop right beside me. The tinted window rolls down, and a smiling Everly pops her head out.

"You're fucking crazy. You left me here," I scream at her.

"Here," she says, shoving a bottle of cold water into my hand.

Greedily, I take it. "Something could have happened to me."

Everly rolls her eyes. “So dramatic, even for a rock star. You were perfectly fine.”

“You realize who I am?” I ask, thumping my chest angrily.

“Yep,” Everly says, making the *p* pop between her lips.

My hands ball into fists. I would never hit a woman, but I’m dangerously close to putting my fist through the engine of her car. I’m losing it.

“And?”

“And what?” she asks.

Is this woman for real? Most women would scramble to accommodate me if we were back in LA. I splutter for a couple of seconds unable to speak.

“Stop whining and get in the car,” she scolds.

Does she have no remorse for what she’s done to me? I could have gone in the wrong direction. I could have fallen off a cliff, been eaten by a bear, or stumbled upon some redneck and been shot. Reluctantly, I get into the car, slamming the door behind me.

Everly puts the car into gear and hurtles through the valley at top speed.

“Slow down. You’re going to fucking kill us,” I yell as I hold white-knuckled to the seat.

Everly ignores me.

“When I get back into cell service, I’m calling Vanessa,” I warn. I’ve had just about enough of this treatment.

Everly slams on the brakes, and thankfully, I am wearing my seat belt. Otherwise, I would have flown through the window.

Fucking crazy woman driver.

“Let me get one thing *very clear* ... I’m the boss of the three of you for the next month. Vanessa has approved everything I’m doing. So, if you want to be a little bitch and tattletale, then go right ahead,” she yells angrily at me.

One fucking month? We are supposed to be in this hellhole for one whole month.

Oh, hell fucking no.

Not with this woman.

“Is this some kind of revenge for me kissing you the other night?” I yell back at her.

Everly’s fingers tighten around the steering wheel at my question. “Your ego is out of control if you think I’m doing all this over a kiss. That kiss meant nothing. It wasn’t anything to get my panties in a knot over, especially one that *unremarkable*.” Everly huffs.

Unremarkable. Bullshit! That kiss blew her mind.

“I’m here to do a job, not be your friend or anything else. I don’t care if you love me or hate me.”

“I’m leaning more toward hate,” I grumble.

“The feeling is mutual. But I see someone has already beat me to the punch,” she says, her green eyes looking over my bruises.

“It was therapy. The way me and the boys like to settle things.”

“How very rock star,” she replies, rolling her eyes.

She’s trying to change the subject so we don’t talk about the kiss.

She wants me.

I can tell.

“Nice deflecting. Prove it,” I say.

“Prove what?”

“That the kiss meant nothing.”

“You’re still going on about this. I don’t have to prove anything. I’m sorry if it meant something to you,” she says, raising an arched brow at me.

“It didn’t.”

“Good. Then we have nothing to prove.”

My eyes narrow on her. “I still call bullshit.”

Everly throws her hands up in the air in frustration. “Oh my god ... you are the most self-absorbed asshole I’ve ever met. This world doesn’t revolve around you, *Hendrix Meyer*,” she says, enunciating my name as if each letter is a pointed barb directly at me.

“See, you can’t do it,” I argue.

“Are you still going on about that stupid kiss?”

“Yep,” I reply, popping the *p* like she did to me earlier.

“Then you’re going to be waiting till your dying breath because I don’t kiss my clients. I’ve signed a contract giving Vanessa and Christian my word that nothing nefarious will ever happen between us,” she explains.

“Do they know about the kiss in the garden?” I ask because I bet they don’t.

“No. I didn’t think it prudent to tell them as it happened before I signed the contract. And *I* know nothing will *ever* happen between us *ever* again,” she says stoically.

“How interesting.” I chuckle as I rub my chin.

“Whatever idea you think you have in that pretty little head of yours ... don’t. Do I need to remind you that my brother works in cyber security for Jackson,” she says, looking over and glaring at me.

I did not know that, but now that I do, I will rethink the blackmail idea that was brewing in my head.

“You think I have a pretty head?” I tease.

Everly sucks in a deep breath and lets out a heavy sigh. “All I care about is helping the three of you get back from the depths of your grief and to your new normal,” she whispers.

Grief.

She’s trying to save us from grieving the loss of our friend. *Who the hell does she think she is?*

“You have no fucking idea the grief we are going through, Little Miss Perfect,” I state angrily, looking her up and down with disdain, triggered by her comments.

“Nice assumption, asshole,” she bites back before starting up the Jeep again. She shoots off down the hill, and I grip on for dear life, but she doesn’t drive as maniacally as she did earlier.

Everly lets out a heavy sigh as her fingers grip the steering wheel tightly again as she slows down to a safer speed. “Look ... I think we’ve gotten off on the wrong foot,” she says, turning her head to the side and giving me a small smile.

“You think?” I answer sarcastically, folding my arms across my chest.

“Are you always this annoying?”

“I thought you said we got off on the wrong foot. Seems like we are still there.”

“Did you forget to take your happy pills or something? Because your friends don’t seem to be as grumpy as you are,” she states, shaking her head.

“Probably because their edibles have given them a chilled-out high, whereas mine has made me lose my mind because you left me in the fucking woods,” I tell her, raising my voice.

“Wait! You’re high?”

“Yep.”

“You all took edibles before coming here?” she asks, a small dose of panic brushing across her words.

“Of course we did. We needed something to get through all this,” I explain, waving my hands in the air.

“This explains so much,” she mumbles to herself.

“Oh no, I’m an asshole with or without edibles. Remember you told me that the first night we met.”

“You’re really making this hard on yourself,” she says, shaking her head at me again.

“In my defense, I didn’t think you would leave me in the fucking woods,” I reiterate again.

“I gave you a choice. It’s not my fault you chose the wrong one.”

“Are you always this much of a bitch?”

“I can be *sooo* much worse,” she says, giving me a wide smile.

I roll my eyes and will bide my time until we are back in civilization and can call for help.

We sit in silence until Everly can’t stand it anymore. “Can we start again? I don’t want us to be fighting like this the entire month. It’s exhausting.”

“What’s exhausting is having to walk for hours, not knowing if you’re going to run into a bear around the next bend.”

“You really are going to have to get over that, or we’re never going to get anywhere.” She sighs.

“You can’t determine how long I should be upset over something like this. You abandoned me. It’s triggered my childhood trauma.”

Everly stops the Jeep again and turns her attention fully onto me. Her face has gone a little pale, and her features that were pulled with tension seconds ago are now soft.

“I’m so sorry. I had no idea that exercise would cause you that much pain,” she says, reaching out and touching my arm gently.

Huh.

Then I realize what’s happening and burst out laughing. *Thanks, edible.* “I was joking.” *I’m not but she doesn’t need to know that.*

“You were joking?” she asks, raising her voice.

I nod.

“You *are* an asshole,” she says before slapping me in the chest.

“Hey, that’s abuse. You need to stop traumatizing me, Everly,” I say, chuckling away to myself as steam comes out of Everly’s ears.

“You’re a real jerk, you know that?” she grumbles as she starts the Jeep up again. “I was actually concerned for you in that moment,” she says, looking disappointed.

And for the first time, I felt that disappointment hit its intended target, and it doesn’t feel good.

We sit in silence as she continues to bounce over the land.

“What does an accountability coach actually do?” I ask, trying to break up the quiet tension. I would rather Everly be angry at me than disappointed.

“Do you really want to know, or are you asking so you can make fun of it?”

“I want to know. And I should know, seeing we will be working together for the month.”

Everly nods. “My job is to be accountable for the three of you. I have to make sure you are not drinking or doing drugs.” She turns and shakes her head, realizing all three of us are currently coming down. “We are trying to work on your mind, body, and spirit.”

Her answer makes me burst out laughing at the hippie shit she’s sprouting, which makes her frown.

“Sorry. It’s the edible.”

She shakes her head again.

“I hope they are paying you well for this job. You’re going to need it keeping the three of us in line.”

“They are,” she quips.

We both fall quiet for a couple of moments.

“You’ve pissed off many people these past couple of months with your choices,” Everly explains.

I know we have, but I'm not about to tell her that. We fall into another round of awkward quiet before Everly lets out another exhausted sigh.

"I don't want to fight with you, Hendrix. Vanessa and Christian have entrusted your welfare to me to help you guys succeed, and I want to see the three of you on top again. I love your music."

"We don't need your help to get back on top. We've always been able to do things on our own." I grunt.

"I'm not the enemy, Hendrix."

"No, you're a groupie." The words slip out before I stop them. There isn't much else to say so I say nothing more. I'm not normally this much of a dick to women, but there's something about Everly Nash that seems to bring out that side of me. I turn and stare out the Jeep's window as the mountains rush by. I think it might be safer this way.

Everly says nothing more because there really isn't anything left to say.

HENDRIX

We round the bend, the trees thin out, and a large two-story log cabin comes into view with a lake nestled in behind it.

“Wow!” I gasp.

“It’s pretty spectacular, isn’t it?”

“Is it a resort?”

“No.”

“Is it rehab?” I ask as panic pulses through my veins.

“No, no ... nothing like that,” she reassures me. “My family owns it.”

My entire body stills. “We’re living with your family?”

“No,” Everly grumbles, still clearly upset with me. “I grew up here. It used to be our family home until we all flew the nest.”

“Nobody lives here anymore?” *Who the hell has a spare house floating around? How rich is she?*

“We use it for holiday celebrations. It’s beautiful at Christmas time. But getting all my siblings and parents together is hard as we are scattered all over the place.”

“Where do your parents live then?” I ask, curiosity getting the better of me.

“At the moment, they are spending their time in Europe. They might spend Christmas in LA this year with my brother

and his partner.”

“I’m guessing your parents are rich?” Only rich people say they are summering in Europe. Why the hell does this not surprise me? Rich girls always have made-up jobs like accountability coach, Pilates instructor, influencer, you name it.

“He’s done well for himself. My dad owned a tech company. He’s retired now after selling it,” Everly explains.

Bingo. There it is; she’s loaded. Why would Christian and Vanessa think she would be the right person to help us? She’s a rich daddy’s girl with no life experience.

“You grew up here, not in the city?”

“Yep, I love it here. The fresh air. The solitude. My horses.”

A country girl. *How is she surviving in LA?* “Horses?”

“Yep. Was Miss Rodeo twice,” she says proudly.

Guess she knows how to use ropes then. Where the hell did that thought come from? It needs to back the fuck up.

“Rodeos?”

“Barrel Racing State Champion ... you’re looking at.”

“Why did you stop if you were so good?” I question.

“I stopped because ...” she starts to explain, but then her face changes as if she caught herself about to tell me something she shouldn’t and thinks better of it. A slight tension in her shoulders is clear. “Just family stuff.”

The mood in the Jeep falls awkward as I’ve obviously hit a nerve.

“I’ve never been horseback riding,” I confess, trying to turn the conversation around.

“Never?”

“None of our foster homes were fancy.”

“Guess you guys are in for a treat then because I know some of the best cowboys in town, and I think they would love

to show some city slickers how to ride,” she says, giving me a wide smile.

I have a feeling payback is about to happen.

“Zeke and Eli seemed keen when I mentioned it to them earlier.”

Of course, they were. “When a pretty girl asks them to jump, they ask how damn high,” I say, which pulls a frown across her face.

“Never know, you could have an inner cowboy deep down inside you.”

“I doubt it.”

The Jeep drives up the long driveway toward the front door, where I see Zeke and Eli looking freshly showered and relaxed with big smiles on their faces.

Assholes.

Everly pulls to a stop, and Zeke opens her door for her. He offers his hand, which she takes, giving him a giggle.

That didn’t take him long to change her mind about him. Guess that speech earlier about being misogynist was just that, a well-rehearsed speech with no substance. I roll my eyes. She’s just like all the other women who work for us. Tonight, she’ll be on her knees for Zeke. They all do eventually.

Eli comes around and opens my door. “Glad to see you’re alive.”

“She’s fucking crazy,” I tell him.

Eli’s eyes narrow. “No, she’s not. Everly’s great. You brought this on yourself.”

My jaw falls open at his comment. “A couple of hours, and you’re already changing to get a go at some pussy. Where’s your loyalty, man?” I hiss at him.

“Fuck you, Hendrix,” Eli spits before turning on his heel.

No, fuck him.

Fuck them.

They are always fucking up, and now they look at me like I'm the problem. If they want to suck up to Cowgirl Barbie, then fine.

“Did you enjoy your walk?” Zeke smirks as I walk around the car.

“I did actually.” I am not giving him the satisfaction of knowing how much it killed me to be left alone.

“You look like shit,” Zeke adds. “And you fucking stink.” Scrunching up his nose at me makes Everly laugh.

“You can freshen up upstairs. Your room is the last on the left. Your bags are already there,” Everly informs me.

I give them a salute and jog up the front steps, which are made of wood and stone. The cabin, if that's what you call it, is your traditional log cabin, just supersized.

Walking in the front entry, I stop and take in my surroundings. The sheer size of the home is overwhelming.

There is a large living room that looks out over the valley and the lake below via floor-to-ceiling windows. A stone fireplace sits on one side, and the dining room with the world's biggest wooden table on the other. It looks like it sits twenty-plus. Behind that is the kitchen with its granite countertops, oversized refrigerator, and a huge oven and cooktop.

“Just up the stairs.” Everly's voice catches me off-guard, making me jump.

I nod and head on through the corridor to where the wooden stairs are located. Large stuffed grizzly bears and deer line the walls, which gives me the creeps. I leap up the stairs two at a time and turn right down the corridor, spying many doors that must lead to bedrooms.

Moments later, I make it to my room at the furthest end of the house.

And furthest away from Everly, which is probably exactly where Zeke and Eli want me.

Whatever! They can have her.

She's not my type anyway.

Liar.

Okay. Was my type, but after spending that car ride with her, there is no way in hell she is my type.

Opening the door to my bedroom, I'm taken aback by the sheer size. It's bigger than some of the houses I used to live in. I zero in on the bed made from logs and the floor-to-ceiling windows, which again, look out over the lake and wilderness. There's a balcony too. Opening the door, I see a couple of chairs and a table as I step out into the mountain air. I sit and take in the serenity. Closing my eyes, all I can hear are the sounds of birds and the rustle of the grass when the wind blows through it, which sounds more relaxing now than earlier when I was stranded. The tension in my shoulders releases, and my muscles relax with each deep inhale of the fresh air.

Then I smell something on the breeze, which has my lip curling up in disgust when I realize it's me. So, I head on into the bathroom, where I see a luxurious spa bath that faces a large, framed glass window overlooking the mountains. Baths are not my thing, but after today, I deserve one, but then my stomach growls. Yeah, food is more important than a bath, so a shower it is. I quickly undress, step into the shower, and let the hot water rush over my aching muscles.

After one of the most satisfying showers of my life, I step out feeling new, cleansed, and almost reborn. I can probably deal with Everly's smart mouth a little better than I have been. I grab a towel and use it to dry my hair as I walk out into the bedroom to grab clean clothes.

"Shit," Everly squeals.

I lift my head to look at where she's standing.

Her green eyes are wide in surprise as she stares at my naked form in all its glory right in front of her.

"I-I ..." She stumbles over her words as her eyes travel over my body, making my dick twitch to life.

No. Easy, boy. She is not the one for us.

Her cheeks turn crimson, but she still doesn't move to get away from my nakedness.

"Like what you see, groupie?" I ask, giving her a smirk, refusing to hide myself from her eyes.

"You left this in the car," she says, holding out my phone.

"Thanks," I say, taking the phone from her hand. Our fingers touch, and both of us jerk away as tiny zaps of electricity lick up my arm.

"You could have waited till I was out of the shower."

"You were being dramatic about having no cell service in the car, so I thought you would be desperate for a lifeline out of here."

"Were you trying to make me accountable for my things?"

"You really are a dick," she says, her eyes drifting down to my hardening dick.

"And *you* seem to like *my dick*," I tease as I run my hand down my stomach before my hand wraps around my cock. I give it a good tug to emphasize it.

"I've seen bigger," she mutters, turns on her heel, and walks out of my room before stopping at the doorway. "Lunch is almost ready if you're hungry."

"I'm plenty hungry. How about you?" I ask, raising a brow.

Everly gives me a huff and disappears out the door, slamming it hard behind her, which has me in fits of laughter.

Maybe it will not be so rough staying here for a month.

I think I've found my new plaything.

EVERLY

I hate Hendrix Meyer with every fiber of my being.

You didn't seem to mind him when his tongue was down your throat or his hand on his dick.

At least I can call Charlie and tell him the rumors are true—Hendrix Meyer has a pierced dick.

Ugh. Why is that gorgeous dick attached to a gorgeous dick?

Either way, I shouldn't be checking out either dick.

Day one, and I've already messed everything up.

I had no idea they were high when they arrived. I should have done a drug test, especially now I know they had edibles on the way here.

Vanessa and Christian made the rules simple.

No drugs.

No drinking.

No sex.

And I've already broken one and some of the third rule. It's not like kissing or ogling one's dick is sex, but it's also not innocent.

Why do I keep fucking up? Because Hendrix Meyer is an ass, that's why. I've not met one as combative as him before. Every conversation has turned into a fight.

You left him in the wilderness for an hour. But he damn well deserved it.

I needed to show him he isn't in charge around here. I needed to assert my dominance over him. Otherwise, he would push every single button of mine until I gave in. The problem is, he did that anyway. I can't believe the way I spoke to him today. I never speak to my clients like that, but he got right under my skin.

I flop back against my bed and stare up at the ceiling. Thank goodness my bedroom is on the other side of the house, away from Hendrix. I think we need the distance between us because you never know when one of us might murder the other in the middle of the night. *Or wind up in his bed.* Hell to the no.

I grab my cell and call my brother. I need his guidance to help me navigate this tricky situation I've found myself in.

"Hey, babe. How's it going being locked up with three hot rock stars?" Charlie asks when he answers.

"Please tell me you're alone?"

"I'm working from home today. Why? Is everything okay?"

That's good. The last thing I need is for Jackson or Derrick to listen in on this conversation. "No. It's not. It's been one colossal disaster," I tell him as I try to hold the tears at bay. I will *not* cry over this.

"What happened? It can't have been that bad?"

"It's worse than anything you could be thinking," I explain.

"Okay."

I know he thinks I'm being dramatic, and maybe I am, but I need him to talk me off the cliff.

"Start from the start."

"The start?"

"Yeah."

“The start is Hendrix Meyer kissed me at Vanessa and Christian’s barbecue before I found out I got the job as his accountability coach,” I blurt out in rapid fire.

“I’m sorry ... what did you say?”

“And the rumors are true. He’s pierced,” I add as my mouth runs away from me.

“Everly, I’m going to need you to breathe, focus, and back this train up. You said Hendrix Meyer, one of the hottest rock stars in the world, kissed you?” he questions me slowly like this is some sort of a hostage negotiation.

“Are you saying I’m *not pretty enough* to hook up with Hendrix Meyer?” I ask as my voice rises.

“This is even worse than I thought. You’re spiraling,” he states firmly.

“No, I’m not.”

“Yes, you are,” he argues back. *He’s so annoying.* “Do I need to call Faith to come down and slap some sense into you?” My brother threatens to call in reinforcements.

“You wouldn’t.”

“I would,” he warns. “And for the record, I think you’re too hot for someone like Hendrix Meyer,” he says, and I lap up the flattery.

“You’re forgiven,” I say, a smile falling across my face.

“Was it a good kiss?”

“It was quick. But he’s an arrogant asshole, and the two times we have met, it has ended in a full-on argument. He knows how to push every single one of my buttons,” I explain to Charlie.

“And yet, you still made out with him?”

“He kissed me, not the other way around. He’s the one who made a move after I flipped him onto the floor for invading my space.”

“So, you used your self-defense skills and flipped him, and then he kissed you?”

“Yes.”

“Guess he likes things a little rough then,” Charlie says with a chuckle.

Hendrix said that move turned him on. *No*, I tell myself shaking my head. Doesn't matter. That's a *him problem*, not a *you problem*.

“And that's when you saw his pierced dick?”

“No. That happened five minutes ago when I accidentally walked in on him coming out of the shower as I returned his cell.”

“Right. And was it good? I need all the details.”

“What do you think? I'm calling you now in a panic,” I tell him.

“This is true. It was big, wasn't it? He looks like he has BDE ... Big Dick Energy. What kind of piercing was it? Prince Albert? Jacob's ladder? Pubic? Guiche?” he asks.

“I have no idea what any of them are. He had something through the top of the tip.”

“Oh, that might be an ampallang. Nice one for you.”

“How do you know so much about penis piercing?” As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I regret them.

“I think I've seen way more penises in my life than you have. I've seen them all.” He chuckles. “We've covered piercings and kissing. That doesn't seem that bad, Evie.”

Not that bad? “I signed a contract that states no fraternization with the client. I take that seriously. Also, I had to make sure that the guys don't do drugs, drink, or sleep with groupies,” I explain to Charlie.

“The kissing thing happened before you knew they were clients. Walking in on a rock star naked is inevitable ... you live together.”

“The boys had edibles before they came.”

“At the house or on the plane?” he questions.

“I think on the plane.”

“Well, then, that’s not your fault either. They weren’t allowed anything on the flight. It looks like the sneaky three brought back up just in case.” Charlie chuckles. “Look, these boys are used to getting whatever they want. Them going cold turkey like this will be a shock to their system so you’ll need to expect a little pushback from them.”

“I left Hendrix in the woods by himself,” I blurt out.

“I’m sure you had your reasons,” Charlie answers slowly.

“I did. I gave him a choice to either get in the car or walk, and well, you know the outcome of that choice.”

“He was pushing your boundaries. I’m proud of you for sticking to the rules. Don’t be so hard on yourself. You knew this was going to be a difficult assignment,” Charlie reassures me.

He’s right. Everyone and everything else has failed with these guys. Vanessa and Christian came to me for my tough love, and that is what I am giving them. “Thank you. I knew you would help me get my confidence back.”

“I’m always here for you anytime you need me. Also, you can always ask Faith to come over and scare them,” Charlie suggests, bursting out laughing.

If they think I’m a hard-ass, they haven’t met my sister. She doesn’t suffer fools.

“I might save that for when things get bad.”

“Just remember, there’s a fine line between hate and love,” he teases.

“Please, there is more chance of a unicorn riding through the mountains than there is for me to fall in love with Hendrix Meyer.”

“All that passion needs to go somewhere.” Charlie laughs.

“Yeah, into writing songs.”

“You could be his muse, and he doesn’t even know it yet.”
He squeals with excitement.

“Would you calm down? There’s more chance of him writing a song about murdering me in the woods than anything else.”

“Then they would be writing new music at least.” My brother chuckles. This is true. “Who knows, he’s already kissed and shown you his dick. There’s not much left for the two of you to do other than fuck.”

“Charlie!” I scream. *Maybe he wasn’t the best person to call with this problem after all, but he has made me laugh.*

“I’m kidding. I know how serious you are about your clients. And you would never cross that line again. I’m only playing with you,” Charlie tells me seriously. “Now go ... turn those bad boy rockers into good boy rockers.”

“Thanks for the chat. Love you,” I say before hanging up the phone. I let out a deep sigh and shake the negative thoughts that have clouded my mind.

I’ve got this.

These three are no different from any of my other clients over the years. I will *not* let one moody rock star derail my program.

I walk out of my room with a renewed pep in my step and head downstairs to see where Eli and Zeke are up to with lunch. As I round the corner and enter the kitchen, I see that every bowl, plate, and saucepan has been pulled out.

“What’s going on?” I gasp.

Zeke and Eli turn around, looking like deer caught in headlights.

“Um ...” Eli mumbles, surrounded by mess.

“We actually don’t know how to cook,” Zeke explains.

“Or chop vegetables,” Eli adds.

“Or basically fend for ourselves,” Zeke confesses.

“But how?” These guys are in their mid-twenties. How have they gotten this far and not been able to do the basics?

“We’ve always bought takeout, or someone organized it,” Eli explains.

“We had a chef for a while, but we had to get rid of her because she, well ...” Zeke says, scratching the back of his neck, looking bashful.

“Because you two were fucking her. She then got jealous when she caught you two fucking a groupie in her kitchen and tried to poison the two of you with laxatives,” Hendrix adds as he joins us in the kitchen.

I jumped at hearing his voice. I was so blown away by the mess the two rock stars had created that I hadn’t heard him come into the kitchen. Hendrix is now dry and dressed, thank goodness. I don’t need any more distractions after this epic fail at the start of my new job. My eyes roam over his muscular body hidden behind his white T-shirt and black jeans. His dark-brown hair is still damp from his shower and is styled messily, giving him the just rolled-out-of-bed look.

Stop checking him out.

Annoyed with myself, I shake out of the trance Hendrix seems to have placed me in and turn my attention back to where Zeke and Eli are laughing.

“Fun times,” Eli says.

“What you gonna do?” Zeke says with a shrug.

“Maybe don’t sleep with staff. That way, no bodily harm can come to you,” I suggest.

“You’re right, but at the time, I wasn’t really thinking with my head.” Zeke smirks.

“More like the *little head* was doing the thinking for you,” Eli teases.

“You know there’s nothing *little* about him,” Zeke says as he grabs himself.

My eyes automatically follow his action, and a millisecond later, I realize what I'm watching. "Zeke," I say, raising my voice.

Hendrix clips Zeke around the ear. "Dude, don't grab your junk in front of Everly. She might think it's an invitation. You never know when her inner groupie could pop out. Everly said she was a fan of our music."

What a dick. My mouth falls open in shock at Hendrix's words. Eli and Zeke look between the two of us, confused by Hendrix's hostility.

"You like our music?" Eli asks.

"It's hard not to have heard it. It was playing everywhere," I grumble. They don't need to know that it was my go-to gym music because their egos are already highly inflated.

"Knew you had taste," Zeke jokes.

"Why don't you guys go check out the place? I'll clean this up and make us some lunch."

"Great idea. I'm starved. Honestly, I was prepared to join the raw food craze." Eli chuckles as he rubs his flat stomach.

"By the time you leave here, you will have mastered at least one dish," I tell him.

"Sounds like a plan," Eli says, giving me a wink.

I watch as they disappear from the kitchen.

It's not long until the steaks and salad are ready, and I'm plating them up. I call out several times, but I hear nothing but silence in return. Finally, I take the plate of steaks, open the oven, and place the plate inside so they don't go cold.

I walk out to the balcony and stare out at the mountainside, squinting my eyes, hoping to see where they could be. Then the grumbling of a deep voice below me catches my attention.

"She's a bitch," I hear Hendrix state angrily.

Guess he's talking about me then.

“Maybe it’s the fact that you’re being a dick to her. I kind of don’t blame her,” Eli tells him.

“Everly is fucking hot and nice,” Zeke says, complimenting me.

It’s kind of flattering that your favorite band thinks those things of you but not so great when they are your clients.

“She has a fantastic ass,” Eli adds.

“You can’t deny the girl is hot,” Zeke goads Hendrix.

“The mountain air has gone to your brain. She’s a five ... tops,” Hendrix grumbles.

That stings. Not that I should care what an asshole like Hendrix Meyer thinks of me, he’s not that great either. His looks may be a ten, but his personality is a two at best.

“I’ve had better,” Hendrix adds.

Zeke and Eli burst out laughing at his comment.

What an ass. How dare he think he can talk about women like that?

“I’ve had better, too,” I yell down from above to them.

Silence ensues, then Zeke and Eli step out from under the balcony and look up at me. Guilt laces their faces. You can see they’d wish the ground would swallow them up. Then Hendrix steps out, and his cockiness seems to know no bounds as he looks up at me with a smirk across his pouty lips.

Screw him.

Whatever he is trying to do will not work.

“Lunch is ready,” I say over the balcony.

“Great! We’ll be right up,” Eli says, flashing me a wide smile.

I turn on my heel and walk into the kitchen to retrieve the steaks from the oven before walking back out and placing them on the table without saying a word as the boys join me.

“This looks delicious,” Zeke says enthusiastically as he takes a seat.

“I bet it tastes as good as it smells,” Eli adds.

Hendrix is the last to arrive and sits at the opposite end as far away from me as he can. *Good*. Those blue eyes narrow on me as he asks Zeke to pass the steaks down to him and then the salad. The table falls quiet as we eat our lunch.

“I can’t stand the silence,” Eli says, breaking first. “Everly, we are sorry you heard that earlier. Hendrix is a dick.”

“Speak for yourself, asshole,” Hendrix grumbles at his bandmate.

“Hope you heard the nice stuff we said about you,” Zeke asks, giving me a small smile.

“Suck-ass,” Hendrix spits to his friend.

“Today is not turning out the way I had wanted it to,” I explain, letting out a frustrated sigh. “I was hoping to create a serene environment that will help inspire your writing again. That getting away from negative scenarios might help that,” I explain to them.

“Are you wanting to be our muse?” Hendrix asks, glaring from his end of the table.

“What? No. I want you guys to heal and create greatness again,” I splutter.

“How can we be great as a threesome?” Hendrix answers curtly.

“We’ve had some great threesomes,” Zeke interjects a joke, trying to ease the tense conversation. Eli high-fives him.

“Everything’s a joke to you guys, isn’t it?” Hendrix turns his venom onto his bandmates.

“It has to be ... otherwise, we would all be drowning in darkness like you are,” Zeke bites back.

“And you both think you’re not?” Hendrix questions his friends.

“Maybe we should start fresh tomorrow,” I advise, hoping to steer the conversation back to a place that will not end in a fight.

“Zeke, you pummeled me earlier today because I mentioned Brodie. Look at my face,” Hendrix shouts as he waves his hand over his bruising.

“That’s not fair, Hendrix. You were goading him,” Eli says, jumping into the fight.

Zeke’s shoulders sink with guilt. “I said I was sorry.”

“Sorry isn’t good enough sometimes,” Hendrix screams across the table before standing up abruptly, swiping his hand across the table, and scattering his plates all over the floor. They shatter as soon as they hit the wooden floors, the sound echoing through the dining room, making me cringe.

When I look up, Hendrix’s seat is empty—he’s gone.

Everyone is stunned by his outburst.

Maybe things are a lot worse than I first thought. I don’t know if Dirty Texas realize how far gone Hendrix is in his grief. It’s going to take a lot more than escaping LA to help these guys.

“Sorry about him. We’ll clean up his mess. You shouldn’t have to after cooking us a fantastic lunch,” Eli tells me as he gets up and begins cleaning Hendrix’s mess.

Zeke stands, walks over to where I’m sitting, and stares down at me. “Come here,” he says, holding out his arms to me.

I frown at his outstretched arms.

“I promise I’m not being creepy. I feel like after today, you need a hug,” he states, giving me a lopsided smile.

“It’s not really appropriate, Zeke.”

“I know, but sometimes a hug is all you need.” He grins, wiggling his hands for me to enter.

I don’t think he’s going to back down, so I stand and step into his embrace. His muscular arms wrap around me as he pulls me tightly into his hard chest.

“Come on, hug me back. I need one too,” he says as a chuckle vibrates through his chest and against mine.

I go against my instincts and wrap my arms around the hulking man. It's like being hugged by a giant grizzly bear.

"Now that's better," he coos as he holds me.

My muscles relax in his embrace. It feels nice. Maybe I did need this hug more than I thought. But I'm not about to tell Zeke that because I don't want to encourage this behavior.

"Look, Hendrix will come around. He's not always like this," Zeke explains to me. "You have taken on a lot with us. We've grown up with no one giving a shit, so when people try to help us, we don't believe them. It's hard to drop that foster kid mentality sometimes. Eli and I can see you're a good person. Vanessa and Christian wouldn't have suggested you for the job if you didn't have the skills," he says, tightening his hug. "We promise we will do better. We want to do better, but we might fight you along the way. Old habits die hard."

"I don't want to make you all miserable," I mumble against his hard chest.

Zeke pulls away and moves one of his hands from my back to my jaw to cup it. "How could we be miserable when you're around?"

That is the nicest thing I've heard today. I look up into Zeke's ice-blue eyes, and I can see he means it. His thumb slides along my cheek as butterflies begin to lift off in my stomach. *You need to back away from this situation immediately, Everly.*

"Zeke!" I try to say his name in warning, but it comes out a little huskier than I would have liked.

"You really are beautiful. All the things I would love to do to you," he states in a gravelly voice, which has my insides tingling with need. "But I won't. I'm going to respect the boundaries you have set for the month. I want to be a better man ... for you."

"Don't do it for me, do it for you," I tell him.

Zeke's eyes narrow on me. "Fine. I'll do it for me. Making you fall in love with me will be a bonus," he says, giving me a

wink. As he steps away, taking his generous heat with him, it leaves a chill lacing my body.

“He has that effect on people.” Eli chuckles, noticing me shake the lust-filled tension Zeke pulled me into.

I’m going to have to watch myself around him. He’s sneaky.

“What are your plans for us tonight, Everly?” Zeke asks, his eyes blatantly running over my body. Those ice-blue eyes flare, telling me exactly what he would like to do tonight.

“I think after the day we have had ... maybe it’s best we do our own thing and reset for tomorrow.”

“I’m sure we can find something to fill our time,” Eli says, wiggling his brows at Zeke.

I don’t like the sound of that.

“We promise we won’t be breaking any of the rules. We will be good little boy scouts,” Zeke states, giving me a wicked grin.

I don’t believe him.

At all.

HENDRIX

What a shitshow today has been.

I lost myself at lunch which is so unlike me. I'm constantly fighting with Everly at every turn. It's like as soon as I touched down in Montana, everything went to shit. I'm so far out of my comfort zone that every little thing is triggering me. I decided it would be better if I didn't rejoin them for dinner after the stunt I pulled at lunch. I'm not proud of what I did. It's for the best I keep my distance, especially while I feel completely out of control.

Eli ended up bringing dinner to me.

"I know you're in there brooding. Dinner's out here if you want it. It smells good."

"Thanks," I'd said, not moving from my bed. Silence stretched between us, and eventually, I heard him walk away from the door. Was it a dick thing to do? Yeah, but I just didn't want another damn lecture.

My stomach won out and I retrieved my dinner from outside the door before wolfing it down—a plate of salmon and steamed vegetables.

Now I'm sitting here staring at the wall, unable to sleep.

It's so quiet. No traffic. No sirens. Nothing but darkness and deafening silence. I hate it. It's not good for me. It makes me remember things. I need the sounds of the city to drown out my memories. But the memories never leave me.

Swinging my legs out of bed, I creep down the corridor to avoid disturbing the rest of the house. Not that it would matter. Zeke and Eli could sleep through an earthquake.

I head downstairs and into the living room. The only light is from the moon trickling through the windows. I've never seen the moon look so big or so bright. Maybe that's why it's called Moonlight Falls.

I want a drink.

My body twitches with the need to make the memories disappear.

The hole in my heart feels like it's being ripped open again. The frayed fragments I've tried to stitch back together are not holding.

I need something to hold them in place. Usually, alcohol does the trick.

Everly said there wouldn't be any drinking for the next month.

Like she knows what she's talking about.

There must be alcohol here somewhere. Scanning the dark room, I notice the antique wooden liquor cabinet in the corner and rush over to it. I try to turn the rusted lock, but it's locked.

As if that's going to stop me.

I head to the kitchen, grab a knife, and return to jimmy the lock until it clicks and opens for me.

Yes.

Grabbing one bottle, I don't even care what it is at this moment. I unscrew the cap and take a large swig, hissing as the liquid heats my body, healing those frayed strings and stitching the pieces back together.

With a satisfied sigh, I grab a crystal tumbler from beside the cabinet, pour a generous amount into it, and then place the bottle back. I want to have more. I need to have more, but I use restraint. This will be enough for tonight—Well, I hope it will be.

Taking a seat in the living room on a chair facing the windows, I stare out into the darkness, sipping on the whiskey, savoring the burn as it warms my body. I relax into the chair, kicking my bare feet up and rest them against the cool window's glass.

My mind wanders, taking me back to that night six months ago, the one I'm running from night after night. The one that haunts me every single time I close my eyes.

The night I killed our brother.

"What the hell are you doing?" Everly's voice shatters my melancholic thoughts, and I drop the crystal tumbler, and it smashes on the floor. The amber liquid splashing everywhere.

Shit.

"Don't creep up on someone in the middle of the fucking night and scare them like that." I curse at her.

"Creep up on you? It's my job to make sure that my clients are not sneaking around doing something they shouldn't have been doing," she hisses back angrily as she stares down at the broken tumbler on the floor. The unmistakable smell of whiskey fills the distance between us. "You're upset because I've busted you. I thought we agreed we would start again. Forget today ever happened."

"That was what I was trying to do," I bite back at her.

"With a glass of whiskey."

"Least it wasn't the bottle, I put that back. Progress."

Everly huffs at me and crosses her arms over her plump chest, which pulls my focus to what she's wearing in the middle of the night. Dressed in a skimpy white tee with no bra on, I can see her pebbled nipples pressed against the thin fabric. The shirt barely covers the pink booty shorts she's wearing. Her blonde hair is cascading around her shoulders in golden waves.

"Did I interrupt a midnight hookup with Zeke?"

Everly's face contorts in disgust, and she splutters and huffs as she tries to find the right words to argue with me. I

know she isn't going to hook up with Zeke. I can see her morals are not as loose as others who have worked for us. But I needed to throw her off my case about the whiskey. I'm not in the mood for a lecture. Honestly, I'm proud of myself; she has no idea how much it took me to put the bottle back in the cabinet and only fill the glass. Yes, I know the point was not to have anything, but fuck, I'm a grown-ass adult, and she left me to die in the wilderness today. I needed something.

"I would never do such a thing."

"You wouldn't be the first."

"My reputation means more to me than a two-minute fuck," she bites back.

"Don't let Zeke hear you say that he might feel the need to show you that he lasts a lot longer than that."

"Actually, who am I kidding, Zeke wouldn't be a quick fuck. You'd be the two-minute man of the group. You have selfish lover written all over your face."

My left eye twitches with the need to defend my dick's honor. She has no idea the stamina I hold between my thighs. She's wound up so tightly I bet no man's ever given her an orgasm before; it's all battery-operated.

"Care to find out how long I can last?"

Everly's jaw falls open before she slams it shut. If steam could magically appear from her ears like a cartoon character's does, I think it would in this moment. "You think what I do is a joke." Her voice breaks with emotion as she quickly swipes away an errant tear. "I worked hard to get where I am. You think you're the only one that's been through shit in their life. The world doesn't owe you because you were dealt a shitty hand in life. Most people would kill to have a chance at living their dreams like you all get to do. How many kids in the foster system dream of a better life, of escaping the crappy cards they were dealt and being fucking rock stars?"

Fuck.

She's playing dirty with that question.

“It’s late. Clean this shit up. I’m going to bed.” And with that, she turns on her heel and leaves me there sitting in the darkness, soaking in the disappointment in her voice.

I feel like the biggest bastard.

“Fuck.” I curse as I hang my head.

Getting up from the chair, I head into the kitchen and grab some paper towel and a dustpan and brush. Once it’s all cleaned up, I stare at the liquor cabinet. Walking over, I grab the bottle of whiskey and throw it back. I use the back of my hand to wipe the liquid from my lips.

Fuck, Everly Nash.

I take the bottle and stomp back to my room.

EVERLY

Hendrix Meyer can go screw himself.

I can't believe what I walked in on last night. There he was, stretched out enjoying my father's expensive whiskey as if he hadn't a care in the world. I'd forgotten about that cabinet, mainly because it was tucked away in a corner and used more as a side table than a bar.

Stupid to not have checked, Everly.

Guess I had more faith in the boys than I should have.

It was a cheap shot accusing me of trying to sleep with Zeke. I'm repairing my reputation in this industry, the last thing I would do is ruin it again by hooking up with a rock star. They are a dime a dozen in LA; he's not that special. I knew it was a tactic to distract me from what was really going on—him drinking. In that moment, I was exhausted. We had been arguing all day, and I didn't have anything else left in me to continue the fight. If this is what it's going to be like for the next month—the constant attacks, pushbacks, and jabs—I'm not sure if the job is worth it. I don't give up on people, but Hendrix Meyer ... I'm not sure if he wants to be saved. *"Everyone in their lives has given up on them."* That's what Vanessa told me. Do I want to be another one who does?

Of course, I don't, but *Shake it off.* I asked everyone for a fresh start this morning and who cares if Hendrix is still in a mood, I have two other guys, Eli and Zeke, who seem more than willing to give this a go; concentrate on them, maybe the two of them can eventually bring Hendrix around. I

doubt they will be willing to put up with his moods for much longer. Yes. That is exactly what I'm going to do. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink and that is Hendrix. He's been led to Montana but just because he is here doesn't mean he wants to drink. *Well, he did last night.* Wrong kind of drinking. Maybe that's not the right analogy then but the gist is there.

I've got this.

I need to have more faith in myself. Vanessa and Christian wouldn't have hired me if they thought I couldn't do it; they are counting on me.

The purple, glistening Amethyst crystal sitting on my table catches my eye. I put it there last night when I was unpacking. Getting up out of bed, I walk over and pick up the crystal; I don't always do this but just having some crystals around helps me focus and destress. I'm thankful I brought them as I'm going to need them. Sucking in a deep breath, I close my eyes, holding it in my hands as I center myself. Charlie and I learned all about crystals at a wellness retreat in Sedona, Arizona. At first, we weren't sure about it, but we went as we were willing to try anything, and it worked. Charlie said he felt a cloud lifted during the yoga sessions with the crystals and I did feel the stress of being my brother's support person lift during that time. Ever since that week, we both like to surround ourselves with crystals and reach for them during stressful times. And this job is calling for all my crystals' strengths.

I concentrate and refocus my mind, shaking off the negative thoughts Hendrix Meyer has clouded over me as I visualize an invisible crystal force field around me. His words have no power over me anymore. Breathing out the negative thoughts and feelings, I slowly open my eyes and stare down at my crystal, the light bouncing off it and lighting the room. A smile falls across my lips as I place the crystal back down on the table, feeling lighter and energized for the morning. Nothing these boys can throw at me today is going to derail my good mood.

Stepping out of my room, the house is quiet, no one is up. I'd be surprised if they were, it's just before seven in the morning. I'm sure they are used to getting up after lunch, but they will be in for a rude awakening. I head down to the yoga room in the basement and set it up for the three of them. Once done, I make my way back up to the kitchen and cut up fresh fruit, pull the blender out for juices and protein smoothies, and check on the overnight oats.

I give myself a pat on the back. After last night, I thought things were already derailing before I had even begun, but now, I am back on track with the plans I had in place before Hendrix Meyer's sour mood came to town. I'm sure his mood will remain sour as I thump my fists on their doors and wake them up, but I won't let it get me down.

"Where's the fire?" Eli asks groggily as he answers his door in nothing but low-slung gray shorts that leave nothing to the imagination. His sculptured body is on display as he rubs his hand absently across his six-pack abs. I notice the intricate art scattering across his tanned skin but don't stare for long. I don't want Hendrix to accuse me of trying to sleep with his bandmates again.

"Morning, it's time to get up. You have yoga downstairs this morning."

Eli's face crumples as his green eyes try to focus on me. "It's the middle of the night."

"It's after eight."

"That's night," he says with a frown on his face.

"Not anymore. Come on, throw on a shirt and meet me down in the basement in ten," I try encouraging him.

Those green eyes narrow on me before he nods and closes the door in my face.

I think that was a win.

I knock on Zeke's door, and eventually, he answers. Do these men not own shirts? He, too, has a pair of low-slung gray shorts that show off the deep V on his hips and the six-pack abs covered in tattoos. Every inch of space on his body

has been filled with art. His blond hair is a mess as he answers the door with a grunt, then scratches his ass.

“Please tell me this is a dream, and you are about to join me in bed?” Zeke grumbles.

“It’s a nightmare, Z. She wants us to do yoga,” Eli calls out from behind me.

Zeke looks over my shoulder at his friend as a disgusted shiver slides over his body at the mere mention of yoga.

“Is he serious?” Zeke questions me.

“Yes. I promise you it’s going to be worthwhile. Trust the process.”

“And what about Hen?” Zeke asks.

His question gives me pause. Do I lie or do I tell them the truth? “Doubtful, Hendrix spent the night with a bottle of whiskey.” I know this because I checked the cabinet this morning, and the bottle is missing.

Zeke stiffens before me.

“He wouldn’t?” Eli adds.

“He did. I surprised him last night. He dropped a tumbler and the contents spilled everywhere. You could smell what was in the glass. After he cleaned up, I checked on him, and the entire bottle is now missing,” I explain to them both.

“After the lecture he gave us yesterday before getting onto the plane. Fucking asshole,” Zeke grumbles.

“Look, forget about him this morning, I’ll deal with him later. Let’s go downstairs and do some yoga and start our morning right. I promise you both will feel better,” I try to reassure them.

Zeke’s eyes narrow at Eli over my shoulder. Not sure what that was about, but it’s gone seconds later and replaced with a smile. “Fine, give me five and I’ll be right down.”

Yes, that’s another win. If I can keep Zeke and Eli on my side, then Hendrix will have no choice but to come over and join us and stop fighting with me.

“Are you going to tell the label about Hen?” Eli asks as we head downstairs.

“No.”

“Why?”

“That’s not going to help him. He needs to want to change otherwise we are going to keep butting heads.”

“He’s not usually that much of a dick,” Eli says, giving me a grin.

“Good to know that it’s me that brings it out of him.”

Eli chuckles. “It’s probably because he thinks you’re hot and he doesn’t have a chance.”

I shake my head at him. “Do you always think that women who work with you want to sleep with you?”

“Yeah.”

“Cocky much?”

Eli smirks. “There hasn’t been a woman yet that has said no to us.”

I still on the last step in the basement; is he serious? I don’t believe him. “Bullshit.”

“You know about Alice. Then there was our chef, a couple of drivers, pretty much every single assistant we’ve ever had, male and female,” he states with a wink. “Stylist, event planner, gardener, security, courier, you name it we’ve fucked it.”

“And that’s some kind of an achievement?”

Eli stills, the smile sliding off his face. “No. Was making a point though. Henny probably wants to fuck you. He can’t because you’re a lot stronger than others. You also don’t take his shit or ours, and he hates that he can’t give you his *look* and have you automatically drop to your knees for him.”

“It’s that easy? One look and women will fall at your feet.”

“Yep.” Eli smirks.

“You’re using these women as substitute sex toys.”

Eli's frown is back. "What do you mean?"

"You just beckon them over. They give you what you want, and then they are pushed aside once you're finished with them for the next one."

"You sound judgmental, and we're not assholes, we will reciprocate in most circumstances," Eli adds.

"I wasn't meaning to be judgmental."

"Yeah, you were." He chuckles. "I think it comes with the job."

"I come with a good hand job." Zeke jokes as he passes us on the stairs. "What are we talking about?"

"Everly here was judging us for liking sex," Eli explains to Zeke.

"You don't like sex?" Zeke asks me.

"How did you get to that pathway?" I ask him.

"The judging us for liking sex. Ergo, you don't like it," Zeke explains.

"I like sex," I argue.

"She seems very judgmental for a woman who likes sex," Eli adds to the conversation.

"How often do you have sex?" Zeke questions me.

"That's none of your business," I argue, not sure how we got to this topic.

"If you are questioning our sex life and holding us accountable for it, then I'm curious about yours," Zeke states.

Is it hot in here? Why am I turning into a flustered mess? Is there a crystal to help me with this? I might have to Google and buy one to help me deal with these two.

"I don't think it has anything to do with your journey though."

Zeke pouts. "Why should we be vulnerable if you're not?"

Oh, they are good. Ugh. Just give them something, that way, they'll feel like we are on the same team. "Fine. I haven't had sex in a year."

Both Eli and Zeke gasp at my answer. Their jaws are almost on the floor as they both stare at me as if I've lost my mind.

"Please tell me you have a good vibrator?" Eli asks.

"Of course, I do."

"Who do you think of when you use it?" Zeke questions me.

"Hey, enough questions from you," I say, pointing my finger at Zeke. "I answered what you wanted to know."

"I have more questions." Zeke smirks.

"And I have a yoga class to teach."

"If we do your class will you answer the question?" Zeke asks.

"You do a thirty-minute yoga class with no complaining and I'll answer one question."

"About your sex life," Eli clarifies, catching me in the loophole.

"Fine. It's not fascinating at all but if it means you will do yoga with me every morning then fine."

"Every morning?" Zeke swallows.

I nod.

"Then we get to ask you a personal question after each session," Eli says.

"Fine," I agree, rolling my eyes. I will probably regret this, but if it means they feel comfortable around me, then I'll do it. "What happens if I want to ask a personal question then?"

The pair look between each other and smile. "We'll answer," Zeke states for them both.

"Great, now that's sorted let's get you set up for yoga," I tell them. They both groan when I point to the gray mats laid

out for them. “Here,” I say, handing them both a citrine crystal. They stare at them with frowns on their faces.

“What the hell is this?” Zeke asks.

“It’s citrine. A crystal that helps curb self-destructive tendencies, fuels creativity, and helps create a safe space for change and growth.”

“This little thing?” Zeke says, shaking the crystal.

“Trust the process. Yes, it’s strange but there are benefits to meditating and doing yoga with the enhancements of crystals.”

“This is some strange hippie shit, Everly,” Zeke tells me.

“Look, I didn’t believe it either at first until I tried it and felt a difference. I still don’t know if it’s a placebo effect or it’s the crystals’ true power, but I notice a difference with them around me.”

Eli stares down at the crystal and rolls it around in his large hand. “You say this will help our creativity?”

“Yes.”

Eli then turns to Zeke and shrugs. “Can’t hurt. I think we need all the help we can get, and if this little orange thing helps us make more hits, then I’m down for it.”

“I’m in, too. What do we have to do?” Zeke asks.

I set them up on the mats and explained to them my plan for the morning’s thirty minutes of yoga, then ten minutes of meditation before breakfast every day. I ask them to place their crystals at the edge of their mats and begin teaching them easy asanas for their first lesson. The guys moan and grit their teeth as I put them through a series of poses until they have sweat dripping down all over them.

“Doing great, guys,” I tell them as we cool down from our yoga session. “Now that you have all the blood and energy pumping through your veins, we will finish the session with ten minutes of meditation.” I explain to them that this will calm the mind and refocus their energy into more creative pursuits other than sleeping with women and partying all night. Don’t get me wrong, I like to party just as much as the

next person, but I don't have an excess problem and can still function. These boys are putting their vices in front of their livelihood and that's a problem. The boys sit there and close their eyes, listening to my words as I ask them to focus on their breathing and to let their bodies relax. Concentrate on areas that feel tense and try to slowly unlock those tensions. I ask the guys to think about blank music sheets blowing in the breeze once that tension feels like it's sliding away. I ask them to catch one and hold onto it. Then I ask them to envision one of their songs on the blank paper, how it came about, and what shaped it. How each note and scribble of a lyric on the paper eventually turned into a song before letting the wind take the paper away from them. I ask them to envision another blank piece of music paper, and this time, they need to fill it with whatever is in their mind. Words, feelings, images, anything, and once it's full, hold it in the air and set it free.

After a few minutes, I remind the boys to keep concentrating on their breathing as I ask them to now think of a waterfall and imagine the sound the water makes as it cascades down the rocks, the sounds the birds or insects around them make. Is it a sunny day or overcast? Is the water clear or murky? Then I ask them to jump into the water below the waterfall. Do they feel the coolness of the water over their bodies? Do they feel refreshed? Then I slowly begin to bring them back, and we finish up the meditation.

"Wow, I feel relaxed," Eli says, rubbing his eyes.

"What kind of voodoo did you do to us?" Zeke chuckles.

I hand the guys a bottle of water each and take a seat back down beside them. "There's no magic involved. It's simple techniques I'm showing you to drown out the noise all around you to focus on the things that you need to. Like writing music."

"Not sure if we are there just yet," Eli adds.

"Wouldn't expect you to be after one session. Maybe after a week you might start getting the itch to write. I'm not sure of your process," I say to him.

“Usually, it’s the three of us jamming together and it sparks an idea,” Zeke explains.

“Can’t imagine Hen is going to be too fond of all this hippie shit. No offense, Everly,” Eli states.

“He needs to get over himself. I can’t believe he got fucked up last night,” Zeke grumbles.

“Maybe he’s not there yet. I can’t force him to want to change, he has to want it himself,” I explain.

“See that’s the thing, he has been the one riding our asses to get our shit together. And now the tables have turned and he’s the fuckup,” Eli explains.

This surprises me, especially because every interaction I’ve had with Hendrix has been combative.

“He’s out of his comfort zone, and all this might be a bit much for him to process. I’m hoping it’s just first-day jitters and in time he will come around,” I tell them.

Zeke and Eli chuckle and give me a *Yeah, that’s not it* look.

“He’s stubborn as fuck,” Zeke adds.

Well, I can be too. “Come on, you two must be starving after that session. I’ll make us some breakfast while you guys go for a swim or have a shower.”

Zeke’s stomach rumbles right at that moment, making us all laugh. “As long as it’s not rabbit food. All this ...” he says, rubbing his taut stomach, “needs fuel.”

“I promise you will be well fed.”

“But it’s rabbit food, isn’t it?” he questions me.

“Healthy food, yes.”

Zeke groans, turning to Eli. “Bet there’s no bacon or pancakes.”

Eli looks horrified.

“I can promise there will be bacon and I’ll do pancakes tomorrow.”

Zeke's face lights up. "You're a star, E," he says, giving me a nickname. Guess that's progress.

"Swim or shower?" Eli asks Zeke.

"Shower, I have a lot of creative energy to burn off," he says, giving his friend a wink.

Not sure what that's about, but the two of them jump up and help me roll the mats up and pack away the crystals before disappearing upstairs to their rooms.

"Breakfast will be ready in twenty," I call out after them.

"I'll be done in five." Zeke smirks at Eli as they run up the stairs two at a time.

EVERLY

I head to the kitchen to get started on breakfast. Thankfully, my parents have kept my coconut shell smoothie bowls. I loved creating colorful bowls for the family for breakfast every morning. My father would grumble that he was being made to eat a rainbow, but it wasn't long till he was finding new recipes online for me to try. This morning, I'm starting the guys on something simple to get them loving these smoothie bowls—a chocolate peanut butter bowl with chopped bananas, coconut flakes, peanuts, and chocolate chips on top. Because they are huge guys, I'll also make smashed avocado on sourdough toast with grilled halloumi, bacon rashers, and two poached eggs sprinkled with dukkah over the top.

“Told you I'd be quick,” Eli calls as I hear the thunderous footsteps coming down the stairs.

“It was just what I needed to ease the tension.” Zeke nudges him back.

“Wow, E, that looks awesome,” Eli says, staring at the breakfast table that is set for them.

“What's in the bowls? Are we allowed to have chocolate for breakfast?” Zeke asks hopefully.

“Yes, it's made with cacao. Might be a little more bitter than normal chocolate but it's mixed with peanut butter and other goodies in the smoothie bowl.”

“Smoothie bowl?” Zeke glances at me.

“It’s no different to a smoothie in a mug it’s just now in a cute bowl. It’s packed with all the healthy things that you wouldn’t know is in there.”

“I thought we were getting bacon and eggs?” Zeke pouts.

“You are, it’s coming. Eat your bowl first and then you can have your bacon and eggs,” I tell him.

The boys nod and head over to the table and take a seat. I ask them if they want coffee, tea, or fresh juice, and they give me their orders. I busily go about making it before taking a seat.

“Is this what you eat every day?” Zeke asks me.

“Yes.”

“Explains why you’re so fine then,” he adds, chuckling.

I shake my head at his compliment.

“It was surprisingly good,” Eli states after demolishing the bowl.

“Good because each morning we will be starting it like this,” I tell them as I pick up their bowls and take them back into the kitchen before grabbing their next dish.

“My insides feel clean. That’s weird, isn’t it?” Zeke asks from where he’s sitting at the table.

“No that’s good. This is the best fuel for your body to help you guys be creative. Your mind can’t function when it’s stuck with a hangover,” I explain, walking back to them.

“She’s right there,” Eli adds.

“Are you saying we can never drink again? Have we started rehab?” Zeke asks, sounding horrified.

“No. It’s not rehab, more like detoxing like you would at a wellness retreat.”

“Wellness retreat?” Eli asks his eyebrows high on his face.

“Have you never been to one?” I ask.

“Do we look like wellness retreat people to you?” Zeke states.

No, this is true. “I’ve been to many with my brother Charlie to help him with his recovery. We’ve tried it all.”

“Was your brother an addict?” Zeke asks tentatively.

His question stills me for a moment as I try to work out how to answer it, and how much I want to tell them about my personal life.

“You don’t have to tell us,” Eli quickly adds, noticing my hesitation.

I wave his concerns away. “He’s the reason I am doing what I’m doing. Before his accident, I guess you would have called me a socialite. Not one of those Rodeo Drive princesses. I was more your small-town country princess.” Rolling my eyes, I remember those days when I felt like a big fish in a small pond. Especially with the campaigns I had been doing with some great Western brands because of my riding; I thought I was a supermodel. I cringe over my younger self sometimes.

“Bet you were hot though.” Zeke smirks.

“I was stuck up, thought I was the bee’s knees, I wasn’t though,” I add, shaking my head. I pull my chair out again and take a seat. “There are four of us kids in my family, Lyle, Faith, Charlie, then me,” I explain, nervously fidgeting in my seat. “Lyle and Charlie were in the military. Unfortunately, they were hurt during separate campaigns in the Middle East years apart. Lyle was captured by the enemy during a bloody fight. I was young when it happened as there was a large gap between Lyle and me. My family sheltered me during that time. What I do know is that he was tortured and witnessed horrific things. Eventually, Special Operations was able to rescue him, but he was the last man alive.” A tear falls down my cheek and hits the table.

Eli reaches out and places his hand over mine for support, and I take it as I need it when I talk about my brothers.

“He wasn’t the same when he got back home. My parents tried everything for him, but the best help in the world

couldn't erase the horrors from his mind. Regrettably, he didn't want to stay in the world any longer and we lost him."

"Shit, E. I'm sorry," Zeke says, getting up from his side and coming over to mine. He takes the seat beside me and places an arm around my shoulders.

"It's okay. Therapy has helped work through that pain. It's still hard for the family to talk about, but we choose to celebrate him not remember the last years of hell he went through."

The boys nod in understanding.

"Then when Charlie had his accident, it brought everything we went through with Lyle years earlier all bubbling back to the surface. We rushed over to Germany where he was medically dispatched after being blown up by an IED during a routine patrol. That's how he knows Jackson, they are best friends from recruit training. They were rushed to hospital together. Sadly, Charlie lost his leg, and you know Jackson has scarring on his. I think there might even be a bit of shrapnel still in there too."

"Fuck, had no idea about Jackson. And I never noticed anything wrong with his leg." Eli curses.

"We knew he was someone not to be messed with, but no one talked about his past, and to be fair, none of us really cared, we were about the women and music," Zeke says quietly.

"Whatever you do, don't treat Jackson any differently. He can still kill you with his bare hands," I warn them with a chuckle, which makes them smile.

"Was your brother okay?" Eli asks with a concerned frown pulled across his brow.

"Yes, he is now. Happier than ever, but it took us a while to get there. Seeing Charlie sink into a depression like Lyle did, it worried my parents. They couldn't cope with the thought of losing another son. They both shut down emotionally, and I understand it was the same with Faith too. I had just graduated from high school, and I wasn't doing anything with my life

except spending money on my father's credit cards. So, I stepped up and told my parents I was having a gap year to hang out with my hero of a brother and help him recover. I was determined for him to get his life back. He was the life of the party, Charlie, and seeing him a shell of the man he once was broke my heart. Jackson was great even though he was suffering as much as Charlie was. He felt guilty as he was able to walk away even with scarring, but still, he had to have skin grafts on his leg and was in pain constantly. He had his own journey to work on before worrying about Charlie. I read everything I could about helping him. I Googled, I YouTubed, I listened to podcasts, I bought books and absorbed everything about Charlie's situation. Of course, my parents hired the best professionals there were out there, and I tagged along as his support person and learned from them. Once we got Charlie out of the danger zone, I decided I would go to school to learn more. I loved the exercise and food portion as well as kicking his ass every morning with physical therapy and being a huge pain. Believe me, my brother hated my optimism every day."

"Like someone else we know," Eli adds, making us all laugh.

Maybe there is a correlation between Hendrix and my brother that I hadn't seen before. Charlie's scars are on the outside whereas Hendrix's are on the inside. Eli's comment has given me something to think about when it comes to dealing with him. To be fair, Hendrix and I are knocking heads as much as Charlie and I were at the beginning, but the difference between Charlie and Hendrix is my brother knew me. He knew that I was a good person, that I wasn't trying to take advantage of him, whereas I'm a stranger to Hendrix. Who let another stranger kiss her in their boss's garden. Then gets them uprooted and leaves him in the wilderness before treating him like a child for drinking when he isn't supposed to be, but he is a grown adult. Okay, I guess I can see why Hendrix might be irritated by me the tiniest bit.

"In the end, I was able to win my brother over and I will with Hendrix too," I tell them.

They both look between each other and laugh at my words.

“Doubt that,” Hendrix hisses as he walks into the dining room and sees the two boys all over me. Those blue eyes are bloodshot and glaring daggers at me. His dark hair is a tumbled mess having just rolled straight out of bed and hasn’t bothered to brush it. His jaw is covered in scruff from not shaving for a couple of days.

He looks like shit.

And angry.

HENDRIX

My head is throbbing, my mouth feels like sandpaper, and I feel like shit as I roll over and try to will myself awake. What the hell happened last night? Did we have a party I don't remember having? I stare at the unfamiliar wall, then at the window that is letting in a startling amount of light. My eyes focus, and I notice the snowcapped mountain peaks.

Where the hell am I?

Sitting up, the room spins, and it takes me a couple of moments to make it stop before I'm able to look around. This isn't my room. The realization hits me as I look over the bed made from logs of wood. Then yesterday's events filter through my mind. What stands out is a pair of disapproving green eyes glaring at me. Then my mind remembers a white T-shirt with the perfect pair of breasts pressed against the thin material, nipples hard and begging to be sucked, and a pair of tight pink booty shorts that hug a peachy ass and tanned legs.

Everly fucking Nash, the bane of my existence.

I needed the entire bottle to stop myself from stroking one out to the image of her in the moonlight, looking completely fuckable, and trying not to remember what it felt like having her pert little body pressed against mine like she did at Christian and Vanessa's house. The way her mouth opened for me willingly, the taste of her coconut lip gloss smeared across a set of perfectly plump pink lips. Then the thought that Eli or Zeke would have the opportunity to taste her the way I had

made me snap last night. Images of her dressed like pure sin creeping through the night to my brothers' beds to use those lips on them had me saying things that I shouldn't have.

There's something about her that makes me want to argue and push back. Seeing the way her face flushes, the way her green eyes roll, and the tiny huff she releases when she's angry does something to me. Is that a kink? Getting off on pushing someone's buttons? Or am I fucked up in the head?

Images of Everly's face turning from anger to disappointment slide across my hazy mind. What did I say this time to pull that reaction from her? I search through my foggy thoughts, trying to recall what happened last night, nothing but a black void fills my mind.

I head toward the bathroom and jump in the shower, hoping to clear this hangover. As I lather myself up, Everly's voice hits me.

"You think you're the only one that's been through shit in their lives. The world doesn't owe you because you were dealt a shitty hand in life. Most people would kill to have a chance at living their dreams like you all get to do. How many kids in the foster system dream of a better life, of escaping the shitty cards they were dealt and being fucking rock stars?"

Her words are like tiny daggers to my chest. Barbed wire twists and turns around my heart, imprinting an ache on it as she reminds me of the foster kids out there who might look up to us. I angrily scrub myself, trying to get this sickening feeling from my skin. I hate that she's right. Hate that we might have disappointed kids just like us who have dreamed of a better life, who listen to our music to escape a shitty foster family, just like Dirty Texas did for us. And here we are shitting our good fortune up the wall.

Damn it. Everly Nash is fucking right.

I stomp out of the shower, wrap the towel around my waist, and spy the almost-empty whiskey bottle on the bedside table. I hate myself for letting that brown liquor control me, for proving Everly right—again. For not being strong enough to control the urge. And I hate myself that even now I want to

reach for it to wipe away this sinking feeling that has set into my stomach.

Instead, I pick it up and throw it into the bin, the bottle landing with a thud in the empty basket, and I let out a long breath I didn't know I was holding before getting dressed.

I make my way downstairs to find something to eat to soak up last night's bender. As I near the kitchen, I hear Eli and Zeke laughing and joking with Everly and the sound triggers me—like nails down a chalkboard. Why does she like them and not me? *Because you're a dick.*

Then I hear Everly say, "In the end I was able to win my brother over and I will with Hendrix too."

Before I know what I'm doing, I'm opening my mouth and answering, "Doubt that."

The room falls silent at my words as they watch me stomp down the stairs.

"You're a fucking dick, Hen," Eli says, glaring at me.

"We were having a good morning till you showed up with your dark cloud pissing all over it," Zeke adds, not looking happy with me.

Everly remains quiet with a frown etched on her face.

"You guys look like a bunch of simps the way you are eating up everything she's saying."

"And you're acting like a child," Zeke sneers.

The sound of Everly's chair sliding across the floor breaks the tension as we all look over to where she is now standing.

"There's coffee in the pot if you want some. I have a spare smoothie bowl in the fridge, or I can cook you up bacon and eggs to help with that hangover," she states.

"You don't have to do anything for this ungrateful fuck, E," Eli adds, turning his attention back to Everly.

They already have nicknames? What the fuck have I missed? I know Eli and Zeke like to share, didn't think Everly was like that.

“Jealous your girlfriend is looking after someone other than you,” I say, biting back.

Next thing I know, Eli is up out of his chair and rushing toward me. I don’t have time to brace myself for the hit that I know is coming my way. Eli slams me into the wall, knocking a picture off and it crashes to the floor.

“What the fuck is the matter with you?” Eli screams in my face.

“Nothing. I see everything clearly.”

“Sick of this attitude you are giving her. She’s done nothing to you,” Eli screams in my face as he shakes me.

“Because she’s too busy doing you two.”

“Fuck you, Hen. Everly isn’t like that. She’s not like all those other women who’ve worked for us before. E has integrity.”

I turn and glare at Zeke, who shakes his head at me. “See she’s worked her pussy magic on you too.”

Eli punches me in the stomach for that barb and the left-over whiskey churns in my empty stomach.

“Stop, guys, please. I don’t want us to always be fighting,” Everly screams behind us.

Eli then kicks my feet from underneath me and I sink to the floor.

“You fucker,” I shout at him after my head bounces off the wooden floor, then I reach out and grab him. We begin to tussle and roll around the floor, cursing each other out.

“Get the fuck off him, Hen,” Zeke yells before joining us on the floor too. The three of us begin to wrestle as we roll around, just like we did when we were teenagers.

“Guys, stop,” Everly screams again before I hear footsteps around my ear, and she tries to tug me free.

“Fuck off, this doesn’t concern you,” I growl as I roll Zeke over and begin to fight back, punching him in the guts.

“Stop,” she screams again, tugging on my shirt.

I pull my arm back to punch Zeke again, but my elbow connects with something soft behind me.

“Fuck, you hit E,” Eli curses as he lets go of me.

The room falls silent as Everly falls to the floor with a thud and a groan.

Zeke then rolls me off. He leaves me alone on the floor as the two of them rush to where Everly has fallen on the floor holding her lip. As she pulls her hand away, I notice blood.

Fuck.

“You fucking hit her,” Eli screams, rushing me and hauling me off the floor and into the wall. “You’re a fucking sorry piece of shit at the moment. Fuck off, we don’t want you.”

I stare at my brother as the words he angrily hurls at me cut deeply. My vision begins to blur as a deep-seated memory bubbles to the surface. Pushing myself out of his arms, the walls around me begin to close in, I need to get out of here. I don’t know where I’m going but my legs eat up the floor underneath me until I’m out of the house and standing outside in the sunlight. Desperately, I look around for somewhere secluded where I can have this panic attack that is clawing its way up my chest and seeping into my veins. I spy a cabin down near the lake and run toward it, feeling the rush of the cool air across my face. I continue until my legs want to give out. I reach the cabin but realize it’s the stables the closer I get. I pull up real quick when the horses give me a grumble as they stick their heads out from where they were hiding. I collapse on the bench out the front of the stables and try to catch my breath as panic grips its fingers into me tightly.

“Fuck,” I yell, cursing to no one, and one of the horses huffs near me at my intrusion.

The night that changed everything between Brodie and me comes hurtling to the front of my mind; generally, I’m okay with keeping the past locked away, but today, it decided that I need to relive that night’s agony.

“Did you hear the news?” I ask Zeke and Eli.

“Yeah. Do you think we should tell Brodie?” Zeke asks.

“He’s been doing so well,” Eli adds.

“I would rather him find out from us than some fucking pap.” They both nod at me. “Where is he?”

“Um ...” They don’t make eye contact with me.

“Where is he?” I say, growling the words.

“He’s in his room ...” Zeke’s words fall away.

“I wouldn’t go in there,” Eli warns me, and a frown forms on my face.

“Why?” Concern laces me. I can see Zeke and Eli are grappling with something.

“Let me go.”

Zeke stands up and pushes me out of the way. “It’s better for all if I do.”

“What the fuck. Why?” Zeke shakes his head and begins to sprint through our home, which surprises me.

I chase after him. What has gotten into him? Why does he not want me in Brodie’s room?

“Hen, please. Don’t go,” Eli calls behind me.

I’m so confused. What are they keeping from me? I’ve always been more athletic than Zeke and Eli and my thighs burn as I push them harder, sprinting forward and pushing Zeke out of the way as we reach Brodie’s door together.

I swing it open.

My chest is heaving from the exertion, and it takes me a couple of deep breaths before I realize what my eyes are seeing before me.

“What the fuck?” Everything falls silent as the sound of stampeding feet halts behind me.

“Henny,” my girlfriend squeaks from between my brother’s legs. Her mouth pink and swollen.

Brodie doesn't react, just quirks a brow at me as my eyes zero in on his dick. I can see the red lipstick marks ringed around it. "Baby, I—" Ashley tries to get up, but Brodie pushes her back down to her knees.

"I haven't finished with you yet." His eyes swirl with fury at her before he tucks himself back into his pants.

"You fucking cunt." I rush into the room and attack Brodie—my brother. We tumble onto the bed. "You've been fucking my girlfriend?" Flesh meets flesh as we wrestle. "Why?" My fist meets his cheek.

Ashley screams for us to stop but I can't, I can't. How could he do this to me? How could he fuck up what I had with Ashley? He knew I was going to propose this weekend. He knew she was my one. He can't stand me being happy. I thought he hated her. He always acted like he hated her.

"She was no good for you," he spits in my face. "She doesn't deserve you." We twist around the bed, tangled in hate. "She's let me fuck her every single day you have been together."

My heart breaks open, frayed beyond recognition by the hurt and betrayal.

"You're my fucking brother." Tears well in my eyes.

"I know you." He tries to push me off him, but I'm stronger. "She didn't even hesitate to suck my dick. She loved it. She craved it. She didn't care about you."

"Fuck you. You told me you loved me," Ashley screams at Brodie.

My stomach sinks as I let go of Brodie and fall back onto my heels.

"I used you." Brodie turns toward Ashley. "You gullible slut." His words are vicious.

"Fuck you. I hope your stepfather comes back and rapes you again."

The room stills at Ashley's venomous words.

Brodie pales as memories assault him.

Zeke grabs Ashley and begins to pull her out of the bedroom. "Get your fucking hands off me." She squirms against him.

"What the fuck did you say?" Brodie is pushing off the bed, as he stalks toward her.

Ashley's thrashing about again but I can see the venom behind her green eyes.

"Your stepdaddy was released from jail today." She sneers at him, a triumphant smile falling across her face as she sees the utter devastation falling across his, getting her own form of revenge back on him.

"We were coming to tell you, and then we found ..." Eli explains not really needing to finish those words.

"He's out?" Brodie turns to me, the scared boy he used to be returning to center stage.

"For good behavior. He got out today. We wanted to tell you." My eyes lock onto Ashley's. Fucking bitch. "We didn't want you to find out like this."

Brodie pushes past Eli and rushes out the door.

Fuck.

"Hope you're happy now, bitch," Zeke growls into her ear.

"Fuck you. Fuck you all." Ashley struggles against Zeke's hold.

"Get her the fuck out of this house!" I scream.

"Henny." She pouts, trying to give me those eyes that I used to fall for. "Henny, please. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. He played me. He used me."

I shake my head. I don't want to hear her excuses because nothing she says can make what she did okay. I push past them and run after Brodie. I hate him right now. I hate him so fucking much for what he has done to me, but seeing him so devastated by the news breaks me.

“Brodie!” I scream throughout the house but nothing, only silence greets me. I know exactly where he will be—the beach. The one place that he escapes to when the demons are too much. The gentle lapping of the waves soothes him, heals him, he says. Makes him not want to reach for the drugs. It’s the reason we moved from The Hills down to Manhattan Beach.

I see him standing there in the darkness, a lone figure. Pushing my hurt aside, I go to him.

“Brodie.” He doesn’t even react when I say his name.

Reaching out, I place my hand on his shoulder, which makes him flinch. He turns to me, and I see his eyes are red raw from crying, he’s broken. Instinctively, I reach out and pull him into my arms. Comfort was something none of us got growing up in our foster homes. No one comforted us when we were sad. Lonely. Vulnerable. So, I know how much Brodie needs this right now. He stiffens in my embrace, but I don’t let up; I wrap my arms around him tightly, letting him know he is safe, that our stepfather will never, ever touch him again.

That we have him.

That I have him.

Even though he fucked up. Because all we have in this world is us four. We are The Lost Boys. We have no family. No siblings. No love. All we have is each other in this messed-up world. Four lost boys, finally finding the family they always wanted and needed when we found each other. We may not be blood, but we are brothers, we chose each other. We weren’t forced to love each other. We weren’t bound by blood bonds to put up with each other. And that was the tightest of bonds there ever could be.

Brodie’s arms finally give in and wrap around me as he breaks in my arms. The pain he’s been holding in, the pain that has been masked by the drugs, pours out of him and I hold him. I wish I could take the pain away from him. He’s been through so much. He needs to unburden some of that pain. So, I hold him tighter, letting him know that I’m here for him. That I will try to take his pain away.

We stay like that for a long time. The gentle lapping of the water slowly soothing him. Finally, he pulls his face from my shoulder and looks up at me, his eyes puffy from his tears, his breath slowing down as he tries to calm his demons.

“I won’t let anyone harm you ever again, you hear me?” I tell him, my face serious. “You are safe.”

Brodie nods, his dark eyes looking away from me for a split moment before they turn back to me with something new behind them. Swirling fire rages behind his chocolate eyes, turning them molten. Then before I know it, his lips are on mine, and his hands are cupping my face.

What the hell is happening?

His five o’clock shadow is scratching my face, the sweep of his tongue against my mouth forcing it to open. It does for a moment, shock rendering me frozen.

Brodie groans as my mouth opens for him, he sweeps his tongue again along my own. His fingers dig into my face. My senses come back, and I push him off me.

“What the fuck, Brodie.”

He stumbles back a couple of steps. Those chocolate eyes filled with lust, desire ... for me.

I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand and his face cracks, rage bubbling to the surface.

“You have no fucking idea, do you?” he asks me.

I’m utterly confused because my best friend, my brother, just kissed me.

“It’s been a strange night. Enlighten me.”

Brodie’s eyes flare; his hands come up and sink into his dark hair.

“Are you fucking blind, Hen,” he growls. “It’s you. It’s always been you.”

I shake my head in confusion. What is he talking about?

“Ashley didn’t deserve you. It didn’t take much coaxing to get her onto my dick.”

My hand fists beside me; I want to punch him, I want to hurt him, but I think that’s what he wants me to do, to lose control.

“Same as all the others.”

“Others?” He nods.

“Every single girl you ever dated, I fucked. I licked their fucking pussies. They sucked my dick like good little sluts.” His words are like daggers to my heart.

“Why?”

“Because none of them were good enough for you. None of them deserved you. None of them were me.” He thumps his chest to emphasize his words.

“You?” My lips are tingling from the searing kiss he just gave me.

Shit. No. No. Brodie, no. Please don’t tell me ...

“Me.” He thumps his chest again, moving toward me. “Me.” This time, he says it as a plea. “I’m in love with you, Hendrix.”

No. No. No. Shaking my head.

“But I’m not gay.”

Brodie’s head hangs down, defeated by my words.

“If you want your dick sucked then Zeke and Eli are the ones. Not me,” I say, pointing my finger at my chest. “I like women. I love women. I want women.” Panic laces my body.

“But you kissed me.” Brodie looks at me.

“You surprised me. That’s all.”

“Kiss me again,” Brodie pleads.

“No,” I scream at him. Taking a couple of steps back from him.

“No woman can love you like I do,” he implores.

“But I don’t want you.” The words fall from my lips, and as soon as they are out, I realize what I have said.

Fuck.

Brodie’s face breaks into a thousand different pieces.

“Brodie ...” I take a step closer to him.

But he holds up his hand, stopping me. The hurt that is all over his face tells me I’ve broken him to his core.

“We will never speak of this again,” he tells me.

I nod in agreement as he turns and walks back to our house.

I fall into the cold sand, the tears falling down my face. I can never love Brodie in the way he wants me to. I wish I could, but I can’t. I’m not wired that way. I didn’t mean to break his heart. I didn’t mean to say the words that I did. It was shock. Once the dust settles, maybe then we can talk about what happened tonight and clear the air.

But I never got the chance because when I got back home, he’d gone and that was the last time we ever saw him alive.

EVERLY

“I can’t believe he did that to you. I want to fucking kill him,” Eli growls as he wipes the blood from my lip.

“I’m going to fucking kill him. Hitting a woman like that. What the fuck is wrong with him?” Zeke adds.

“It was an accident, guys. I put myself in the middle of the three of you fighting,” I mumble through my swollen lip.

“We’re sorry about that,” Eli adds.

“Hen got us all wound up and we exploded,” Zeke adds.

I let out a heavy sigh. “Violence isn’t the answer though.”

They both hang their heads in shame. “It’s all we’ve known, E. The world we grew up in was a violent one,” Zeke explains sadly.

I reach out and grab his hand, giving it a squeeze, understanding that their childhood wasn’t as idyllic as mine.

“We want to change, we have to change,” Eli adds.

I look up at Eli and give him a small smile, which irritates my lip. “Have you guys gone to therapy for any of your childhood issues?”

They both pull their brows together in a frown and look at me. “You think we are therapy people?” Zeke asks with a chuckle.

This is very true.

“Booze and drugs were our therapy, sweetheart,” he adds.

I get it now. I'm understanding the boys a little bit better. I don't want to say that they are lost causes, but I think each one of them is suffering more than any of us realize.

"Would you consider seeing someone when you got back to LA?" I ask.

"Thought you were supposed to save us, E?" Eli quips.

"Maybe someone with more specialized skills would be better to deal with your pasts. I can help you guys right in this moment and forward, but I think you all need to see someone separately and together for the other stuff. Otherwise, you're never going to be able to heal fully," I explain.

Eli and Zeke look at each other and shrug.

"Maybe we don't want to rehash the past," Eli says quietly.

I nod in understanding. "Guess I should go find Hendrix and clear this all up."

"We'll come with you," Zeke says.

I shake my head. "Thanks, but I need to sort this out between the two of us otherwise we are going to continue to butt heads, and that's not going to get us anywhere."

The boys stay silent for a couple of moments before nodding. "We'll clean up in here for you," Eli says as Zeke helps me down from the kitchen counter.

"Do I look okay? I don't want to freak him out?" I ask, not wanting to trigger Hendrix any more than I have.

"You always look good," Zeke says, giving me a wink.

I roll my eyes at the boys, but a smile tries to pull on my tender lips, and I pull it back thanks to the cut. I walk outside into a beautiful day, the sun is bright and still low; as the day progresses it will hang higher in the sky. There's not a cloud in the sky, nothing but bright blue as far as you can see. I stand at the bottom of the stairs and stare out across the vast plains wondering where the hell a grumpy, angry, upset rock star would be. My eyes land on the stables, and the sound of a couple of horses neighing, alerting me to an intruder, gives him away. I jog down toward them and hope that in his pissed-

off state he doesn't get kicked in the balls by one of the horses, because I do not want to have to explain to Vanessa why their rock star now sings with a high-pitched voice instead of his normal deep, sexy voice.

By the time I get down to the stables, I have a light sheen of sweat across my body. I walk over to the tap, turn it on, and splash my face; I wince when the cold water hits the cut of my lip; then I use my shirt to wipe the water away before opening the barn door. It's dark inside with patches of light filtering through the holes in the roof. When the horses see me, they give me a nod and an annoyed neigh as they want to be let out into the open pastures. I look around the darkened barn but don't see any sign of Hendrix. Where the hell is he?

"Hey, Peaches, how are you this morning?" I say, walking over to my horse and giving her a pat on the nose. She gives me a big shake of the head before walking away from me toward the back gate, wanting me to let her outside. "You're right, you're ready to get going for the day. Sandy's probably filled your troughs out there, and you're hungry." She gives me another nod of the head, letting me know I've guessed it. Walking over to the back of her stable, I press the button that opens her gate, and she gallops out into the wilderness. The other three horses get upset that I've let her out and not them and they start to carry on.

"Okay, I haven't forgotten you three either. Go have fun, someone should. I have to find an angry rock star and that's not going to be fun," I say as I press the button that opens the gates; they all gallop out into the sunshine.

"It's not going to be fun for me either, being found by an overly sunny accountability coach," the deep voice says above me, making me jump.

I turn around and see Hendrix has buried himself amongst the hay bales, those bright blue eyes flashing fire at me as he scans my face and settles on my lip, a grimace falling across his face.

"We need to talk," I tell him.

“Yeah, I guess we do,” he grumbles back. “I’ll come down,” he says.

“No, I’ll come up,” I yell back as I turn and walk over to the ladder and start to climb up to one of my favorite hiding places. I get up to the top and take a step but trip over my own foot and end up flying headfirst toward the hay but before I can brace myself, Hendrix breaks my fall and catches me, and we end up in the same position we were in at Vanessa’s house. He looks up at me and is about to say something but claps his mouth shut as his eyes land on my lip again, and the next thing I know, I’m being rolled, and he’s now on top of me. *And I like it.* I’m not supposed to like it, but I do. It’s been too long since I’ve been in the arms of a male that I’m embracing it, despite it being someone I shouldn’t.

He stares down at me, and his calloused thumb comes out and runs across my lip and I try to hide the shiver that races down along my spine.

“Why did you jump into the fight?” he asks, glaring at me with those bright blue eyes.

“Because there’s no fighting in my home,” I bite back.

“But you’re so little. What the hell did you think you could do?”

The audacity of this man. “I could kick your ass if I wanted to, like I did at Vanessa’s,” I say, reminding him of how I kicked out his feet from underneath him.

He smirks. “But you didn’t.”

This man is infuriating. “You caught me off-guard with your elbow. It was shock.”

His thumb runs over my lip again.

“You can’t even apologize to me.”

“Didn’t think you’d want it,” he bites back.

“It’s common decency to apologize when you hurt someone,” I tell him as I try to push him off me. It takes a couple of pushes, but he eventually rolls off me and stays

seated on the floor. I sit up beside him and glare at the pigheaded man.

“Sorry,” he says as if the word tastes like acid on his tongue.

I grimace at this apology.

“You really are a dick, aren’t you?” I say, shoving myself up from the attic floor and dusting off the stray strands of hay as Hendrix shrugs. “I came down here to see if you were okay, after all ...” I say, waving my hands in front of me. “But you’re determined to hate me. I don’t know why. What the hell have I done to you?”

Hendrix stands up and does the same, shaking off the strands of hay clinging to him before looking up at me again with fire in his eyes. “You left me in the middle of the fucking forest. Anything could have happened to me.”

This again.

“You were being a dick. I had to show you who was boss. That just because you are rock stars doesn’t mean you’re running the show.”

He raises a brow at me before stalking toward me, not looking happy.

Oh no. What did I say?

I take a couple of steps back till my back hits the wooden wall as Hendrix closes in on me. He stops and places a hand above my head, his strong biceps flexing in his black shirt, exposing his tattoos to me. His large presence crowds around me and I hate the flutter the lady garden downstairs gives with his looming presence.

You’re the boss, Everly.

Don’t let the big, surly, hot, grumpy rock star intimidate you.

He needs to understand that while he is here his normal life doesn’t exist and that I am only trying to help him.

“The only place I like being dominated by a woman is in the bedroom,” he states clearly.

I look up into his eyes and start to melt under his stare.

No, stay strong.

“Guess you’re going to learn something new then. A woman can dominate you out of the bedroom, too,” I say, raising a brow in his direction.

That was a good one, Everly.

“Do you like being dominated in the bedroom, Everly?” he asks, his voice deepening as he says my name.

I shake my head trying to disperse myself from whatever seductive hold he is having on me. *Stay strong, Everly.*

“Can’t remember, it’s been too long,” I say, biting back before realizing what I’ve just said.

No.

I don’t need this man knowing it’s been a very long time since I got laid.

Hendrix’s eyes widen before heat and determination flash across his irises.

What have I done?

“What do you mean you don’t remember?”

I roll my eyes. “I’m not talking about it with you,” I say, pushing off from the wall as I try to push past him, except his hand is faster and he pushes me back against the wall.

My brows pull together. “Hey,” I say, angry at being manhandled by this man.

“You’re not going anywhere until you tell me what you meant.”

I let out a sigh and shake my head. I’m not talking about the disaster that is my love life with this man.

“Everly, if I have to be vulnerable, shouldn’t you be too?”

Shit.

If he wants to know that I'm as dry as the Sahara Desert because LA is full of fuckboys and egotistical men that think their shit doesn't stink, then sure, I'll put my messed up love life out there for criticism if it means he will share a little with me.

"Fine. I'm an open book. What do you want to know?" I ask, straightening my shoulders and holding my head up high.

Hendrix's eyes widen in surprise at my acquiescence. "Didn't think it would be that easy."

"You're right. If I'm asking the three of you to be vulnerable then I should be too."

Hendrix blinks at me, still clearly surprised by the turn of events.

HENDRIX

Wow.

Didn't think she would relent that easily. I thought I would have to work her harder than that. There are so many questions I want to ask, but I have to be strategic because I don't think I'm going to get her like this ever again.

You like having her on you, again. And you liked having her pressed up against the wall.

This is fucking true. When she tripped and landed on me, it felt so good to have her luscious breasts pressed against me again. Then the split in her plump lips hit me like a freight train; I can't believe I hurt her. I don't hurt women. *I'm not my father.*

And you couldn't even apologize for it.

That's because she is irritating as fuck. She keeps battling me every step of the way, hardly making it easy for me.

And you like it like that.

I do.

Fuck.

I like the way she pushes against me.

But I hate the way that my brothers are protective of her as if she is theirs.

Maybe she is.

I pushed her into their welcoming arms with my surly attitude. Eli and Zeke do like to share, and most women can't say no to them when they are dealt with the full charming offensive that the two of them bring. The thought that they might have touched her irritates the hell out of me. *But you don't want her.* Of course, I don't. She's a complication I don't need in my life.

And she left me in the fucking forest.

She doesn't know what she did was a trigger.

I shake my head and try to clear the thoughts now swirling around my mind, but they seem to have bubbled to the surface.

"Hendrix, go outside and hide," my mother screams as my father's voice bellows through the home.

"I can't leave you, Momma."

"You have to, sweetheart, please, go hide in the forest where you will be safe," she whispers as she continues to push me out into the backyard as the stomping of my father's feet echoes through our home.

"It's dark and I'm scared," I cry.

She bends down and kisses my forehead as her tears wet my skin. "It's safer and less scary than staying here. Now go, before it's too late, and don't come back until I come for you, okay? I promise one day soon you'll never have to hide ever again."

And with that, I'd turned on my heel and run into the forest at the back of our house not knowing that would be the last time I saw my mother. It took emergency services two days to find me, and when they did, I was dehydrated, hungry, and scared. A lady with kind eyes explained to me that something had happened to my mother and, unfortunately, she had passed away. I asked her if my father had killed her, and the woman tried not to cry upon hearing my question. I was five when the shitty life I had been dealt got even worse.

And now here I am dealing with things that I had buried deep inside of me. Stuff that I thought would never see the

light of day again. Except fucking Everly Nash has decided to rip my vulnerability wide open, and I hate her for it.

I fucking hate her.

Liar.

That kiss.

So what. I've kissed fucking hundreds of girls. She isn't any different. It's not like she blew me in the bushes or anything.

Then why is it her face that gets you off most nights when your hand is wrapped around your dick?

Shut up.

Why the hell am I arguing with myself? Am I going crazy? Is she making me crazy? I know she's driving me crazy.

I shake my head trying to get out of it and bring myself back into the moment. Everly confessed that she hasn't been with anyone in a long time. I assumed a woman who looked like her had men falling at her feet, but I guess when she opens her mouth to talk, she pisses them off. Why does the thought that she hasn't been with anyone for a while make me happy?

Because you're sick and twisted.

"How long has it been?"

Everly huffs and rolls her eyes at me, still sassing me. "A year," she finally answers.

"A year?" I repeat, surprised over her confession. Fuck, I don't think I could go that long without sex. And if I did, my dick would have fallen off from me jerking it all the time.

Everly's eyes narrow on me. "Yes. Not all of us are rock stars who have people ready and willing to bed you," she bites, her cheeks flushed with what I suspect is embarrassment over her confession.

Yes, we have a buffet of women ready and willing but where is the challenge in that, when it's an all-you-can-eat smorgasbord?

“True but look at you, Everly. I bet if you walked into any bar anywhere in the world you would find a man willing to sleep with you.” Everly is beautiful, I can’t deny that.

Everly’s brows pull together at my comment. “Please, I’ve seen the women you’ve slept with, they are supermodels.”

Her comment makes me raise a brow. She’s looked up who I’ve dated? *Interesting*. She’s hotter than any of those models I’ve been with, and if I’m being honest, I never slept with most of them; we were on a mutually beneficial social media campaign date with not-so-strategically placed paparazzi around us to capture the moments. Besides, I’m not into those kinds of women; I like mine to have curves in all the right places, who like eating more than salads, and who are happy to have a beer. *Much like her*. No, nothing like Everly. She eats rabbit food and drinks kombucha or whatever it is. I can’t imagine her with a beer in her hand, especially not now when she is trying to keep us sober. But she does have curves in all the right places, especially when she’s filling out her Daisy Dukes and now in her activewear. Just the thought of my hand gripping her peachy ass again has my dick twitching to life. Remembering the feeling of her breasts pressed against my chest, fuck, I could get hard thinking about it. Then images of her plump lips wrapped around my dick filter through my mind and it has me wanting to pick her up and push her against the barn wall and break this sex drought she has going on. I could see her dating men who wouldn’t know what they were doing. Good guys, that fuck with the lights off, who may make her come but it’s mechanical, going through the motions. There’s no passion there, no *rip your clothes off and fuck against the hay in the middle of the barn* kind of sex.

Before I realize what I’m doing, I’m moving in closer to her again, crowding her in against the back of the barn. She sucks in an audible breath at the action, and it only fuels me.

“Don’t believe everything you read,” I tell her.

Everly rolls her eyes at me. “You’re telling me you haven’t been with any of those women?”

I shake my head. “Didn’t say that, just said don’t believe everything you read.”

“Okay out of the ten, you’ve slept with nine, semantics.” She huffs before she shakes her head at me again. “I’m an idiot,” she mumbles, “here I was thinking my vulnerability would make you open up to me. That maybe we could start over after yesterday, but instead, I feel like you’re mocking me. “Semantics, Everly, I don’t like supermodels. Yeah, super-hot, skinny models aren’t for me,” she says, imitating me.

What the hell?

“I kissed you at Vanessa and Christian’s because I thought you were a desperate groupie and I’d take one for the team. Give a fan a great memory of their favorite band,” she says, mocking me again.

Huh.

“You think I kissed you at Vanessa and Christian’s out of sympathy?”

“Of course.”

I’m genuinely surprised by her comment. “Do you have any idea how beautiful you are?” I ask her. My hand reaches out and cups her face and my thumb slides over the fucking cut that I gave her, marring her perfect lips.

“Don’t mock me, that’s cruel,” she says.

“Who the hell made you believe you weren’t beautiful?” I ask her.

My question stills her, and I can see her face as she is reminded of the person who made her think she wasn’t beautiful. Who did this to her? I run my finger over the cut on her lip, and my stomach rolls that I did this to her.

“Hendrix,” she whispers. I’m not sure if she wants me to do something or for me to step away from her.

“Who hurt you, Everly?”

She shakes her head, and a single tear falls down her cheek. My thumb slides away the errant tear that was slipping

down her lip.

“Right, cut all the other bullshit going on between us, Everly. Do you not know how beautiful you are?”

Those bright green eyes look up at me innocently, unsure if she believes the words coming out of my mouth; after all the shit that’s happened these past couple of days between us, I don’t blame her. Before I know what I am doing, I’m making a stupid decision and I pull her to me and kiss her. Like I said, stupid decision. I push her up against the barn’s wall and press my hardening body into her luscious one. Her mouth opens for me, and she winces as the cut on her lip opens again, but I ignore it and forge on ahead, feeling her body against mine feels good. The metallic taste of copper slides across my tongue as I kiss her and for the briefest of moments, everything in me stills for the first time. My mind blanks and my muscles relax after being held tightly with tension. Everything melts away as all I can think about is devouring Everly.

“Get the hell off me,” she mumbles, pushing her hands hard against my chest, making me take a couple of steps back in confusion. “What the hell do you think you were doing?” she screams at me, wiping her lips against the back of her hand. “You think I’m some desperate woman needing a man to come to my rescue and save me. I have a vibrator; I don’t need your dick to save me,” she yells.

“You don’t need your vibrator if you have my dick,” I say, giving her a smirk.

“Ugh,” she grumbles, throwing her hands up in the air in frustration. “You think this is funny, don’t you? I told you something about me that not many people know because it’s embarrassing. That me, the accountability coach, the person who should have their shit together when it comes to their life, let someone come into it waving big red flags and missed every single one of them. Me,” she says, thumping her chest, her eyes becoming glassy again, her cheeks red with anger, embarrassment, and maybe a sliver of lust.

“Everly—” I start, but she holds up her hand to me.

“I don’t want to hear whatever bullshit you’re going to tell me, Hendrix. You can never kiss me ever again; do you hear me?”

“Everly—”

“No,” she says, shaking her head vehemently, “I need you to promise me what just happened here can never happen again.”

Silence falls between us.

“I can’t promise that,” I tell her honestly.

She gasps at my confession. “Please, stop toying with me, this is cruel.”

“You think I’m toying with you?” I bite back.

She shakes her head again, ignoring me. “This is my life. I know you think all this is bullshit. You don’t believe in it, but I do. Zeke and Eli do too.”

That’s a low blow bringing my brothers into this argument.

“Because they wish they were the ones kissing you.”

Everly gasps again and the next thing I know she kicks me in the shin.

“Ow, fuck, what the hell? Why did you kick me?”

“Because you annoy the hell out of me and you’re a pig,” she bites back.

“Why, because I’m telling the truth? How does that make me a pig? You asked me to promise that you and I won’t kiss again, and I said I couldn’t promise you that. And I can’t because I want to kiss you again.”

“Stop saying that,” she yells at me.

“No.”

“You hate me,” she argues.

“I can hate you and still want to fuck you.”

She kicks my other shin.

“Ouch. Stop fucking kicking me,” I yell at her.

“Stop being a pig.”

“This conversation is going around in circles. I’m not making you any promises that I won’t kiss you again.”

Her green eyes narrow on me again. “That’s harassment. I don’t consent to any of that,” she says, waving her hand in front of me.

“You sure about that? Because each time my lips are on yours you seem to consent really quickly.”

The tips of Everly’s ears burn red, either from anger or lust or a bit of both, she then stomps her foot and flips me off.

“Fuck you, Hendrix Meyer,” she says, turning on her heel and stalking toward the ladder.

“Any time, sweetheart, if you ever get sick of your vibrator you know where to find me.”

“Ugh,” she growls in frustration before turning around and disappearing down the ladder to the bottom of the barn.

“Never. No man can make me come like my rabbit can,” she yells back from the ground, with a safe distance between us.

“Challenge accepted, Everly,” I yell back, unable to hide the smile that’s fallen across my face, something that hasn’t been seen on my face in six months. Who knew torturing Everly was going to become my new favorite thing.

As I sit back and chuckle to myself, a chill falls over me when I realize Everly is storming off from me and back up to the house where Zeke and Eli will be waiting for her; I can only imagine how angry they are after I accidentally hurt her. They are going to be even angrier when they see one pissed-off Everly stomp back inside.

Shit. I need to get to them first.

I head toward the edge and go to grab the ladder, but when I peer over the edge, I see it’s been pushed to the side out of my reach. Is she serious? It takes me a couple of goes to grab it, but I eventually do without plummeting to my death, then haul ass down the ladder. As soon as my feet hit the dusty

floor, I hightail it out of there; she hasn't gotten far with her stomping back toward the house, she is about halfway. I take off with as much speed as I can, my thighs burning as I run uphill toward the woman who is driving me crazy. It's not until I'm a couple of feet away from her that she hears my grunts behind her and twirls around. Her green eyes widen as she sees me barreling toward her, then I football tackle her and land on my back, taking the air out of my lungs for a couple of seconds as I hit the soft grass, pulling her on top of me. I roll us a couple of times until I am on top of her.

"Hendrix," she screams at me.

My hand comes out and covers her mouth. Her eyes widen, and she stills beneath me, and I realize she's turned from anger to panic in an instant. I roll off her to the side, and she does the same.

"I'm sorry, I ... didn't mean to scare you," I say, trying to catch my breath.

"What the hell was that?"

I sit up and let my shoulders sag. "I was trying to stop you from going inside and telling them about what happened?"

She stills. "You think I was going to tell them that we kissed?"

I shrug. "I didn't want to put any more distance between me and my brothers and well ..."

Everly's brows pull together. "No one is ever to know we kissed."

Harsh.

"They are going to be angry at me over your lip, and you know ..."

"All you had to do was ask, Hendrix. You didn't need to tackle me in the grass," she says.

Where would the fun be in that?

"I'm sorry I scared you."

Everly's brows raise high at my words.

“A genuine apology from Hendrix Meyer, well I never,” she says, giving me a smirk.

“Don’t get used to it,” I bite back.

She holds up her hands and we both smile at each other.

“I promise not to say anything to the boys if you promise me you won’t drink again?” she says, holding out her hand to me.

Dammit.

Well played, Everly, well played. Guess I walked right into that one, didn’t I?

“Fine,” I say, reaching out and shaking her hand.

EVERLY

Have Hendrix and I come to an understanding ... and all before lunch? This is a breakthrough. A miracle. When I went after him, this was not at all where I thought we would end up. Yes, I thought we would fight and nitpick because we seem to be good at that. *You also seem to be good at kissing too.* That was a surprise, him kissing me again. I'm still not sure if he did it because he felt sorry for me or if he wanted to, not that either option matters because we are not kissing again, ever. Never. Ever. *Keep telling yourself that.* No, my special friend can take care of all my needs, not him, no matter how much I think he might be able to satisfy me more than my battery-operated friend can. It's never going to happen, this is my job. My career. My reputation. I need to be stronger. No matter the magnetic pull this man has over me.

I still can't believe he chased me all the way from the barn just to stop me from telling his band members that we kissed. Is he embarrassed? Oh shit, I hadn't thought about that. I assumed he wouldn't be. Maybe he is? My stomach rolls at the thought as my ego takes a beating.

"You ready to face those two inside then?" I ask.

"Not really," he grumbles, getting off the ground and shaking grass off himself.

"You'll be fine if we walk in together," I tell him as I follow suit.

He flashes me a smile, and it makes my knees weak, but I need to be stronger than that. *A cute smile isn't going to sway*

you. Stay strong, girl. Think I liked it better when we were fighting; this truce makes me uneasy.

We head back into the house in silence, Hendrix letting me enter first, and as soon as I step into the room, the two boys are on me, checking me over.

“Are you okay?” Eli asks.

“Did you find him?” Zeke questions.

“Yeah, she did,” Hendrix answers, entering the room.

They both still and glare at their bandmate.

“Why doesn’t he have a black eye?” Zeke turns and asks me.

“Or crushed nuts?” Eli adds.

“She stole the ladder from me and left me stranded. Will that suffice?” Hendrix explains to them.

They both turn and smile at me, then proceed to give me high fives as they mutter, “atta girl” to me.

“You better have groveled to this beautiful woman for what you did to her,” Zeke asks, eyes narrowing on his friend.

“I think I did a good job,” Hendrix states as he turns and looks over at me.

I can feel his innuendo. “And I told him I’ve had better.”

Hendrix smirks while Zeke and Eli look between the two of us unsure of what is going on.

“Guess that means no more fighting?” Eli asks.

“Can’t promise that. You never know what the rest of the weeks will bring,” Hendrix adds, heading toward the stairs. “I need a shower. That barn has me all dirty,” he states as he looks at me.

“It’s time for lunch, so how about I start that,” I say, trying to compose myself.

“Sounds good, I’m starving. Worked up an appetite this morning.” And with that last quip to me, Hendrix disappears upstairs.

“Everything okay? You two seem rather strange,” Zeke asks.

“Hendrix has a smile on his face, haven’t seen that in a long time,” Eli adds.

Oh. Really?

“We hashed it out and I’m thinking we might be all good,” I explain.

“You sure? Did you drug him or something? Because he seems like a different person than this morning,” Zeke questions.

“He can’t have changed that much.” I chuckle, rolling my eyes at them both.

They look at each other, then back to me. “He seems the tiniest bit lighter, so whatever you did, keep it up,” Eli adds.

Kissing him is good therapy, see.

No, it’s not. Stop it. It’s never happening again.

Falling for a client never ends well; I should know.

“Babe, I missed you,” Ian says, greeting me as I arrive for our session. He has a movie he’s working on and needs to stay focused for; he’s the director. It’s been long hours at the office and lots of travel. He grabs me by the waist and pulls me in. I bounce off his hard chest and melt in his arms. I never meant to fall for my client, never have before, but Ian was persistent, and he wore me down. It’s been six months, and we are going strong. I’m hoping he’s going to ask me to move in with him soon as I hate how separate our lives are, but he’s a busy guy.

“I’ve missed you too,” I say, wrapping my arms around his neck as my lips crash down against his. It’s always the same every week when I come over, he greets me at the door, tells me he misses me, I fall into his arms, and then next thing, he has me bent over the couch and is sinking into me moments later.

“Fuck. I’ve missed your pussy, Evie,” he groans as he starts to pound me.

“You’ve missed her pussy, Ian?” a woman’s voice echoes in the room.

We both still. I turn my head, and I see a gorgeous woman standing in the living room with her arms crossed and her eyes wide with shock.

“Oh fuck,” Ian says as he quickly pulls himself from me and slides himself back inside his gym shorts. I quickly pull myself back together too.

“Lydia, let me explain,” he says, holding up his hands to her.

Lydia? Who the hell is Lydia? The sinking realization starts to hit me that Ian isn’t who I think he is.

“Let you explain? Oh hell no. I’ve seen all the explanation I need to. And you,” she says, pointing at me, “fucking a married man, you’re a whore.”

Wait, he’s married?

“You told me you were single.” I turn toward Ian.

“No, sweetie, he’s been married for twenty fucking years. But don’t worry, he’ll be single real soon,” Lydia sneers at me.

“I had no idea,” I tell her.

“You’re blind and dumb, great combination there. Let me guess, you’re his fitness instructor,” she questions me.

“No, accountability coach,” I answer quietly.

Lydia laughs. “Wow, how very LA. Well you suck at it, sweetie. Don’t worry, I’ll be holding you accountable for what you’ve done. Now get the hell out of my house,” she screams at me.

And I do, quickly, but not before screaming at Ian for the shit he’s put me in, for lying to me, for making me the other woman. I’m no side piece.

Lydia’s threats held true; she did make me accountable, finding out where I was employed and contacting them. She told them what happened and made such a fuss that they fired me. They didn’t care that I didn’t know, the fact that I was

sleeping with a client was enough for instant dismissal. *I was so stupid.* I thought Ian loved me. That he was mine and we were going to start building a life together. Yes, he was older than me, but age didn't matter.

The memory of Ian makes my stomach turn. I hate that I let a man fool me and I lost everything I worked for.

Never again.

"I'm going to freshen up and then I'll get us some lunch," I say, putting on a bright smile, hoping to mask the unease the memory gave me.



MY MIND HAS BEEN a mess today, so all I could think of was self-serve tacos. I've finished setting the table, and I'm surprised to see Hendrix is the first down.

"Looks good," he says, eyeing the multicolored food on the table.

"It's something simple and healthy," I add awkwardly as I turn and head back into the kitchen. Hendrix follows, and when I turn around, he is there grabbing the cutlery from my hand. When our skin touches, sparks of electricity zip between us and I pull my hand away at the shock. I don't need any of that chemistry stuff happening between us—that is not an option. Hendrix silently takes the cutlery and sets it out on the table as we wait for Zeke and Eli to join us.

Grabbing vegetables and fruit to put through the juicer, I jump when I feel his presence behind me. I stop the juicer, turn around, and Hendrix is right there, crowding my personal space.

"Are you okay? You seem jumpy?" he asks.

"Because you're not respecting my personal space," I tell him.

He takes a step back, holding up his hands. "Is that better?"

It's going to have to be, isn't it? I have no excuse to ask him to move further away. I turn my back to him again and continue juicing, not paying attention to what combinations I'm putting in, just needing to keep my hands busy.

Get it together, Everly. It's my job to keep these boys in line, not the other way around. *Find that boss bitch energy again and do not let one cocky rock star, with kissable lips take that away from you.* I suck in a deep breath and try to center myself.

"If you want to start on lunch, go right ahead. I'll have drinks for everyone in a moment," I tell him as I busily continue to juice away.

He doesn't respond, but he must move away, as moments later, I hear a chair to the dining room table slide out across the floor. My shoulders relax knowing he is nowhere near me again. I bring the jug of fresh juice over to the table and set it in the middle.

"Do you know how long the boys will be," I ask Hendrix.

"From the noises I heard from Eli's room, they might be a while. I'd suggest we start without them," he says, giving me a smirk.

Noises? What does that mean?

"Are they okay?" I ask.

"They will be soon." He chuckles.

I let my cutlery go, and it clangs against the table. "Do you always talk in riddles?" I ask him, annoyed by his comments.

"Oh. I assumed you knew," he answers.

"Knew what?"

Then Hendrix chuckles again. "That Zeke and Eli like to have fun together."

They are best friends. I'd assume they would like to have fun together. When I stare at Hendrix blankly, he realizes I'm still missing something.

“Zeke and Eli are bisexual. They like fucking each other, but they love fucking each other with a woman in the middle,” Hendrix explains, and I instantly feel my cheeks warm at the images of being caught in the middle of those two. *Focus, Everly*.

“So, you’re saying that the two of them haven’t been following my rules which is no sex while we are here?”

Hendrix’s cutlery drops onto the table, the tinny sound echoes around us. “No sex? We’re on a sex ban?”

“This is a detox, and that is most definitely off the table for the month,” I tell him as my eyes narrow, making sure he understands that sex is never going to happen between us.

“A month?”

“I’m sure you can cope with keeping your dick in your pants for a month. It’s not that hard,” I tell him.

“Oh, it’s hard, alright.”

I roll my eyes at his comment.

“But maybe not for you who hasn’t had sex for a year. A month is a long time to a man like me,” he bites back.

“Fuck you,” I say, picking up my napkin and throwing it on the table as I push back the chair and stomp over toward the kitchen for the bottles of water I forgot. After grabbing them, giving me time to not react to Hendrix, I turn and head back to the table, placing the bottles in the middle.

We sit in silence as I try to resume my lunch.

“I shouldn’t have said that,” Hendrix says, eventually breaking the silence between us.

“But you did, and you meant it. I regret telling you. Will you always throw it in my face?” I ask him, not daring to look at him as I’m embarrassed by my admission. I thought it might help break down the walls between us, and I guess in some ways it did but not how I thought.

“No,” he answers with what sounds like honesty. “But I still don’t understand why you haven’t fucked someone in all

that time?”

“Because sex is better in a relationship, where you’ve built a connection with someone. Something I’m sure you know nothing about,” I bite back.

“You’d be right because no matter how much you think that person will love you, they will always fuck you over in the end. It’s easier maintaining casual relationships.”

Who hurt you, Hendrix Meyer?

“Sounds like you’re talking from experience.”

Those blue eyes narrow on me. “I am, but you’re going to have to work harder to get that story from me.”

“Just like you’re going to have to work harder to work out why I haven’t had sex in a year.”

He raises a brow at me. “What do I get if I do work harder?”

His question is laced in silk which sends shivers over my body. My kitty wants to purr all the things she wants Hendrix Meyer to do to her. That’s never going to happen.

“Nothing.”

“That doesn’t seem like an incentive to me,” he argues.

This man is so frustrating. “Fine, I’ll bite. What do you want?” Maybe I’m reading too much into his flirty words. This man could have anyone he wants, the last thing he truly would want is me.

He taps his tattooed finger across his lips, and a wicked thought of watching the ink-covered skin slipping inside of me flashes across my mind. *Ugh. Enough, Everly, he is not some sexual magician, he’s just a rock star. You could go out into LA any night of the week and pick one up.*

“I want to be the one to break your drought.”

Of all the things he could have said, that was not what I thought.

“Never,” I bite back instantly.

“Then I guess I’ll be doing the bare minimum work here, in rehab.”

Ugh. This man.

“Don’t you want to be better?” I ask him.

“Baby, I’m already the best.” He chuckles arrogantly.

“The record label doesn’t think so,” I bite back instantly, watching the smirk fall from Hendrix’s face.

“Hey, you made it to lunch, Hen. See I told you he would,” Eli says excitedly, breaking up the tension between Hendrix and me.

“Yeah, you did,” Zeke answers as he looks between Hendrix and me. “Everything okay?” he asks, noticing the way we are both glaring at each other.

“Peachy,” Hendrix answers.

“No, everything isn’t fine,” I say with a steely tone.

Eli and Zeke stop, and their smiles drop.

“What the hell did you do?” Zeke asks Hendrix, who throws his hands up and starts making his taco.

“I’ll deal with him later. It’s you two I’m upset with,” I say, turning and looking at the two of them, freshly showered, again. A chuckle falls from Hendrix’s lips as he realizes he isn’t under fire this time. “It’s come to my attention that you two have been fucking each other under my roof, after promising me you would abide by my rules.”

The two of them instantly look over at Hendrix before turning their attention back to me. They both look like apologetic puppies as they stare at me, each of them wondering how to answer my accusation.

“We weren’t trying to deceive you, E,” Zeke states.

“But you did,” I tell him, letting him know that finding out the two of them have been fooling around behind closed doors—no matter how hot that would be to witness—hurts, and worse, that they weren’t honest with me. I thought the three of us were building a friendship.

“Not many people know,” Eli adds.

Which makes Hendrix chuckle. “The gossip pages are filled with the women you fuck together selling their stories.”

Eli turns and glares at his friend. “Like you’re innocent and haven’t done the same thing.”

This has Hendrix stiffening. Is he bisexual?

“I’m not into dudes,” he bites back.

“And yet you have happily joined us on occasion in sharing a girl,” Eli adds.

“Was too lazy to use my hand,” Hendrix fires back.

Eli flips him off.

Okay, this conversation is spiraling in a direction I didn’t want it to go. “Look, are you two a couple?”

Eli and Zeke look at each other and then back to me. “Kind of, not really, sort of,” Eli answers.

What the hell does that mean?

“We like sharing, always have, and always will. We both are not interested in individual relationships,” Zeke explains, and I notice a slight pinkness to his cheeks. Is he embarrassed to tell me that?

Oh, I understand now.

“They’ve been like that since high school, always liked the same girls and always shared,” Hendrix adds.

“You had no complaints,” Eli adds.

Hendrix shrugs.

“You know you could have told me this, don’t you?” I ask them both.

“As you might have noticed it’s hard for us to trust people. Someone will always sell us out for the highest price,” Zeke tells me.

What a sad existence; always wondering if someone you trust will betray you for money.

“Don’t forget, princess here is rich, so ...” Hendrix adds, letting the rest of the sentence fall away.

“My parents are, I’m not.” I turn and glare at Hendrix. “I also would never sell anyone out for money, loyalty is big to me.”

“People say that until the green is waved under their nose,” Hendrix states.

“Ignore him, he has way more trust issues than us,” Eli explains. “We’re sorry we didn’t disclose this to you, E. We promise we aren’t hiding anything else.”

“I’m not the enemy, guys. I really hope you understand that,” I tell them all, including Hendrix.

“Does that mean we can get a hug?” Eli asks.

“Fine,” I say because I can’t stay mad as those two; it would be like kicking a puppy and I’m not inhumane. They both rush toward me and wrap me in their arms.

“Come on, Henny, join in the love parade, it might do you good,” Eli jokes. But all he gets in response is a grunt and the clattering of his cutlery. I can’t see what he’s doing as I am engulfed in a man sandwich, and I can’t seem to see over the wall of muscles. When they eventually let me go, I notice Hendrix has left the table, and I’m guessing I won’t be seeing him again today.

HENDRIX

I t's past midnight and I can't sleep. Earlier tonight, I watched Everly and my brothers stargazing together; I declined the invitation, saying I was tired. They let me go, and I stood at my window in the darkness and watched them sitting there laughing together, drinking their health drinks, while Everly explained the universe to them. Am I jealous? Hell no. Maybe a little, that she easily gives them her attention, that she lets them touch her, whereas when I do it, she pushes me away. *Maybe she's not into you.* Doubt that; everyone is into me. Wonder what she is thinking about Zeke and Eli's news. Was telling her a mistake? Have I pushed her toward the two of them even more now? A lot of women when they find out they can have them both usually choose one night with two rock stars over one, not that I'm that interested in the women the boys fuck, or the guys for that matter, they are equal-opportunity lovers, they like one and all. Would Everly like to be spit-roasted by two rock stars? It has been a year since she's had any action so ... do the boys know? Because if they did, they would be all over her, working their charms, finding her a challenge they would gladly like to conquer. *Is that what she is to you, a challenge?* Yes. No. Maybe. I don't know, all I know is that she has my brain in a muddle and my dick aching, and I don't like it one bit. Is this what it's like being sober? Feeling all these things in stereo. *It's too much.* I need to get out of my head; too many thoughts are swirling around, and I'm not able to process it.

I make my way toward the hot tub outside. I know I can sit in there, relax, and get my head back on straight before

tomorrow. This is the time that I would be reaching for the booze, but I know Everly has that shit locked up tight after last night, but I hate this feeling feelings. Every dark thought, every hurt that's inside of me, is starting to bubble to the surface, and I know I'm not ready to deal with it all.

The house is dark and quiet, so fucking quiet, as I make my way down the stairs and through the living room, which is dark with the only light coming in from the moon. I head down another set of wooden stairs and to the door outside, pausing for a moment wondering if it's alarmed. No, it wouldn't be, would it? Guess I'm about to find out as my hand turns the doorknob and pushes. I grimace and wait for a sound that's going to wake the entire house, but nothing comes. I send a silent prayer up above and continue out into the night. The air is crisp, the sounds of the night echo in stereo across the still nighttime landscape. As I look up, I stare at the millions of twinkling stars that spread out across the dark sky as far as the eye can see. There better not be bears or wolves out here looking for a snack because that is not at all how I want to go out.

I turn the corner and still, what the hell? I rub my eyes because I cannot be seeing this. I look up to the heavens and curse them. What the hell are they playing at? This is a pretty messed-up universe. I wanted alone time, and instead, you've decided to place the person I'm trying not to think about here, half-naked, right in front of me.

Tempting me.

A moan falls from Everly's lips, and that's when I realize her hand is moving beneath the bubbling hot water. I look up again and smile, you dirty dog universe.

"Need a hand," I ask.

Everly squeals and jumps about five feet into the air before falling back down with a splash.

"What the hell, Hendrix? You scared the hell out of me." She pants, then I watch as her face turns bright red at the realization that her hand was in her pussy while I was standing behind her. "How long were you standing there?"

“Long enough,” I tease, unable to contain my smirk.

“Fuck,” she mumbles under her breath.

Oh, this is going to be fun. I stride over toward the hot tub, sling my towel from my shoulder, and place it on the seat beside the tub. When I turn back around, I notice Everly’s eyes roaming over my bare chest. I work out, giving the ladies something to look at when I’m on stage. My body is covered in tattoos, the intricate images all over my chest and over my abs. I can feel her eyes sliding over every inch of my body till she hits my black briefs that don’t leave anything to the imagination as my dick starts to twitch and come to life.

“Like what you see?” I ask, which pulls her from her staring and she shakes her head as if forgetting that she was openly ogling.

“Dream on,” she tells me, but I can see the flush of her cheeks.

“I think you were dreaming when your hand was between your thighs. What were you dreaming of, Everly? Me? Were you wondering if these fingers could fill you better? If the slide of my tongue across your aching clit will bring the relief that you need. Or would only my cock be enough to satisfy you?”

Everly’s jaw drops open at my forwardness, but she shouldn’t have been surprised because she was the one pleasuring herself in the hot tub, not me.

“Keep that mouth open wide, groupie, and I’ll fill it for you,” I say, giving her a wink, which promptly makes her close her mouth.

“I’ve got to go,” she says, getting up out of the tub, and for the first time, I see her body in its entirety. She’s wearing a skimpy white bikini which molds to her luscious breasts perfectly as they stretch the material. I can see the hardness of her nipples pressing against the fabric and even the slightest hint of color through the wet material. Then my eyes slide down over her taut stomach and down toward her pussy, her bottoms are semi-see-through, showing off her bareness. I lick

my lips as my dick starts to rise to the occasion. *Easy, boy, not sure you're going to see pussy action tonight. You're going to have to be content with my hand again.* She notices my staring and instantly drops back down into the tub.

“Turn around so I can get out,” she barks at me.

“No can do, I'm getting in,” I tell her.

“Not till I get out, we both can't be in here,” she adds, a slight panic to her tone.

I pointedly look around the hot tub which could fit twenty people in it. “Seems like enough room, unless you don't think you can keep your hands off me.”

Everly groans and rolls her eyes.

“That's what I thought. I'm coming in,” I say, stepping up and over, then slowly sinking into the hot water. Instantly, my muscles begin to relax as the heat hits them, and a groan falls from my lips as I take a seat, close my eyes, and throw my head back. “This feels good.” Everly doesn't answer me. When I'm comfortable, I open my eyes and see her scowling at me. “Chill would you. Nothing is going to happen that you don't want to,” I say, chuckling.

“Why the hell are you here?”

I let her question swirl around us; do I tell her the truth or do I give her a bullshit answer? “Couldn't sleep.” She raises a brow, not liking that answer. “Couldn't sleep because I wasn't drunk,” I add.

“And you need alcohol to sleep?”

I nod my head.

“Why?” she questions me.

Do I tell her? *No.* I can't talk to anyone else about it though, as we all have our own demons we are fighting. *She might think you are weak.* True. But do I care what she thinks about me? *You do if you want to get into her pants.* Yeah, but she's into all this me being vulnerable; it might work.

“No judgment zone here,” she adds when my silence stretches on.

“Fine, I drink to keep the memories away,” I tell her, my hand itching to find a beer to mask what I’m feeling.

“Memories?”

I knew she would have questions.

“Not going to share those with you. This is as much as you’re getting from me,” I bite back as prickles start to lace my skin, the need to run as far away from this conversation as I can kicking in.

“I understand. Thank you for sharing with me what you feel comfortable with,” she adds, her soft voice caressing my skin, sending goosebumps across it.

She feels sorry for you now. You’re moving into the unfuckable zone. I try to shake those intrusive thoughts away. Fuck, I hate this.

“You know what, you were right, I think I should go,” I tell her, quickly rising out of the water ready to hightail it out of there.

“Hendrix, wait,” Everly calls out, halting me. She’s standing out of the water, her blonde hair wet around her shoulders, her green eyes imploring me not to go. “Please, stay. I want you to stay,” she adds.

My brows rise high; I wasn’t expecting that. I watch as Everly slides back into the water and beckons me over. Fucking, tempting siren. I do as she asks and slide back into the water, silence falling between us.

“You don’t share a lot with people, do you?” she asks.

I shake my head.

“Eli and Zeke probably don’t know what is actually going on up there with you.” She taps her head. “You keep it all to yourself, the pain, the memories, the past.”

I hate how accurate she is with all of that.

“You mask it with booze, drugs, and women, so that you don’t have to feel.”

“Don’t need you psychoanalyzing me, groupie.”

Everly shrugs her shoulders before she swims over to where I am. She stops right in front of me. “You hide everything with sex.”

I shake my head. “No, I just enjoy fucking.”

She smirks as if knowing that was exactly how I was going to respond to her statement. Then she is moving to straddle me in the tub. *What the hell is happening?* My hands come out and grab her hips instinctively as she settles herself in my lap. What the hell is she doing? I thought ... my dick is now standing to attention.

“Look at me, Hendrix. I want something from you, and I’m going to do something unethical to achieve it, I’m game if you are?” she asks, a seductive lilt to her words.

What is this siren playing at? My dick is screaming, “Yes,” but my mind is saying, “No.” She has a plan; she’s going to trick me into revealing all my secrets and then leave my dick high and dry.

“Show me what you’ve got, groupie.”

“Right, for one night only, you get to touch a part of my body if you answer my question satisfactorily,” she states with a twinkle in her eye.

“Any part of your body?” I clarify.

“Yes, from the tip of my toes to my head and everything in between but it is only for five seconds and then you have to answer another question before proceeding.”

“Five seconds, that’s not long enough. If you want me to spill then I need more. A minute.” I ask, pushing my luck as I thrust myself against her pussy, which pulls a gasp from her lips.

“Ten seconds. You can only use your hands.”

Oh no, no, no, that won't do. "I'll take ten seconds, but I can use my mouth, tongue, and dick."

She shakes her head. "No dick, but mouth and tongue for ten seconds is fine, you agree?"

She's saying I can have my mouth and tongue on her cunt for ten seconds. Fuck yes.

"One night only. Never to be repeated, never to be spoken about," she states clearly, holding out her hand to me.

Sweetness, when my tongue is on your cunt, and I have you screaming, you're going to want more, but I'll agree. It sucks my dick won't be getting action but who knows, maybe she will break some more rules tonight and ride it or suck it.

"You have yourself a deal," I tell her, shaking her hand, not sure if she realizes the deal with the devil she's made.

"Good, now hands on the edge until you answer," she tells me.

Reluctantly, I pull my hands from her hips and splay them out against the edge of the tub.

"You ready?" she asks, and I nod, letting her know I am when clearly I'm not mentally.

"Are you angry with Brodie?"

Wait, hang on a minute. What the hell kind of question is that? She feels me tense beneath her.

"I didn't say this was going to be easy, Hendrix."

No pussy is worth that. My hands come off the edge and push her to the side as I stand up.

"It's been nice playing with you tonight, Everly, but I've had enough."

She stares at me in disbelief.

"Well played though, good effort, pimping yourself out to save my soul." As soon as the words are out, I see they hit their intended target dead on.

“You’re right. What the hell was I thinking? Good night, Hendrix. I’ll see you at eight for yoga in the basement. Be there. I will not tolerate tardiness.”

And with that, I turn around and step out of the hot tub, grab my towel, and reluctantly walk back to the door. I pause and turn around, and when I do, I realize the magnitude of how deep my words can cut someone as Everly has her back to me and I can see her shoulders shaking because she’s trying to stifle her tears. A normal human being would go over there and comfort her, but I’m not normal, I’m fucked up, and if I’m being honest, she deserves more than anything I could give her.

I open the door and walk back inside, regretting every single step away from her.

EVERLY

I can't believe I did that last night. What an idiot. I threw myself at my client in the hopes my body would help him open up. *Ego much, Everly, thinking that you on a silver platter would entice a guy like Hendrix Meyer to open up to you.* I'm an idiot. I wish last night never happened as I angrily cut up the fruit for the boys' breakfast.

"Morning, E," Eli greets me warmly. "What do we have for breakfast today?" he asks excitedly.

"There are breakfast burritos, with turkey bacon, avocado, tomato, healthy hash brown, spinach, and egg whites and we also have overnight oats bowls, with bananas and fresh berries."

"That sounds great. Want me to do anything?" he asks.

Oh. His question catches me off-guard.

"Sure, if you don't mind setting the table. Once everyone is down, we can do our yoga session and then I have some other activities for you all to do."

Eli gives me a smile and does as he's asked, just being around him has lifted my sour mood.

"Good morning, E. How did you sleep last night?" Zeke asks, coming in stretching, his T-shirt riding up his taut stomach, exposing his impressive abs.

I still at his question. Did Hendrix tell him what happened last night? That I practically threw myself at the man. Ugh. I start to chop up the fruit with much more vigor.

“What the hell did you do? She’s murdering that banana,” Eli calls out to Zeke.

“Nothing. I asked her how she slept last night and then she got angry,” Zeke replies.

“Probably sexually frustrated, it’s been a while,” Eli says in a mock whisper.

I drop the knife upon hearing his comment and turn around about to yell at the two of them for talking about my lack of sex life when Hendrix walks into the room, dressed and ready for yoga.

“Who’s sexually frustrated? Can’t be you two,” Hendrix says, chuckling.

“Everly,” Eli answers without missing a beat, and I see Hendrix’s eyes widen as his attention turns to me.

What in the hell? “Eli,” I squeal. Why would he say that?

“Shit, sorry, E, I forgot I wasn’t supposed to tell Hendrix,” he says, giving me his best puppy dog eyes. My shoulders slump, and I refuse to look at Hendrix.

“Can you clean this all up? I’ve got to get the studio ready for our session,” I say, wiping my hands on the towel before turning on my heel and escaping the kitchen toward the yoga studio in the basement.

“Hey, Everly, can we talk?” Hendrix asks as I pass him.

“Sure, but not right now,” I say, trying to sound breezy as if last night didn’t affect me. But as soon as my foot leaves the top step, Hendrix is right there behind me.

“Actually, I think we need to talk right now.”

Ignoring him, I head downstairs. I then begin to turn the lights on, grab the yoga mats, and start placing them out for everyone.

“Everly,” Hendrix says my name again, and I ignore him choosing to busy myself rather than face humiliation again where he is concerned. “Hey, would you look at me,” he says, grabbing my elbow.

“Please, Hendrix, I never want to speak about last night ever again. Scrub it from your mind because I have. It was a blip in the matrix, that wasn’t me. I wish I could blame it on the alcohol, but I can’t,” I plead with him.

Hendrix steps forward so we are touching, making me look up at him. “I never wanted to do anything more than let my fingers sink inside your cunt last night. Unfortunately, I won’t be answering any questions about Brodie, okay?” he states firmly before letting go of me and stepping away.

I have whiplash from the comment, and it takes me a couple of seconds to comprehend what he said. “Why won’t you talk about Brodie? Just because he’s gone doesn’t mean he should be forgotten.”

“You think I can forget what happened to Brodie,” he asks, his voice rising.

“Of course not, but it’s healthy to talk about him too,” I add.

“What don’t you get? I won’t talk about him. Aren’t you supposed to respect my boundaries? I won’t talk about him, okay?” Hendrix yells at me, his hands balling into fists.

“What’s going on down here?” Zeke asks, his eyes locking on one pissed-off rock star.

“Stay out of it,” Hendrix says, turning around and pointing his finger at his bandmate.

“I won’t stay out of it. Why are you yelling at E again? What’s your problem with her? She’s not our enemy, Hen,” he tries to explain to him.

“This doesn’t concern you, Zeke, please,” Hendrix tells him.

“It does when it’s affecting everyone. What the hell is your problem? Back in LA you’d been badgering Eli and I to get our shit together and now we are you are losing your mind and acting like an asshole toward Everly, who is just trying to do her fucking job,” Zeke states.

“What, play with crystals on the ground while singing kumbaya?” Hendrix spits, getting angry again.

“Are they fighting again?” Eli’s voice calls from upstairs, then footsteps start down the stairs.

“Why won’t any of you give me the space that I need,” Hendrix argues.

“How about this? I’ll give you all the space you need. Eli, Zeke, you two can take the class, you know what to do. I need some fresh air,” I say before turning around and storming back up the stairs.

I need a moment; there’s too much testosterone in this house.

Pushing through the front door, I stomp down the stairs and start walking out into the sunshine. How have these three men turned my life upside down so quickly? I don’t know if I’m cut out for these three; I feel like every step I’m taking is away from the good that I’m trying to do. I’m fucking up at every single turn; that’s not me. I suck in the fresh air as I continue to stomp through the dirt.

“Everly,” Hendrix calls out behind me.

“I’m asking you to respect my boundaries now, Hendrix,” I call, ignoring him.

“And I’m going to ignore them like you do with mine,” he yells back, which stops me in my tracks, and I whip around to stare at him.

I fold my arms in front of my chest. “You’re right, I do ignore them, and I can’t expect you to respect them when I don’t.”

Hendrix stills, then a smile falls on his face. “That’s not what I thought you were going to say.”

“I get it, I do. My enthusiasm for wanting to help the three of you get back to being an amazing band isn’t at the same level as y’all. I realize I might need to tone down my personality.”

“Knew it, you are a groupie. We’re your favorite band aren’t we?” he teases.

“I’m a Sons of Brooklyn kind of girl,” I bite back.

“Bullshit, I don’t believe you.”

I shrug as we both smile at each other genuinely before silence falls between us, and we realize we’ve somehow gotten along for two seconds without killing each other.

“You know, you shouldn’t have to change for anyone, especially not for us three,” he adds.

Thud goes my heart in my chest at his kind words.

“And about last night, it was the hardest thing to walk away from you, honestly, I’m still kicking myself but—”

I wave my hands in his direction. “Please, you don’t have to say anything. What I offered was highly inappropriate and I’m ashamed of myself for acting that way. I’m sorry, Hendrix.”

His face falls as he stares at me. “Why are you apologizing to me? I don’t deserve it.”

“You’re my client and I was taking advantage of you.”

“Everly, if you ever want to take advantage of my dick, tongue, mouth ever again, you can. But answering questions about Brodie, even you can’t get me to talk about that.”

I can see it on his face; a conversation about Brodie really is a no-go zone, and obviously, it’s a trigger for him so maybe that conversation should be left to a grief counselor. All I should be concentrating on is keeping them sober, and getting them to write the next album.

“Okay, I won’t ask again.”

Hendrix’s eyes widen at my response. “Guess we should go inside and do whatever the hell hippie shit it is you need me to do to become creative again,” he grumbles.

“You’re going to join us?” I ask, surprised.

“Nothing else is working so, why not? It can’t make things worse.”

HENDRIX

Everly surrounded my yoga mat with crystals, clear quartz, red jasper, and Pyrite to be precise; apparently, they are for creative success & abundance, enhancing bold new ideas and a positive energy boost. Look, I'll try anything if it means we can write again. I miss it. I miss the days when we would sit around and jam and create magic together, the four of us. It doesn't look like the three of us can make magic together and I'm starting to worry if that means it's all over for us. The Lost Boys will vanish into oblivion. It's been good, I guess.

Everly is taking us through a series of poses, and I'm not gonna lie, what the hell is this torture? My legs are going one way, my arms are straining, my back is going another way, and sweat is dripping off my face.

"Okay, guys, you did well. How do you all feel?" Everly asks as we finish up. Zeke and Eli go on and on about how good they feel.

How are they talking after this? It's like I've run a mile.

"Fantastic, as always, E. Felt the boost today, the energy is buzzing around me. I like it," Eli says excitedly.

How is he excited about doing this? I'm exhausted.

"It's the end of the session, and we did it and didn't complain. Remember your promise?" Zeke tells Everly.

What promise? What have I missed?

Everly groans. "Go on ask your question, just one."

Zeke's face breaks out in a huge smile. "It's an easy one, but one Eli and I need to know the answer to. Why haven't you had sex in so long?"

Wait a minute, why are they allowed to ask her questions like that? Also, how do they know this about her? Everly's face falls at his question and she shuffles uncomfortably. The anger I felt moments ago vanishes, and I want to tell my brothers not to be nosey regarding Everly's sex life, but I don't because I want to know too. I don't understand why someone as beautiful as her hasn't.

"That's your question? My sex life isn't that fascinating, boys," Everly says, giving us a chuckle, trying to hide her discomfort. "Guess I better ask a good question next."

"Whatever you want to know, we'll answer," Zeke responds.

"Fine, here goes," Everly says as she sucks in a deep breath, outwardly centering herself. She starts explaining how she met this older guy through her work and over the year they had been working together, they had slowly started to cross the line between each other. Her eyes flick to me for the briefest of moments before continuing with her story. She then explains that she saw him out one night when they were both out with friends and they ended up at the club together. The next thing they knew, they were on the dance floor, and one thing led to another, and she ended up dating this man for six months. She explains that she thought he was the one. She introduced him to her family and they were happy until one day, his wife walked in and found them together.

Oh.

Everly's voice breaks as she talks of that moment; she talks about how sick she still feels a year on that she was sleeping with a married man as that wasn't at all the type of girl she is. She talks about how hard it is to trust again because the guy was in her life so openly yet had a whole ass family back in Connecticut. That he cheated as easily as breathing. Then she explains how his wife had had enough of his

constant cheating and went to her boss and complained and she was fired.

Ah, now I understand her rules, why she keeps pushing me away. *Except last night, she was willing to step over them to get you to open up.* Why was her first question about Brodie? Anything else and I would have had my mouth on her cunt, and we both wouldn't be suffering.

"That's fucked up, E," Eli mumbles.

"I'm sorry, E," Zeke adds.

"It is what it is. A lesson learned," she says, her eyes briefly meeting mine before returning to my brothers.

"And you haven't been with anyone since that douche?" I ask, the words out of my mouth before I can stop them.

Her eyes widen in surprise before she shakes her head.

"So, no finger banging or oral? What about kissing?" Zeke asks.

Everly stills. "I've kissed someone, but it was a mistake."

She won't even look at me when she says it. A mistake. She thinks our kisses were a mistake.

"How many people have you kissed since?" My question comes out through gritted teeth.

"Hey, we're the ones asking the questions this morning, Hen," Eli adds.

"And they are only allowed one question per session," Everly states.

My fingers ball into fists beside me. How many people has she kissed before me? Were they all mistakes or was it just me?

"Now I guess it's my question to you two?" she says, looking between Eli and Zeke.

"Shoot, Everly, we got you," Eli says.

"How did you two know you were bisexual?" she asks.

“That’s an easy one, E. The four of us met when we were fifteen, when we were all placed in the same foster home. Zeke and I were sharing a room, and Brodie and Hen were too.”

Everly looks over to me at the mention of Brodie’s name; she notices the tension icing my body and her brows pull together as if silently asking me if I am okay with them talking about the one subject she knows I don’t want to talk about. I give her the tiniest of nods to let her know I’m okay.

“I found him jerking off to porn when he was sick from school, and I asked him what he was watching, and he told me reluctantly that it was MMF stuff. I told him I jerked off to the same stuff and that’s how we started talking about what we were into,” Zeke explains.

“It wasn’t until we were sixteen and we were sharing a girl who dared us to kiss that things heated up between us. It was the first night we both experienced each other,” Eli states.

“And we haven’t stopped,” Zeke adds.

Wow, even I didn’t know that story. I had no idea that was how it happened. It wasn’t really until we were famous that I found out about the two of them fucking each other too.

“Do you always share?” Everly asks.

Eli’s hand comes up and he waggles his finger at her. “One question, that’s the rule.”

“I answered a follow-up question though,” Everly adds.

Eli and Zeke still as they go back and think about our conversation.

“She did,” I say.

Everly gives me a small smile.

“Fine, she did. Yes, we always share,” Eli answers.

“It doesn’t feel right anymore not sharing,” Zeke adds.

“Oh. What happens when you want to get married?” Everly asks.

Eli frowns and Zeke shrugs. “That was a sneaky question, E,” Zeke adds, which has her smiling.

“Fine, we will continue this tomorrow then,” she states, standing up and shaking herself off. “Breakfast is ready upstairs, go help yourselves. I’ll clean up down here.”

“We can help,” Eli says.

“I’ll help. I’m not hungry,” I add, butting in.

Eli and Zeke stare at me as if I’ve sprouted another head before looking over at Everly. She gives them a small gesture and they both smile and rush upstairs, obviously hungry for breakfast.

“What do you want?” Everly asks as she folds her arms over her chest, pushing up her boobs in the sports bra she’s wearing, and all I want to do is bury my face in those two pillows.

“I want to know how many men you’ve kissed in the year?”

Everly stills before turning on her heel and moving over to her yoga mat where she starts spraying it down with antiseptic before rolling it up. “I’m not answering that question,” she grumbles.

“Why? Because you don’t want to tell me that I was the mistake.”

Everly stands up. “What do you want me to say, Hendrix? You heard my story.”

“It wasn’t a mistake to me.”

Everly gasps at my admission before I see her shutting down and the barriers going up again. “This conversation needs to stop. Go have breakfast. You must be hungry after your first session,” she says, changing the subject.

“I’m hungry but not for breakfast,” I tell her.

“Stop,” she states angrily. “Please, stop.”

I still at her request.

“This can’t happen,” she says, waving her hand between us.

“If we weren’t working together, would it happen?” I question her.

“That’s not the case, so it doesn’t matter.”

“It matters to me,” I tell her.

“No, it matters to your ego, that’s all. You’re like every other man needing to know that someone thinks you’re hot to feed your insatiable ego,” she says, shaking her head as she goes back to rolling up her mat.

“You think I’m hot?”

Everly sighs. “Of course that is what you’re concentrating on. All the little girlies on the internet think so.”

“I don’t care about them, Everly,” I growl as I step closer to her, making her drop her curled-up mat with a thud as I walk her backward toward the wall. “I need to know what you think, that’s all I care about.”

Her back hits the wall, and she looks around trying to find the easiest escape route—not again, we need to talk.

“I think nothing,” she bites back.

“Really, I don’t affect you in the slightest?” I ask as my hand hits the wall behind her, and I lean in real close. She swallows and the closer I get to her, I can see her pulse thumping rapidly against her skin, so I lean in and kiss it. Everly gasps as my lips touch her skin ever so gently; then I trace my tongue across the thumping beat.

“Hendrix,” her voice is barely a whisper; I can’t tell if she is urging me on or asking me to stop, so I continue exploring her neck with my tongue and lips, enjoying her saltiness. Her hands reach out and grab my hair, pulling me from her neck; the slight pain has my dick hard. So, I press it against her thin activewear so she knows exactly how hard I am for her. “Hendrix, please,” she says my name with a whimper. Does she want more from me or not?

“Give me one kiss, Everly. Let me show you how much of a mistake I can be,” I growl.

Her chest heaves, bringing her breasts into my line of sight; her fingers tighten in my hair, pulling a moan from my lips.

“I ... um ... I ...” She stumbles over her words as her eyes fall half-lidded with lust.

She wants me, I want her, and yes, I know I’m being an ass pushing whatever attraction we have for each other, especially after her confession earlier, but I’m not a good guy and all I can think about is kissing her again. To make her realize I’m not a mistake, that this pull we have isn’t a mistake, but there is no happily ever after, after all this. I’m not a relationship kind of guy. I lean in closer, our breaths mingling until our lips are almost touching like magnets being pulled closer together.

“Fuck it,” she mumbles against my lips and pulls me to her. She opens her mouth and lets me in, and for the first time, my tongue can explore the forbidden land; her fingers continue to grip my hair painfully, but it fucking feels good. Especially when I press my hardness against her, feeling every curve and swell of her body against it. My hand reaches out and lifts one of her legs up so I can press myself closer to her center, and when it hits its target, the moan it pulls from her mouth could have me coming in seconds if I’m not careful. Seconds later, she is pulling me from her lips.

“If you are about to tell me this is wrong, we shouldn’t be doing this, then I’m going to bend you over that bench and spank your peachy ass till it’s pink. Do you fucking hear me, Everly?” I growl at her.

She bites her swollen bottom lip, her green eyes are glassy with lust, her cheeks are flushed, she has no makeup on, and she looks breathtaking. Her hands drop from my hair, then I let them roam over my arms, her fingers tracing the intricate markings on my skin, leaving goosebumps in their wake. Her hands move down my shirt, over my abs until they disappear under the hem of my tee. I hiss as her hands run over my bare skin; my eyes shut and a groan falls from my lips as her nails

drag painfully slowly over each ab until her fingers slide along the edge of my basketball shorts. Mentally, I'm urging her fingers further because if she slides them beneath my shorts, she will find there is nothing between my dick and her hand. She then slides her hand over the top of my shorts, along my painfully hard cock, and raises a brow at me.

"Guess I know where all that ego comes from." She grins as she grips my dick in her palm.

"Fuck," I curse at the feeling of her touching me.

"You've pushed me so far over the line, Hendrix," she states as her brows pull together.

"I know, I have," I tell her as my eyes slide over her face and land back on her lips. "Give us five more minutes of not being in the real world because being here feels so good, and I don't want to go back to reality yet."

Everly lets out a long sigh and nods in agreement. Thank the fuck. I reach out and pull down her sports bra making her breast pop out, then lean forward and capture her dusty pink nipple in my mouth.

"Hendrix," she groans as my tongue circles her taut nipple, sucking its hardened tip into my mouth. Her hand slides up and down my shaft and my vision starts to blur. It feels good, so fucking good. How can she ever deny whatever this is between us? I've never wanted a woman as much as I want Everly in this moment: I can't think of anything else other than sinking my dick into her cunt.

"Everly," Eli calls out and we both still.

She instantly pushes me away from her and pulls up her top as reality bursts our bubble.

Fucking Eli.

"You want a coffee?"

Everly blinks a couple of times trying to clear the lust from her mind before she answers. "Sure, I have to have a shower first," she calls back; her voice has a little wobble but not

enough for Eli to notice or suspect anything is happening down here ... I hope.

“This ... um ... it can't happen again,” she tells me.

I reach out and grab her, pulling her to me, and my lips crash back down on hers.

“It will happen again. Come to my room tonight, please.”

She shakes her head. “I can't sleep with you.”

“There's so many things we can do without my dick being inside of you,” I tell her. This has her nibbling her bottom lip. “Please, one night.”

“I ... I can't,” she says, looking up at me, her eyes glassy.

“I understand,” I say, stepping back and giving her space.

And with that, she disappears upstairs while I wait for my dick to stop missing Everly.

HENDRIX

It took a long time for Everly to come back down after getting showered and dressed. She refused to make eye contact with me during breakfast, annoying the hell out of me, especially when she easily conversed with Zeke and Eli, swapping jokes and laughs as if they have known each other for years. I helped her with the cleaning up, and every chance I got, I touched her, gentle touches with my hands, my shoulder sliding against her, pretending to get lint from her hair, enough that it had my dick twitching and her cheeks flushing; I still affect her which is good.

“Okay, today I have something planned for y’all, so follow me,” Everly says brightly, and we walk down the hallway toward a closed door. “This was my father’s meeting room I guess you would call it. And today it’s going to be your writing studio,” she states excitedly.

The three of us look at each other and the dread starts to sink into my stomach as we look around the room at all our instruments.

“Not sure if we are ready for that,” I tell her.

“And that’s okay, but you’re going to have to sit in this room for the next four hours so you can either play music, write, or do a Sudoku. I don’t care, but the three of you are going to do it together.”

I look over at my brothers who seem surprised, but don’t object to the idea.

“What do we have to gain from sitting in that room for four hours together?” I ask her.

She shrugs at my question. “Not sure, but I guess we will find out in four hours.”

What the hell? I can’t be locked in a room with these two; they will drive me insane.

“What happens if we need snacks?” Eli asks.

“Pop your head out and let me know, but you can’t step foot outside that room until your time is up,” she says before shutting the door.

“Things just got interesting, boys.” Zeke chuckles as he walks over to his guitar, picks it up, and strums it before putting it down again.

There’s a large pane of glass that shows off the mountains and the lake, and the forest and plains as far as the eye can see.

“She’s a ballbuster, so maybe we should try,” Eli adds.

“I can’t,” I say, tensing up. The boys look at me and nod and don’t push me.

“That’s okay, we can sit here and see what happens,” Eli suggests.

We all take a seat in oversized armchairs and just sit in silence awkwardly for a long time, until eventually, someone breaks.

“You haven’t drunk anything since that night, have you, Hen?” Zeke asks.

I still at his question. “No,” I answer defensively.

“It feels weird not having a drink but also I don’t miss it either,” he adds.

Eli nods in agreement.

“I’m glad you’ve come around to the program compared to the first day,” Zeke states.

“And it’s nice that you’re being nice to E. She really is trying to help us,” Eli adds.

A frown forms on my face at Eli mentioning Everly, but I try to hide it.

“She’s nothing like Alice,” Eli continues.

“Yeah, she wants nothing to do with us,” Zeke chuckles.

That’s not one hundred percent true, but I don’t say anything. My boys don’t need to know what’s happened between the two of us, yet.

“Such a shame really because that woman is hot, wouldn’t you agree, Hen?” Zeke asks.

I shrug my shoulders, not answering.

“You can’t even agree she’s hot because you’re still upset over her leaving you in the woods,” Zeke teases.

Of course, I’m upset. They have no idea what it meant to me being stuck out there like that.

“He’s upset that Everly isn’t interested in him when he can’t seem to keep his eyes off her,” Eli jokes.

“What did you say?” I turn around and glare at my friend.

“I said you have a thing for Everly, and she isn’t interested,” Eli continues, teasing me.

“How do you know she’s not interested?” I question him.

“Um, for the fact that the two of you seem to be at each other’s throats every second,” he adds.

“Could be foreplay,” Zeke states.

“This is true. Is it foreplay, Hen?” Eli asks.

“None of your business,” I add, getting up off my chair and walking over to my guitar; I stare at the instrument that was attached to me for so many years.

“That’s a yes,” Eli says, and they both burst out laughing.

I whirl around and glare at my friends. “The chick is hot, so what?”

“You wanna bang her?” Zeke questions.

“Do you?” I question right back.

“Hell, yeah I do, but I respect the boundaries she’s set in place. Plus, she’s not interested in me or Eli. Not so sure about you though,” Zeke says, raising a brow at me.

“No, there’s no way she’s interested in him over the two of us.” Eli moans.

“What’s wrong with me?” I ask him.

“You’ve been a surly bastard to her since you got here,” Eli states.

“Maybe she likes that,” I say.

“Ha, knew it, you have a thing for her,” Zeke says, pointing to me.

“What? No I don’t.”

His eyes narrow on me. “You do, but you’re not willing to say. We used to tell each other everything, every thought, every feeling. The four of us were all connected. What happened?” Zeke asks.

“One of us broke the connection,” I tell him quietly.

Silence falls around the room, and it stays like that for a long time.

“Do you think we can do this without Brodie?” Eli asks the room.

I don’t know, but I can’t do this right now.

“We haven’t really tried, so who knows,” Zeke adds.

I shake my head. “I can’t,” I tell them bluntly.

“You can’t write or do this without Brodie?” Zeke asks quietly.

“Both,” I say as a tangle of emotion starts to grip my throat. I feel hot and sweaty. My hands are starting to shake.

“You’re saying that you’ll never write again?” Eli asks.

“I ... don’t ... know,” I answer.

“Brodie was fucking your girlfriend. The woman you were in love with just because he could. That night we thought

finally you would stand up for yourself against him and tell him to fuck off,” Eli says.

I stare at my brothers. Eli looks angry, and Zeke is nodding in agreement.

“Brodie was a bully, especially to you,” Zeke adds.

“What are you saying?” I question them both.

Zeke and Eli look at each other and have a silent conversation. “Brodie always seemed jealous of you, like he wanted to be you. He loved the fact that you relied on him so much. That you couldn’t make a decision without speaking to him first about a lyric, a note, or a girl. We always thought that he tried to control you and we assumed that’s what you liked,” Zeke explains.

What the hell are they talking about? Brodie never controlled me. We were friends, brothers, we chose to be each other’s family. We stuck together to survive; we needed to in that place.

“Brodie never controlled me,” I blurt out.

Zeke and Eli look at me but stay silent.

“He was our brother,” I argue.

“Every girl in high school you either kissed, fucked, or had a crush on he went after, every single one of them. He wasn’t interested in girls that you weren’t interested in,” Zeke adds.

My stomach drops. I suspected but never understood, but I also never cared about those girls. They were not the loves of my life, except Ashley got close.

“I don’t want to talk about him, okay,” I yell at my brothers.

“Oh no, we’re talking about it, Hen. You have been riding our asses about Brodie for months, and now that you’re here, you don’t want to talk about him. No, we are talking about him,” Zeke yells at me angrily.

“Fuck you,” I scream at him.

“No, fuck you, Hen. We’re going to deal with this today. We loved Brodie, he was our brother, but he also did fucked-up shit to us all,” Zeke tells me.

I shake my head. I’m not listening to this.

“We are living our dream, Hen, and I for one am not going to let anyone past or present stop us from living it,” Zeke declares.

“Brodie had his demons, Hen. We were never going to save him,” Eli adds quietly.

“You don’t understand. I’m the reason he’s dead,” I say, thumping my chest.

“No, you aren’t. Brodie got caught fucking your girlfriend and he couldn’t deal with the consequences of his actions and did what he always did, run,” Zeke yells at me.

Tears are beginning to well in my eyes as the truth starts to bubble to the surface. “You don’t understand, I killed him. He would be here today if it wasn’t for me.”

“Did you give him the drinks and drugs that night? Did you make him get on his bike?” Zeke questions me.

I shake my head. “But I made him leave, I broke his heart.”

“No, you stood up for yourself. He was fucking your girlfriend. It was okay for you to get angry at him for that,” Eli adds.

I shake my head again; they don’t understand.

“Your entire relationship he was fucking Ashley,” Zeke explains.

“Why the hell did you never tell me then?” I yell.

“He promised it was a one-time thing, then I guess they took it underground,” Zeke tells me.

“He’s still our brother,” I yell.

“Who treated us all like shit. Being sober has made things clearer. My mind has been traveling back over our time

together during yoga, and as much as I loved Brodie, he did fucked-up shit to us all,” Eli states.

“But he’s dead and we’re not,” I say.

“And that’s no one’s fault but his own,” Eli responds.

“It was mine though. I killed him, he confessed on the beach that night he was in love with me. He did all of this for me. Said that no one could love me like he could and then he tried to kiss me. I told him I wasn’t interested in him like that, that he was my brother.”

The room falls silent as Zeke and Eli look at each other, stunned.

“I rejected him. Just like everyone else in his life and he couldn’t handle it. I tried to stop him, but he wouldn’t listen. It’s my fault, he’s dead. I killed him,” I scream at them.

“Fuck, Hen, you’ve been holding this in all this time?” Eli asks.

Everything feels raw; I can’t do this. I can feel the walls closing in around me, my chest is becoming tighter, I can’t look at my brothers.

“I can’t do this anymore,” I yell at them, and the next thing I know, my legs have taken off and I am rushing toward the door. My hand is on the knob and thankfully, Everly never locked the door, otherwise I would have kicked the fucking thing down. I pull it open and rush into the hallway with Eli and Zeke hot on my heels. I see Everly sitting in the living room on her computer. She looks up at the commotion and she must see the panic on my face as she is starting to get up. No. She can’t see me like this. She’s not meant to see me broken like I am. I go around the corner and down the stairs as fast as my legs can take me.

“Hendrix,” Zeke calls out, but I ignore them all.

And I run and run and run.

EVERLY

“**W**hat the hell is going on?” I ask the boys as we watch Hendrix hightail it into the forest.

“Fuck,” Zeke screams as he runs his hand through his hair.

“We have to go after him,” Eli says.

“Can I help?” I ask.

“No,” they both say sharply, taking me aback.

“You’re the last person Hen needs to see at the moment, no offense,” Eli adds.

I nod in understanding and watch as the two of them rush off after their wounded best friend. I feel helpless just standing here watching them run out there, but they know what is best for Hendrix. Something bad must have happened in that room between the three of them, and if they believe I will make things worse, then I’ll let them be the ones to take the lead on this. I thought when I locked them in the room and they saw their instruments, they would just start jamming; I wasn’t thinking it would lead to something like this.

As the minutes and then an hour tick by and there’s still no sign of Hendrix, my anxiety kicks in and I need to keep busy. I go and get lunch ready for the boys; they will be hungry once they return.

As the second hour rolls around and there’s still no sign of them, I’m really starting to get worried. They don’t know the lay of the land like I do; there isn’t anywhere they could hurt themselves, but still, it’s a vast area of wilderness, and as

much as I joked that there isn't anything in there that could harm them, I was lying.

Rushing outside to start my search, I see two figures on the horizon coming back. Oh no, it should be three. I rush back upstairs and grab them a couple of bottles of water knowing they must be thirsty. Zeke and Eli come back with sunken shoulders, faces hot from the exertion and the sun.

"Did you not find him?" I ask as I hand them the bottles of water. They both throw them back quickly.

"Yeah, we did, but he needs some time. He said he will be back soon," Zeke explains. Oh, thank goodness.

"Come in, you guys must be exhausted and hungry, I have food," I tell them.

They both nod as if the thought of talking is too much for them. They follow me inside but both head for the sofa in the living room and sit down.

"What do you need?" I ask them.

Eli looks up at me, his face sad, those bright, playful eyes filled with worry and exhaustion. "Don't want to sound creepy, but do you mind sitting between us so we can cuddle? It's just like ... something we need to soothe us, nothing more."

Oh. That's random, but if comfort is what they need at this time, then I'll do it; it's the least I can do. I walk over and sit between the two of them awkwardly. I'm not sure what to do with my arms, but the next thing I know, Eli is pulling my legs over his, and Zeke is lifting my upper body and placing me on his lap.

"It's hard to explain, E, but being a three relaxes us," Zeke explains as he wraps his arms around me, then Eli reaches out and entwines his fingers with mine. I notice neither one is getting hard over this which is reassuring.

"Is Hendrix going to be okay?" I ask.

The boys look at one another, and I can see they are debating whether they should tell me what happened until Eli

sighs. He looks at me grief-stricken and shakes his head. “I don’t know, E. Hendrix believes he killed Brodie.”

I still, listening to his words. Oh no, that is devastating.

“You see, Brodie was fucking Hendrix’s girlfriend for years behind his back,” Zeke tells me.

Brodie was doing what? Is that why he broke up with that model? I remember something about it, but I thought it was because she couldn’t deal with the traveling and groupies being around Hendrix all the time, not that she was messing around with his best friend. Wow.

“She wasn’t the only one Brodie has messed around with,” Eli adds.

No wonder he has trust issues when it comes to women.

“And that night he found the two of them screwing was the same night that we found out that our foster father had been released from jail. The one we all testified against, the one that ...” Zeke stops and tries to compose himself, but he’s unable to.

“The one that beat us and let his friends do whatever they wanted to us when they were drunk,” Eli adds.

Oh shit.

That is messed up. I want to give them both a hug but it’s hard in this position.

“Can you let me up for a moment,” I tell them. The two of them still and slowly let go of me; I can see on their faces they’re worried what they have told me is causing me to leave them, probably like so many other people. “I want to be able to hug you both as we talk, and I can’t do it in that position.”

Their eyes widen in surprise at my comment, then Eli stands, Zeke lies down on the sofa, and he is reaching for me. I lie down, snuggled in tightly against him, and then Eli lays down behind me and I’m in a rock star sandwich.

“That’s better,” Eli says, and they both curl themselves around me.

This must be what it's like to be with the two of them; nothing but pulsating masculine energy is swirling around me. I feel safe and secure between these two men, but I think if they were doing anything more than cuddling it would be too much. I couldn't handle two men like this.

I reach out and cup Zeke's face. "I'm sorry you all had to go through that." I try to turn but I can't see Eli. So, I roll until I have my back against the sofa, that way, I can see them both.

"Not everyone's start in life is great, but our childhood doesn't define us," Eli states.

This is so true, and I'm glad the boys are thinking like that.

"Did Brodie and Hendrix have a fight?" I ask, wondering why he would think he is the reason Brodie is dead, when his friend was shacking up with his girlfriend. Did it lead to a brawl? Were things said that couldn't be unsaid in the heat of the moment?

Zeke and Eli look at each other, silently conversing whether they should tell me what happened.

"We found out today what really happened," Zeke adds.

Oh. They both didn't know.

"When Hendrix caught Brodie and Ashley together, Brodie ran, that's not uncommon for him to do. I remember Brodie running to the beach and Hendrix following him," Eli explains.

"It was what was said at the beach that changed our lives, but it's not Hendrix's fault, none of this is," Zeke adds, his eyes starting to well up.

"Hendrix told us that Brodie confessed that he was in love with him that night. That he slept with Ashley because she wasn't good enough for him. It explains why he always messed around with Hendrix's girls, Ashley was most certainly not the first," Eli tells me.

My heart breaks open for him. For that was the conversation you had with your best friend, your brother, and

then the night took a turn for the worse. No wonder the three of them have been burying themselves in the booze and drugs.

“Hendrix is straight. He isn’t fluid, unlike us,” Zeke adds.

“I can only imagine how confusing it would have been for Hendrix in that moment hearing that from Brodie, especially as none of us had any idea that he was gay or bisexual,” Eli snuffles.

“Knowing how Brodie felt about him and he didn’t feel the same way would have been devastating for Brodie. Hendrix loved Brodie, he loved all of us, we were family, we are family and he wanted nothing to break that apart. That’s why he always forgave Brodie for all the shit he did to him and us. Hendrix never wanted the four of us to be apart. He was the glue holding us all together,” Zeke tells me as the tears start to flow down his cheeks.

I reach out and swipe them away.

“We can’t lose him, E, we have to save him. You need to save him,” Eli states as he, too, has tears streaming down his face.

I do the same, swiping the tears from his cheek.

“I’ll try my best,” I tell them both and they nod and break down beside me. I reach out and pull them both in for a hug until we eventually fall asleep, emotionally exhausted.

EVERLY

“Un-fucking-believable,” an angry voice pulls us from our sleep.

Zeke and Eli groan beside me as we all sit up on the sofa and look over at a pissed-off Hendrix who has walked in looking like shit.

“Hendrix, it’s not what you think,” I say, trying to disentangle myself from his two friends. This doesn’t look good, not good at all.

“You’re back,” Eli says, relief evident in his tone as he gets up off the sofa.

“I thought you were different?” Hendrix asks me as those blue eyes glare at me, hurt rolling across them like a stormy sea.

Eli turns and looks at me.

“And you two”—Hendrix points at his brothers—“you’re as bad as Brodie.”

“Hey, what the hell, man?” Zeke calls out, now getting up off the sofa.

“You told me there was nothing going on with them. Were you messing around with all of us this entire time?” Hendrix yells at me.

I’m taken aback by the venom in his voice. I get that what he walked in on may not have looked great, and I understand why he’s angry, especially after what the boys have explained

about his past, but I thought I had explained myself enough that he wouldn't think I was like that.

"You and Hendrix have been messing around?" Eli turns and questions me.

"Not like that ... it's more complicated," I try to explain as hurt slides across Eli's face.

"Fuck you all," Hendrix spits and grabs the keys to my truck from the sideboard and bounds down the stairs.

"You've been hooking up with Hen?" Zeke asks.

"No, it's not like that," I say as panic rises in my chest.

"What the hell is it like?" Eli asks angrily.

I'm flustered, my anxiety is through the roof, and I'm freaking out that they know, that I'm about to lose my job. My reputation is going to be dragged through the mud. I'm upset that I've let Vanessa and Christian down. Charlie is going to be upset with me, too, because he's friends with them all, as is Jackson. I've let everyone down.

"I don't have time to explain. Hen took the keys to my truck," I yell at them.

"He thinks we've betrayed him. What the hell, Everly?" Zeke yells at me.

I shake my head. "Nothing's happened other than a kiss or two."

"A kiss? Hendrix is upset over a kiss?" Eli asks.

"See, it's nothing," I try to explain. "I met him at Vanessa and Christian's and things didn't go so well, and we argued. I flipped him over for being a dick, calling me a groupie, and next thing I know he's kissing me."

Zeke and Eli stare at me.

"You're the groupie?" Eli asks.

"I'm not a groupie. I know it doesn't look like it but I'm not, I promise. I had no intention of doing anything with anyone, but Hendrix keeps kissing me," I yell at them.

Why are they smiling?

“This makes perfect sense now.” Zeke laughs.

I don’t understand what’s so fucking funny.

“He told us about that night, not specifically you, but he met some chick that he thought was a groupie, but wasn’t and you handed him his ass, and he wanted to find you again. Fuck, this is too funny.” Eli bends over and holds his stomach.

“This isn’t fucking funny,” I tell them.

“No wonder he freaked out when he arrived, seeing you there when we left the plane, this all makes fucking sense,” Zeke roars, laughing.

None of this is funny.

“Would you both stop mucking around? We have to find him.”

“She’s right. He’s going to be pissed over what he saw, and he’s drawing his own conclusions right now,” Eli adds.

“Fuck, he’s going to think we’re just like Brodie, and he’s not in the right headspace for that,” Zeke states.

This is what I was trying to say, but they were too focused on what was happening between Hendrix and me. “There’s another truck, not sure if it runs, but you can grab that. The keys for the other car are in my father’s office, and I’ll go get my horse, he can’t have gone far,” I yell over my shoulder as I rush out of the living room and into my father’s office, grabbing the keys from his drawer and rush back out again, throwing them to one of the boys. Then I hightail it downstairs and run as fast as my legs can carry me toward the barn.

Shit, the horses are out in the paddock. *Please, Hendrix, don’t do anything stupid.* I whistle and call for Peaches. It takes a couple of calls before she is heading over to me.

“Hey, baby, I need your help,” I tell her, rubbing her nose. “I need to find a pissed-off rock star. You think you can do that for me?” She gives me a head nod. “Okay, let’s get you all saddled up.” I lead her into the barn and get her ready. It doesn’t take me long before she’s saddled up and I jump up

onto her back, heading out into the paddock. I head to the furthest gate before jumping off, taking her through, and relocking it again. Once the paddock is secured, I hightail it into the wilderness, hoping to hear my truck echoing down the valley.

The light is fading fast, making the land more dangerous; luckily, I grabbed a torch from the barn before leaving to help, just in case. I ride for what seems to be hours until the last orange speck of sun has slipped behind the horizon and the stars have come out.

“Hendrix,” I call out as a tear falls down my cheek. Where the hell is he? Nature’s nighttime sounds start to swirl around me, and I hate that every sound in the forest sets my anxiety off. “Hendrix, please, where are you?” I scream into the darkness, hoping, praying I will hear his gravelly voice somewhere. I didn’t mean to hurt him today, I was trying to comfort his friends and I guess I let our familiarity take over and stopped being professional. Maybe this job isn’t for me; I’m getting too emotionally invested in my clients.

The torchlight scans the darkness until I see broken trees. As I move toward them, I notice my truck, stuck against a tree. Shit.

“Hendrix,” I scream, panic gripping my body, and I kick Peaches to hurry over to where my truck is. “Hendrix, where are you?” I scream again as I reach the truck. A mumble comes from the distance, but I don’t know where. I dismount from Peaches and tie her up to a tree. Once she is secure, I scan all around the darkness with my torch.

“Hendrix, please where are you?” Another mumble is heard, and I try to pinpoint where it is, whipping my torch around. “Hendrix, I’m here. We need to get you home.” His words are muffled, and I zero in on his location, and that’s when I see him curled up beside a tree.

Relief fills me as I rush over to him. “Thank God, I found you,” I say as I reach him. As soon as I’m beside him, he launches himself at me, holding me tightly, and I can feel his heart beat almost out of his chest. He must have been scared.

“Thank you,” he whispers.

His whispered words of thanks have me breaking down. “I’m so sorry, I never meant to hurt you. Nothing happened. I was comforting them and fell asleep. I don’t want them,” I babble to him as I hug him tightly.

He stills at my words and so do I, then he starts to pull away from me. “I don’t like the forest at night,” he states.

“No one does.”

“But you left me,” he tells me.

No I didn’t, he ran away from us.

“Did you hit your head?” I ask, trying to shine the torch onto his forehead.

“You left me that first day, Everly,” he tells me.

“I did and I apologized for that,” I say.

He shakes his head. “I know, but that day made me remember things, and now I feel broken. They were supposed to stay buried inside of me, never to see the light of day. I hate you for making me remember,” he tells me, his voice breaking with emotion.

Tears stream down my cheeks. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know.”

“You made me weak. I don’t like feeling weak,” he confesses.

I don’t understand what I’ve done, but I’ve hurt him, and I need to make it better.

“I don’t think you’re weak,” I tell him.

“Bullshit, you wouldn’t be trying to fix me if you didn’t think so,” he says angrily, which surprises me.

“I’m not trying to fix you. I like you the way you are.”

He shakes his head at my comment. “You’re using me, just like all the other women before you, just like Brodie.”

I’m not like that. He needs to know that I’m not like all those other women who fucked him while fucking his friends, no matter what it looked like on the sofa this afternoon. I reach

out, grab his face, and get right into his personal space. “I’d never use you, Hendrix. I know what it’s like to be used. And I would never do that to someone else.” His bright blue eyes widen as he takes in my words, and then a single tear falls down his cheek and seeing this man in front of me break, breaks my heart. I lean forward and kiss the tear that is running down his cheek.

He reaches out and stops me. “Don’t, please don’t. I’m too broken for your sunshine.”

I hiccup on my emotions upon hearing his words. “Let me help you.”

He shakes his head. “I’m fucked up, Everly. I can’t taint you with my darkness.”

“I’m stronger than you think,” I tell him.

“I wished I had met you when I was whole again, not while a work in progress,” he confesses.

“Maybe you were supposed to meet me now so that we can work through it together,” I say as I cup his face, letting my thumb run along the prickles of his five o’clock shadow. He reaches out and grabs my hand by the wrist, turns it around, and kisses my knuckles.

“Life is cruel, they’ve sent an angel to me while I’m still consumed by demons,” he tells me.

“I’m not perfect, Hendrix. Please don’t make me out to be,” I tell him.

He then reaches out and grabs my face this time. “You’re fucking perfect to me.”

Tears fall down my cheeks at his words.

“Fuck, Everly,” he curses as he presses his forehead to mine. “Do you have any idea what you’re doing to me?”

“The same thing you are doing to me. I can’t keep away from you, Hendrix. It’s like this gravitational pull that keeps putting me back into your orbit,” I confess to him.

“I’m no good for you.”

“Maybe you’re not, and yet here I am. And it’s the only place I want to be,” I tell him.

“I hate the fucking forest, Everly, I hate it, yet I can tolerate it because your sunshine keeps the monsters at bay,” he says, picking me up and pulling me to him to straddle his lap.

Hearing those words, my heart aches for him as my hand grips onto his shoulders.

“I’m here for you, whatever you need,” I tell him.

“You have no idea how much I need from you, Everly.”

“Tell me,” I ask.

“Everly,” my name comes out in a strangled moan as I feel him stiffen underneath me.

“Fine, I’ll tell you. I’ve been thinking about what it would be like to have those thick fingers sliding in and out of me, watching the tattoos on your fingers disappear inside of me.”

“Fuck, E, fuck. You can’t say those things to me,” he groans.

“That’s what I was thinking about in the hot tub when you interrupted me,” I confess to him.

“Fucking hell, had I’d known ...” He doesn’t finish those words.

“But you know now,” I tell him.

“Everly,” he says my name as a curse.

“Do it,” I dare him. And the next thing I know, he is slipping his hand down my leggings and those thick fingers are sliding between my folds.

“You’re already so fucking wet for me,” he growls as he slicks up his fingers and plunges them deep inside me. My nails dig into his shoulders and my head rolls back as I feel his fingers stretch me wide. “You feel so fucking tight,” he mumbles against my neck as his tongue slides along my pulse. “This cunt is fucking strangling my fingers, you greedy girl,” he curses as he curls them deep within me, caressing the

delicate nerve endings inside me. “This is fucking mine,” he tells me as his teeth sink into my shoulder and he bites down, marking me.

A heady moan falls from my lips as his fingers continue to work me over, the sharp pain of his bite making me wetter.

“You liked that didn’t you? You filthy little thing. A bit of pain with your pleasure. Fuck, E, you were made for me,” he groans.

My hands itch to explore as I feel his cock thicken against me, but when I try to touch him, he stops me. “No, I just need you to come, that’s all I want tonight.”

“Please,” I beg.

“Don’t worry, this isn’t over, not now that I know how tight your cunt is and how wet it gets for me. Next time I want to take my time with you, but tonight we just need some tension relief.”

How can I argue with that?

“Now, fucking come on my fingers so that I can taste your sweetness and have the memory of this moment in my mind instead of others,” he tells me.

If this is what he needs in this moment, then I can’t deny him.

“Do it, make me scream,” I tell him.

“Fuck yes,” he curses as his fingers begin to move feverishly inside of me, his skilled thumb sliding over my aching clit, all the while his tongue is tracing the path along my pulse as he heats me up from the inside. It’s not going to take me long because honestly, no one has finger fucked me before like this. It’s never felt so good. My nails dig harder into his shoulders as I feel myself hurtling toward the edge. “Give it to me, Everly. Come all over my hand so I can taste you.”

And I do. I throw my head back and scream into the forest, spooking a couple of birds that take off into the darkness. Hendrix continues to work me through my orgasm, and once

I've come back down, he pulls his hand from my pants, and I watch as he slides those tattooed fingers into his mouth and sucks me off them. Hottest thing ever.

“You taste as good as I imagined.”

I bite my bottom lip as heat pools in my body. Leaning forward, I kiss Hendrix, surprising him, but as soon as my lips meet his, it turns frantic. I can taste myself on his tongue, turning me on, and I feel like I could go another round. I wrap my arms around him, and he does the same; it's the first time we have freely kissed each other, and we do it with abandonment.

Then the sound of a car crashing through the wilderness echoes around the valley, followed by bright lights. I scramble out of Hendrix's lap and jump up dusting myself off. He does the same.

“Everly,” he calls out my name.

“It's all good. Go reassure your brothers that you're okay, they have been worried about you,” I tell him as I head over to Peaches.

“Come to my room tonight, please. We need to talk.”

I nod as the car stops right in front of us.

“Thank the fuck, Hen, you're alive,” Eli yells as he jumps out of the truck and wraps his arms around him.

Zeke puts the truck in park and rushes out too. “We thought you were dead,” the big Viking states, hiccupping on his tears as they both hug Hendrix tightly.

“Never run away again,” Eli says.

“We can't lose you too,” Zeke states.

Their words bring tears to my eyes as I untie Peaches and mount her. “You boys okay getting back to the house, or do you need me to escort you back?”

“Um, I think we're good. We kind of made a destructive path on the way here, we should find our way back,” Eli tells me.

I give them all a nod, click my heels, and Peaches hightails
it toward home as I let the wind brush away my tears.

HENDRIX

I watch as Everly rides away into the darkness, and I hope she decides to come to my room tonight as we need to talk about what happened between us in the forest.

“Everything okay between you and E?” Zeke asks, noticing me watching her leave.

I choose not to answer because I don’t know what to say.

“You believe us when we say nothing happened between E and us, don’t you?” Eli questions me.

“Hen, plus we had no idea you were hung up on her,” Zeke adds.

The image of the three of them wrapped in each other’s arms was a punch in the stomach. I had thought there was something between Everly and I, and seeing her with my brothers, doing something with them that she had refused to do with me, gutted me.

“What’s going on with the two of you?” Eli asks.

“Nothing,” I answer quickly.

Zeke bursts out laughing at my answer. “We know that’s bullshit, ’cause E told us that you two had kissed at Vanessa and Christian’s.”

Oh. She had told them the truth.

“She was the groupie you couldn’t stop thinking about,” Eli adds.

“Yes, okay. And when I saw her waiting for us when we stepped off the plane my mind short-circuited and I lost it,” I confess to them. There’s no point hiding what’s going on anymore; the cat’s out of the bag.

Zeke and Eli look at each other and burst out laughing.

“What’s so funny?” I ask, punching them both in the arms; they’re being fucking dicks.

“Don’t think we could find anyone more perfect for you. Everly won’t take your bullshit,” Eli explains to me.

“You need a woman that is going to stand up to you and tell you when you’re being a dick,” Zeke adds.

“Fuck you two,” I say, flipping them off as I head toward the truck, not wanting to stay in this darkened forest a moment more. I open the door, jump into the back, and wait for those assholes to join me. I can see the two of them joking with each other in the beams from the headlights. It must be nice to have someone by your side that you can count on no matter what. Could Everly be that for me?

What the hell, man! You finger banged her once and now you’re thinking about creating something with this chick? Who the hell are you?

I still as Brodie’s voice comes through my conscious, what in the hell?

She doesn’t deserve you.

I shake his words from my mind. I’m exhausted; it’s just my mind playing tricks on me, nothing more.

“You, okay?” Eli asks, turning around as Zeke heads off into the darkness.

I give him a reassuring nod, but my bones are chilled over Brodie’s words.

We continue back to the house; when we park, I notice Everly’s bedroom light is off. Understandable since it’s been a long, emotional day, but I’m disappointed that she isn’t there waiting to greet me. We walk into the living room, then the boys head to the kitchen.

“You must be hungry, man,” Zeke says right as my stomach decides to rumble.

“Guess I am,” I say with a chuckle.

“Sit down, we will look after you,” Eli tells me, and this makes me smile.

I don’t think anyone in my life has ever said those words to me before; it’s a strange concept.

It’s not long till the boys come back with a turkey sandwich and some potato chips on the side. I take a bite, and it’s the most delicious thing in the world. I also throw back a gallon of water, completely dehydrated from my adventure in the woods. We sit in silence for a bit, and I’ve finished about half of my sandwich before Zeke talks again.

“You know we don’t blame you for Brodie,” he says tentatively before taking a sip of his water. “It wasn’t your fault that he loved you in a way you couldn’t return.”

My throat starts to tighten, thinking about Brodie and that night.

“You could have told us, though, we would have understood. You didn’t need to go through that alone,” Eli adds.

“Nothing I could have said would have been able to bring him back, so I didn’t want to burden you both with anything more,” I tell them.

“We’re your brothers, Hen, we’re family. We are all we have in this world. We’re supposed to be the ones supporting you when you need it,” Eli explains to me.

I know this now. I get it, but back then, in the middle of my grief battling with my guilt, I couldn’t see it. They had each other to lean on; I had no one and I thought I deserved no one ... until tonight.

“I get it now,” I tell them.

“Good,” Eli says, nodding before he takes another bite of his sandwich.

“And as your family I’m going to give you a warning, don’t fuck with Everly if you’re just wanting something to play with while we are here. I know we haven’t known her for long, but she feels like a sister to us both and we’re going to look out for her, even if it’s you,” Zeke states.

“Yeah. You don’t want to be like her douchebag ex, either,” Eli adds.

“Guys, slow it down. I don’t know what is going to happen between Everly and I. All I do know is there is a pull between us, one that I want to explore,” I tell them honestly.

Zeke’s eyes narrow on me. “Fine, but tread carefully because her rules are very strict about not hooking up with her clients. She loves her job, and it means so much to her. Vanessa and Christian can’t find out otherwise they will fire her. The stakes are high for her, man, so if she can’t give you what you want right now, you might have to wait till we get back to LA and we’re no longer her clients.”

“It’s only a couple of weeks. I’m sure you can wait that long if you think she’s worth it,” Eli states, giving me a wink.

“We need to talk first before I decide anything,” I tell them.

They both give me a nod and then drop the subject.

After finishing my meal, I reluctantly head back to my room. I walk up the stairs and watch as Zeke and Eli head down toward her door before I turn and head toward mine. I make my way to the shower and turn on the knobs until the temperature is right and get undressed, then step into the shower, the hot water washing over my skin and the sharp jets massaging my tense muscles. I grab the soap and lather myself up, and when my hand hits my dick, I can’t help but slide over it, bringing it to life, wishing it was Everly’s hands wrapped around it. My eyes close as my head leans back against the tile and I start to jerk myself remembering what we did in the darkness. The way her tight cunt strangled my fingers. The taste of her sweetness on my tongue after she came. Her filthy words telling me how she’s been thinking about watching my fingers plunge inside of her—never knew the thought of

seeing my tattoos disappear into her cunt was something I was into, until now. New kink unlocked. Images of her spread out before me, my tongue being the one to bring her to the brink instead of my fingers, having her sweetness coming all over my mouth, has me coming in seconds. One day, she will let me between her thighs like that; I'm a patient man.

I get out of the shower, and suddenly, I'm feeling exhausted, the emotional roller coaster of the day finally catching up with me. I look at my bedroom door one last time, psychically willing Everly to walk through the doorway, but when seconds tick by and she doesn't, I give up my wishful thinking and head to bed; maybe things will be better in the morning. I pull back my sheets and get in naked, and the moment my head hits the pillow, I seem to be out of it.

I'm running through the forest as fast as I can because that's what Mommy told me to do. I sit in my favorite spot and wait for her to find me when it's safe. I fall asleep and when I wake up, it's daytime. Did Mom forget about me? She's never done that before. Should I go find her? No. She always told me to stay where I was, so she knew where to find me. That she would always come find me once the coast was clear. I sit and wait for her all day and nothing. I stick my head out of my hole and watch the sky turn from blue to pink, then orange to black. I counted the stars one by one till I fell asleep again, hungry and thirsty. But I couldn't leave my spot, otherwise, Mommy wouldn't be able to find me. Then suddenly someone is reach for me and pulling me from my spot. "No, I have to wait for Mommy," I scream as the large hand pulls me from my hiding hole.

I wake up with a start.

EVERLY

I can't believe I let Hendrix finger me. What the hell was I thinking? *You weren't.* He was so angry seeing me lying between Zeke and Eli, and that surprised me. Honestly, I thought I was a plaything to him, something to amuse himself with while he was away from his normal hunting ground. Then he looked so scared out in the forest all alone, and when he was telling me how unworthy he thought he was for me, my heart broke in two. I never wanted him to feel that way, not when he's not the only one feeling the pull between us. Hendrix and the boys needed to talk, especially about the guilt he is feeling regarding Brodie's death. I hope they sorted it out on the way home.

I'm a coward. When I got home, I went and hid in my room, too scared of the thought that Hendrix might have changed his mind about me coming to see him tonight. Instead, I've sat here all night, staring at the ceiling, talking myself out of going to see him. I've listed a thousand and one reasons why I shouldn't, but then I see his face asking me to come talk about what happened today, tonight, and I'm back at square one. I turn and look at my clock and it's late now; I've missed my chance to go to see him. I think rocking up in the middle of the night is the equivalent of a booty call and that's not what it is. *Liar.* Okay, maybe a little. That orgasm he was able to rip from me was one of the best I've ever had, and I wouldn't mind having another round, not sure if my rabbit will be as good. This man has ruined me for all vibrators. *Then go see him.* I can't. *Forget the rules, he wants you.* I can't. He's a client. Look what happened last time. *Fuck Ian, he was a*

douche. Don't understand what you ever saw in that man. I don't either; he was a hard lesson to learn, but I haven't learned it yet because Hendrix is my client and I'm lying here contemplating going to his room. You don't have to do anything. This is true. Liar. That I am. Of course, I'm going to want to do something to that man, look at him. He's the lead singer for The Lost Boys, my favorite band, and he wants to have sex with me. I'm not a groupie. I'm not, even if Hendrix calls me one. Charlie and Derrick would be disappointed. This is true. He has a pierced penis. True again. It's on your sexual bucket list. That it is. Still not reason enough to overstep the moral line. Honey, you have already crossed that, when the rock star had his fingers inside you. Shit, that's right. I'm the worst accountability coach. I can't even hold myself accountable for the things I do. Just do it.

I throw back my covers and get up. I look down at what I'm wearing, and my holey horse T-shirt is not sexy. I head over to my drawer, rummage through my lingerie, and pull out a black slip dress. Do I wear underwear? Yes, you aren't a ho. You don't want him thinking you are coming over for something when you're not. *Liar.* I quickly get changed, grab a hair tie from my dresser and throw my hair up into a high ponytail. I quickly clean my teeth and give myself a spritz, then I head for the door.

Opening it, I look out into the dark corridor, my eyes landing on Zeke's and Eli's doors. They are probably in the one room together, having fun, they aren't worried about what I'm doing. How many times have they snuck along this corridor to each other? I step out into the hallway, my heart thumping in my chest, and I quietly close my bedroom door behind me. I take the first tentative steps and pray for no creaking floors. I continue slowly until I hit a creaking board and almost have a heart attack. I swing my head around and make sure that no one heard that before I move quicker along the hallway toward Hendrix's door.

Once there, I suck in a deep breath and try to slow my racing heart. I give the hallway one last look as I slowly turn the knob to his room and wait to see if it's really unlocked. That would be embarrassing if he locked it. But it opens and I

slip in, closing the door behind me. I can see Hendrix lying under a sheet, and he's tossing and turning. His beautiful face is bathed in the moonlight, and I can see his brows are pulled together in pain. It looks like he's having a nightmare.

Oh no.

"No, I have to wait for Mommy," he calls out, and I still before my heart kicks in again. I rush over to his side of the bed.

"Hendrix," I say, shaking him, "you're having a bad dream."

Then he sits up suddenly, making me gasp. He turns and looks at me, rubbing his eyes as if unsure I'm really here.

"Are you okay? It looked like you were having a bad dream."

"I was," he answers honestly.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

He stares at me for a couple of moments, waking himself up. "I was lost in the forest."

My stomach sinks hearing the start of his nightmare.

"My mom used to send me to the forest at the back of my home when my father got home from the bars drunk. He had a real temper on him. The only way to keep me safe was if I went and hid," he explains.

I reach out and place my hand over his, reassuring him he's in a safe space with me.

"I did this for years until one day she never came and got me. I was hiding for two days until rescue found me."

That poor little boy. I can't imagine how scary that was for him.

"They sent a social worker to me to explain that the reason my mother never came and got me was because my father had killed her."

I gasp hearing it, even though I thought that is what might have happened. And then it all clicks, why he hated me leaving him in the forest that first day. Why tonight, when it was dark, I found him curled up he told me he hated the forest. What on earth have I done to this man?

“I’m so sorry, this is all my fault,” I tell him.

He shakes his head and glares at me. “No, it’s not.”

Tears well in my eyes as I nod. “That first day I left you alone thinking I was teaching you a lesson, instead, I triggered a suppressed memory. I’m a horrible person,” I tell him.

“Hey, now, how could you have known?” he says, trying to reassure me.

I shake my head. “You’re supposed to be safe and protected here with me.” Hendrix reaches out and cups my face. “You didn’t know. It’s not your fault,” he tells me. I want to believe him but ... “Hey, you came to my room,” he says with a grin.

“I did.”

“Thank you.” That wasn’t at all what I thought he was going to say. “Come, lay down with me,” he says, letting go of my face and pulling the sheet back. That’s when I notice he’s naked underneath it, his dick is now pointing sky-high, and I can just see the metal at the top. “He won’t bite unless you want him to,” he teases.

I shake my head and get in next to him. Hendrix shimmies over and turns on his side, and I do the same, so we are staring at each other.

“Am I allowed to touch you, Everly?”

I nod, which makes him smile as he reaches out and pulls me to him.

“We don’t have to do anything. The fact that you came here is enough,” he adds.

“Your dick says otherwise,” I quip.

Which pulls a deep chuckle from his chest. “Any time he’s around you, that’s his default setting.”

Oh.

And that’s hot.

“Did it hurt?” I blurt out.

“What? My piercing?” he asks, trying to follow my train of thought. I nod. “Yeah, kind of. Couldn’t have sex for months which was worse.” He smirks.

“What is it?”

“It’s an ampallang piercing. It’s a crossbar through the top of my dick,” he explains.

“Why did you get it?”

He smirks again. “For sex,” he answers.

My brows raise high at his answer.

“It feels good for both parties. I can hit a woman’s G-spot with it.”

Oh wow.

“You can touch it if you want,” he says.

My hand hesitates until he reassures me it’s okay. I reach out and wrap my hand around the tip of his cock and let my hand slide down over the bar. Hendrix rolls onto his back and closes his eyes, a deep moan falling from his lips. The sound makes my body come alive, that me, Everly Nash, is giving a man like Hendrix Meyer pleasure, a man who has probably had so much sex in his life that anything I do to him isn’t mind-blowing.

“Hey, what’s with the frown. No one should be frowning when playing with my dick, I’ll get a complex,” he says, giving me a smile.

I didn’t realize I was frowning. He’s going to think I’m weird.

“We can stop, Everly.”

I shake my head and grip him tighter, which has his eyes rolling back. “Was having a self-conscious moment, that’s all,” I tell him honestly because I do have the man’s dick in my hand.

He sits up on his elbows and looks over at me. “Why? What you are doing to me, I’ve been dreaming about since I met you.”

I swallow hard at his confession; he wants this, he wants me. “I got in my head thinking you’ve probably had hundreds of women in this same position, and I worried that I’m not good enough for you.” There, I said it.

Hendrix stills and he removes my hand from his dick.

Oh no, I’ve blown it. I knew I should have kept my mouth shut; he doesn’t need to know about every little insecurity you have. Being honest was a mistake.

The next thing I know, he rolls me on my back and is hovering over me. He falls to his elbows as his hands caress my face.

“It’s been a while if ever that someone has worshipped you, Everly. I see that now. You need a man like me to show you how desired you are. I haven’t been able to get you out of my mind since that first night you literally bowled me over. Then to hear that you’ve hidden yourself away for the past year because of some jerk. A jerk who never deserved you in the first place. A man that never understood the gift he had before him.”

Hendrix’s sweet words cause a crack in the wall around my heart, and I’m not sure if I am ready for a man like him to demolish it because I know that I may not survive him. He’s going to ruin me for other men. And yet here I am getting ready to sacrifice myself at his altar, not caring for the consequences.

“What is this, Hendrix?” I ask him.

“If I’m honest, I don’t know. It’s caught me by surprise, and there’s so much shit swirling around in my mind I’m not sure which way is up for now,” he confesses.

At least he didn't give me fake promises.

“All I know is I can't stay away from you. That you are consuming my thoughts night and day and all I want to do is please you. Have you look at me the way you look at my brothers.”

I still. “I'm not interested in them.”

His thumb caresses the tight pull between my brows. “I know, what I meant was I want your smiles, your laughs, your ease.”

Oh.

“You want my friendship?”

He smirks and nods. My stomach sinks, he wants to be friends, that's all this is. I'm an idiot.

“Hey, I can see that mind working overtime. Yes, I want to be your friend because isn't that what they say about building a healthy relationship? It should be built on friendship not just lust.”

Oh.

“Not saying we are dating or anything, but I want to explore something healthy with you. Everything else before you has been toxic and clouded in drugs and alcohol and regret and I don't want that with you.”

I get it now.

“You want a fresh start.”

He nods. “With you, if you are willing to give me a chance.”

“And just to see how things go, no strings, no pressure, just getting to know each other.”

He smiles and nods in agreement. “We would have to hide it from the label. I don't want to get you into trouble,” he adds.

This is the moment he is asking me to trust him and step over that line, a line that I have held on to so fiercely. Can I do that?

“I’m asking a lot from you, I get it, especially as we haven’t known each other for long. But I want to try for you, with you.”

My heart flutters in my chest, something I haven’t felt in a long time, if ever.

“Okay.”

His eyes widen in surprise that I would give in so easily, and I will probably regret this when the month is up, but I want to try; otherwise, I will always wonder *what if?*

HENDRIX

She said yes.

I don't believe it. I thought it would have taken so much longer to convince her. I was prepared to pull out the big guns and use my tongue on her to convince her I was worth the chance. She has a lot more to lose than me. Dirty Texas won't fire me for an inappropriate relationship, but they will her and her reputation means a lot to her, especially after that asshole used her as his own private sex toy while his wife was away. If I ever catch him in a dark alley, I'll fuck him up. I can't fuck this up. I don't want to mess it up. Just hearing her saying yes to me has cleared some of the darkness from my heart. The shadows are starting to dissipate as they encounter her sunshine. I want to try to be the best version of myself for her.

“Good, now lay back, baby. I need to make you feel good,” I tell her as I start to kiss down her neck and over her collarbone. I use my teeth to pull down the thin strap of her slip dress, exposing her right breast to me. I suck in the dusty pink bud and then blow on it, watching her skin break out in goosebumps as a moan falls from her lips. I then move on to the other side and do the same, pulling down her strap and sucking on her left nipple while my fingers pull and tug her right one. She's already wriggling underneath; Everly is highly sensitive and responsive to my movements. This is going to be fun. She's going to need to hold on because this first time, I'm going to have her screaming, and all thoughts of the last man to fuck her will be erased until all she can think about is me. I

continue for long moments, alternating between sucking and pinching her nipples.

“Bet you’re fucking soaked, aren’t you, groupie?” I say, looking up at her with a smirk.

“I’m not a fucking—” her angry words disappear as I suck down hard on her nipple. I love teasing her, my new favorite thing, making Everly squirm underneath me.

“You’re my fucking groupie, to do with as I like, you hear me?” I tell her as I move down her body.

“I’m not a—”

I cut off her words again as I start to kiss down her taut stomach and slide my tongue into her belly button, making her giggle. My hands slide down her thighs, and I grip her peachy ass, giving it a tight squeeze before my fingers find the edge of her tiny G-string and pull it down her thighs while my lips travel above her underwear. Running my hands back up over her hip bones, her hips thrust ever so subtly, pushing her bare pussy into my face. Her kitty is going to have to wait till I’m ready as I have a hell of a lot more teasing to do. I kiss my way down her thighs, moving from the outer to the inner, while I continue to roll her underwear down.

When I reach her feet, she opens her legs wide to kick off her knickers, and I throw them from the bed, not caring where they land because while I’ve been teasing Everly, I’ve been teasing my own damn self, and if I’m honest, I’m over this fucking drawn-out foreplay already; I need my mouth on her pussy, now.

So, I do just that.

Spreading her creamy thighs wide, I slide my tongue right up her slit in one long lick, which has her fingers digging into the sheets. She throws her head back, closes her eyes, and thrusts her hips toward me, trying to relieve the need that is building within her. *All in good time, Everly, all in good time.*

I throw back the sheet, exposing us, which makes Everly sit up and take notice.

“You said you dreamed of what it would look like when I slide my fingers inside you, watching my ink disappear between your folds. Watch me,” I command her as I slide a finger inside her, both of us watching the ink disappear.

“Fuck,” Everly hisses as she throws her head back.

“Not yet, you need to take another first,” I tell her, which has her sitting back up again. I sink another finger all the way in, bit by glorious bit until I am knuckles deep inside of her. Who knew how hot that action could be.

“Please, Hendrix,” she begs as I slide my fingers almost all the way out of her slickness, watching her wetness coating my ink. I slide them in again, and she arches her hips, trying to chase the right spot. She’s already come on my fingers; I want her to come on my tongue next, so I’ll give her this for a couple more pumps, and then I’ll be doing it with my tongue. “So good, so fucking good,” she moans as my fingers continue to bring her closer to the edge.

“Not yet, my little groupie, you won’t be coming on these fingers.”

“Wait, no, I need ...” She pouts as I pull my fingers all the way out, savoring the pooling wetness between her folds. Then I place my fingers into my mouth and suck her sweetness from them.

“You’re my new favorite taste,” I tell her.

She moans as those green eyes watch me, hooded with lust. Her cheeks are bright pink, and her teeth have sunk into her plump bottom lip. Enough. I need my mouth on her as I dive between her legs and start to feast like a starving man. I wasn’t lying when I told her she’s my new favorite taste, it’s the truth. I may have fucked a lot of women, I’m not going to lie about that, but using my tongue on a woman, oh no, that is something intimate. Not something I do with the groupies, my fingers are usually enough or they are so desperate for my pierced cock they are on their knees and fingering themselves meaning I don’t have to.

So, when I say I love tasting her, it's the truth because it's something I won't do to just anyone, and if I'm honest, no one has ever tasted as magical as she does. I could feast on her cunt all day long and never want to come up for air. Maybe I should? That feels like it would be good therapy for me, helping me relax my mind, because honestly, all I can think about is her while I'm down here and how many times I can make her come. That's all I care about, all that matters in the world, right in this moment.

Everly's fingers slide into my hair and begin to tug on the strands as my tongue continues to work her over. *That's it, E, show me how you like it so I can remember next time.* Her pants are becoming louder and wilder, her legs are starting to shake beside me as I continue to lap up everything she is giving me. Then I slide a finger into her folds and another finger presses on her ass, which has her hips thrusting up against my tongue. *Don't worry, I won't be penetrating your back hole just yet, we can work up to that.* Can't imagine any better feeling than sinking into that tight hole while my fingers are working inside her cunt, pushing her higher and higher until she is so full, so close to the edge, that she squirts all over me. She'll probably be surprised, embarrassed that I made her come so hard that she soaks me, but I will be in absolute fucking heaven when it happens. My dick starts to leak at the thought of that.

"Hen, fuck, Hen," she moans my nickname, and I can tell she is close; her entire body is curled up tight like a spring. I give her clit one last hard suck and that pushes her over the edge. She lets out a series of expletives as she comes all over my face. I continue to lick up every last drop in a blissful haze until she squirms against my mouth, her pussy becoming oversensitive to me. I look up, and she is blissfully floating away in a post-orgasm haze, but I'm not done with her yet; she has at least another orgasm for me and this one I want to feel as she comes all over my dick.

I move from between her thighs and tell her to roll over and get on her knees. She does as she is told almost instantly. Fuck she is stunning with that white peachy ass turned in my direction. My hand comes down against it with a slap, making

her gasp before her head turns around and she smirks at me. My dirty little groupie likes to be spanked; I'll have to remember that for next time. I move forward and line myself up against her glistening cunt and slowly start to sink into her, inch by incredible inch. I watch as the bar slides between her folds and pulls a moan from her lips. I reach out and wrap my hand around her ponytail and pull her back to me as my dick slides all the way in. This angle has her squirming against me, then I start to thrust up into her.

"Yes," she moans after the first couple of thrusts. "Harder, Hen," she commands. *Fine, you want hard and fast, my little groupie, you're going to get it.* I let go of her hair and push her head first into the pillows, pressing her into the bed. My fingers move to her hips and grip them tightly.

"You want rough, I'll give it to you. I want you screaming into the pillow because those screams are for my ears only. Do you hear me?" I ask her, pulling all the way out.

She moans her answer. Good. I line up my dick again, sliding back into her tight hole, and then lose myself. This new angle hits her G-spot perfectly, and I continue to pound it repeatedly.

"That's it, groupie, tighten that cunt around me. Squeeze it. Choke it. Need you to come all over it." I continue to fuck her hard and rough; the moans coming from her mouth tell me she is loving every second of it. Then I feel her squeezing me, her thighs are starting to shake as she screams into her pillow and comes all over my cock. So, fucking perfect. I'm not far behind her as I pull my cock out and come all over her back, trying to miss her slip that is bunched in the middle, the long ropes a contrast over her tanned back. She's a fucking masterpiece as I stare at her, slowly coming down from my high.

"Stay there, babe. Let me grab a towel for you," I tell her and slowly jump off the bed, trying not to pass out as the blood rushes back from my dick to my brain. I grab the white hand towel, wet it with warm water, and come back and clean her up before throwing it away in the hamper.

“Think we’re going to need to wash your slip,” I tell her.

She turns around, slips it off, and throws it into my hamper. “Guess you’re going to have to give me a T-shirt,” she says.

Fuck yes.

As I jump back out of bed and search my closet, I find a Lost Boys tour tee and give it to her, it has my name on the back. She stares at it for a moment before putting it on. And the sight of her in my tee gets my dick hard again.

“Told you, you were my groupie,” I tease.

She flips me off, but her smile is wide, letting me know she likes me teasing her. I jump into bed and pull her toward me.

“No regrets?” I ask her, worried that once the hormones fade away she’s going to regret what we’ve done.

She shakes her head. “Nope, not even the slightest,” she says, leaning in and kissing me.

Thank fuck, and I kiss her back until we both slowly start to fall asleep; my arms tighten around her, and I know I’m never letting her go. She feels too good lying beside me.

EVERLY

I wake up late, and my body aches from Hendrix fucking me every moment he could get. We fell asleep and just on sunrise, I was woken up with my leg wrapped around his and the delicious sensation of him sliding into me. He whispered the dirty things he was going to do with me next time, and moments later, I was coming. Then we had a shower, and he couldn't keep his hands off me, and that dick, it never goes down. The next thing I know, I'm on my knees with his dick in my mouth and my fingers between my legs. I don't think I've ever had so much sex, nor have I ever been so horny. My appetite is as insatiable as his. Who the hell have I become? Maybe he's right, and I am a groupie.

As I stretch out and roll over, I notice the bed is empty. My stomach sinks; where is Hendrix? Of course, my mind instantly goes to dread—he's changed his mind, he got what he wanted, and now he's had enough. I get up and head into the bathroom to relieve myself, hoping that he might be there. He's not. My shoulders tense and the good mood I woke up in vanishes. Guess I should get going; he probably doesn't want me sticking around. I walk out of his room and down the corridor toward my own, but I pause when I hear music playing, live music. What? No. It's not him, is it? I rush down the stairs and head toward my father's study, the music getting louder and louder the closer I get. I open the door, and I'm surprised to see all three of them jamming away with big smiles on their faces. As soon as I enter the room, they all stop. And that's when I remember I'm only wearing Hendrix's shirt.

Shit.

Hendrix looks up from where he's sitting, and he looks so hot dressed in a tank, the open sleeves exposing his obliques, and the same fingers that worked magic on me last night now doing the same across his guitar.

"Hendrix looks good on you, E," Eli says, looking me up and down. "Ouch," he grumbles when Hendrix clips him around the ear.

"Eyes up here," he tells his friend.

"You're writing?" I say, looking between the three of them.

"Seems like someone inspired Hen last night. You wouldn't know who that could be, do you?" Zeke asks with a chuckle.

"Would the two of you fuck off," Hendrix tells them.

They both stand up, chuckling to themselves as they walk toward me at the door.

"Whatever it is keep it up. He hasn't been this inspired in years," Zeke whispers as they pass me.

I close the door behind me and walk further into the room. Hendrix places his guitar back on its stand, gets up, and walks over to me.

"Fuck, you look hot in my shirt," he growls as he grabs me and kisses the hell out of me. He then lifts me up, and I wrap my legs around his waist. His fingers dig into my bare ass as he walks me over to my father's desk. He places me on the edge of the desk before falling to his knees in front of me. Next thing I know, he is grabbing my legs and placing them over his shoulders.

"Hendrix," I squeal, "what the hell are you doing?"

He stares up at me, giving me a heated smirk. "I'm having my breakfast, E."

"Not in here. What about them?" I say, nodding my head toward the door.

“You’re going to have to be quiet because I don’t want them to hear you come. Like I said last night, that sound is only for my ears.” He grins and without another word, he dives between my legs and starts eating his breakfast. I fall back onto my elbows while one hand slides into his hair. I bite down on my lip as I try not to scream the house down because Hendrix’s tongue is just as talented as his fingers, and when he uses them both, I’m done for, like he’s doing now, and he sends me over the edge into oblivion.

“Wow, that was a great way to start the day,” I pant.

“Good, now get up and let me play you the song I wrote this morning,” he says.

“Wait, what about you?” I ask, looking down at his dick straining against his jeans.

“Babe, don’t you worry, I’ll be coming to find you later, and then I’ll be expecting your sweetness coating my dick,” he says with a grin before picking me up off my father’s desk and placing me back down. He holds out his hand and escorts me over to one of the armchairs and tells me to sit. He then picks up his guitar and starts strumming away.

“The song’s called ‘Sunshine,’” he states before clearing his throat and singing what they have been working on.

I swallow hard, trying to keep my emotions at bay as I realize the song is about me and him, finding his Sunshine.

“What do you think? It’s not finished, we only wrote half of it this morning, but I couldn’t stop. For the first time in a long time my fingers were itching to get writing and strumming,” he explains, and when he looks up, he notices me crying. “Baby, what’s the matter?” he asks, reaching out for me.

“You wrote me a song.” I hiccup through my tears.

“Of course I did. You inspired it. You inspired me,” he tells me, which makes me tear up again. I promised myself I wasn’t going to fall for him, but when a famous rock star writes a song about you, it’s kind of hard not to.

“I don’t know what to say,” I say, sniffing.

“Say you won’t be leaving my bed for the next couple of weeks,” he asks with a grin.

“If it means you are able to write more songs like that, then I’ll never leave,” I tell him.

“Good, my plan is working then.” He smirks.

Thud goes my heart.

“Come on, let’s grab some breakfast, I’m starving suddenly,” he states, holding out his hand for me, which I take.

“Let me go upstairs and shower and put some underwear on,” I tell him.

He pulls me to him, and I bounce off his hard chest as one hand slides up under his shirt and squeezes my ass groaning, “This is mine,” before whispering into my ear, “Come back down in one of my shirts, you look fucking hot in them.” He growls against my neck before he sucks on it.

“Hey,” I squeal, “did you just try to give me a hickey?”

“Maybe,” he says with a grin.

“You can’t do that. We’re supposed to be hidden, remember?” I tell him.

He nods. “Okay then, let me do this,” he says, pulling up the T-shirt exposing me to him.

“Hendrix,” I squeal.

But then he latches his mouth onto my breast and sucks right beside my nipple, hard, and when he stares down, he admires his handiwork. “There, perfect.”

“Happy now, you caveman?” I say, placing my hand on my hip.

“Not in the slightest. Tonight I am going to mark up every inch of your breasts. It’s fucking hot.” He smirks before slapping my ass and escorting me out of the room. “I’ll grab you some breakfast, now go shower, even though I’d like you to stay my dirty little groupie, all day,” he says, kissing me one last time before shoving me up the stairs.

Who the hell is this man?

I rush upstairs and get into the shower, and when I come out, my phone is ringing. When I look down, I see it's my brother.

"Hey," I answer.

"Where the hell have you been? I haven't heard from you in a week. That rock star better have had you chained to his bed or I'm going to be personally offended," Charlie states.

"Shhh, don't say that. Is Derrick around?" I ask, knowing my brother's partner is also Vanessa's best friend. I don't want him to overhear what I'm about to tell my brother because I am literally freaking out.

"Derrick's at work, I'm all ears," he says.

"This is for the vault," I warn him.

He lets out a sigh. When I tell him it's for the vault it means he can't tell Derrick what I am about to tell him and vice versa.

"I slept with Hendrix Meyer last night."

I have to hold the phone away from my ear as my brother screams down it. "Fuck, how was the pierced dick? Tell me it's good."

"It's good, so fucking good. Best sex of my life."

"So, fucking jealous," he groans.

"He wrote a song about me, too."

The phone goes silent. "Wait, what did you say? I blacked out. Did you just say the world's best rock star wrote a song about you?"

"Yes, like what the hell is going on?" I squeal.

"I don't know but hell yeah, Everly. You deserve all the happiness in the world. Hendrix Meyer would be oh so lucky to date you," he says.

Aw, he's too kind. "We're not dating—"

“You’re fucking, okay, but you know what I mean,” he says, interrupting me.

“You can’t tell Derrick. You know how loose his lips are. He’s Vanessa’s best friend and she warned me not to sleep with the band. I promised her, Charlie. She will fire me, my reputation will be ruined, and ...” I try to hold back the panic attack that seems to want to raise its ugly head.

“Everly, chill. Your secret is safe with me, I promise. How the hell did it happen?” he asks.

I then explain to him everything that has happened this week between the two of us and only touched on Hendrix’s personal life; it’s his story and I don’t think he wants others to know.

“I woke up to them jamming and writing songs this morning,” I tell him.

“And that was after one night. If you keep that up, they are going to have an entire album done,” he teases.

Maybe if they can do that, Vanessa might not be upset if Hendrix and I decide to pursue things when we get back to LA.

“I have to go, my stomach is rumbling and Hendrix is making me breakfast,” I tell my brother.

“Seriously, Evie. Do you have a magic vagina or something?” He chuckles.

“Ew, that word sounds weird coming from you.”

“Not as gross as me saying it.” He chuckles again.

“Love you, I’ve got to go.”

“Love you, too,” he says before hanging up.

When I leave the room, I notice one of Hendrix’s T-shirts hanging on my door. I’m guessing he wants me to wear that one today. I grab it and go and get changed.

“Morning again, E. Hen’s tees look good on you,” Eli says with a grin as I walk into the room.

“Eli,” Hendrix calls out from the kitchen.

Eli gives me a wink and continues eating his breakfast.

When I walk into the kitchen, Hendrix is pulling the overnight oats out of the fridge, and then scoops up fresh berries and places them in the jar. “The boys said you’d like this for breakfast,” he says, handing me the jar. I thank him, and then he busies himself as he tries to work the coffee maker but bashes it a couple of times.

“Here let me, you’ll break it otherwise,” I say, jumping into action to save my machine. “Did you want one?”

“Yes please, someone wore me out last night with their insatiable appetite,” he says, nuzzling into my neck as I make us both a cup of coffee.

“You two are turning my stomach with your cuteness,” Eli calls out from the dining room.

“Fuck you,” Hendrix calls back, flipping him off while he kisses my neck. This man is walking Viagra. If he doesn’t stop it, I’ll be ready to flip him around and fuck him on the kitchen counter. I turn around and hand him his coffee, which he takes, but not before placing a kiss on my forehead. Could we be any more domesticated? We walk back into the dining room, and Zeke and Eli are making out. I’m stunned. That is hot. Hendrix’s hand comes out and tries to cover my eyes.

“Stop, I wanna see, it’s hot,” I say as I try to move around his hand, which makes him laugh.

“See we can be cute too.” Zeke grins.

“Hen, it’s not our fault your girl likes watching MM,” Eli teases.

“You’ve encouraged them now. Next thing they will be fucking on the table.” Hendrix groans before he digs into his overnight oats. I shake my head at him.

“So, you and Hen, huh?” Zeke asks as he sips his coffee.

“We’re together, and?” Hendrix answers for me.

“Don’t need to get defensive, big man. Eli and I are curious, that’s all. Something happened last night, and now you’re in the studio writing and making music for the first time in six months,” Zeke states.

Hendrix looks over at me and then back at his breakfast, staying silent for a couple of beats before he answers him. “Yesterday it seems I faced a lot of my demons with the help of all of you. Honestly, it felt like the purge, things were happening every which way until they settled down and now things don’t feel so bad,” he explains, looking at me briefly before going back to his oats.

“You feel okay, though?” Zeke asks.

Hendrix looks up and smiles at me. “Yeah. I do. For the first time in a long time, things feel right.”

“Seriously, what the hell did you do to our friend? He seems pussy whipped,” Eli whisper-yells at me.

“Eli,” Hendrix warns.

“You seem like a big, mushy marshmallow this morning, Hen. And seeing E come down in your prized T-shirt leads me to believe lines were crossed last night. Please tell me our brother is a generous lover and not a selfish one. If he’s selfish, I apologize he was not raised right,” Eli states.

“Guys, please, you’re embarrassing Everly. I’m going to say this once and once only. We’re together. What is happening between the two of us, no one can know about, not until the month is up and Everly isn’t our coach anymore. Then we will date like normal people,” Hendrix explains.

Oh. Wow, that seems kind of long-term planning.

“And is this something that she wants? Because we haven’t had a chance to hear from her,” Zeke states.

“It is what I want. You all know my fears, I can’t let Dirty Texas Records know what’s going on between Hendrix and I otherwise they will fire me for sure and I can’t afford another strike against my reputation,” I tell them all.

“We would never do that to you, E. You’re like a sister,” Eli states.

Aw, that is so sweet.

“You’re one of us now, and we look after our own,” Zeke adds.

Hendrix then reaches over and grabs my hand. “I won’t let anything happen to you, okay?”

I nod. For the first time in a long time, I feel safe, secure, and looked after.

EVERLY

Who knew you could have this much sex? Hendrix is insatiable. Every single night when I crawl into his bed, he's on me, whispering dirty things to me with that wicked mouth. And when I wake up, he's gone, but I know where to find him—in my father's study, making music with the boys. He calls me his muse, and that he needs to worship at my altar every night so he can have a good writing day; and when I say altar, I mean my vagina. I don't think I could be any happier. The boys seem to be thriving; they are eating and drinking well, they have resumed yoga in the mornings after a break in their creative session, and I make sure that they are energized by all the creative crystals I can find. Then they go back into the room while I make them breakfast or lunch or dinner. I even got the boys outside one day for horseback riding, which didn't go so well. They complained the entire time about their balls being bruised. Unfortunately, that night I had to ice Hendrix's balls and ass because they were so bruised. I had to laugh, but the boys were not happy with me. They said next time I wanted to go exploring it would be in the truck.

We took the row boats out onto the lake, which was romantic, but again, the boys moaned about the bugs, the sun, and how sore their arms were. Note to self: These boys are not country boys. I gave up on outdoor activities after those two flops.

Hendrix and I are having a lazy morning in bed as it's the weekend. He has just spent a long time playing with my

boobs, which he knows is a weakness for me. He loves giving me hickeys all over my breasts, and every day he admires his handiwork. He's slowly moving down over my stomach so that he can settle in between my thighs, which he seems to love doing until my phone starts ringing.

"Stop, I have to answer this, it might be important. No one calls me," I tell him. Hendrix just gives me a smile and continues to kiss my hip bones.

"Hello," I answer on a giggle, just as Hendrix spreads my legs and gives my slit one large lick and I have to try to stifle my moan.

"Everly, how are you going? It sounds like you're happy which is a good sign."

"Vanessa?" I say, sitting up. My heart is thundering in my chest, and I look down at Hendrix, my client, who is currently naked and in between my legs. He stops what he's doing when he hears her name.

"Yes, it's me. Thought I'd check in and see how the boys are going. I'm assuming because I haven't heard from you for help that things are going well?" she asks.

"Yeah, things are going well," I answer.

Hendrix gets a wicked look on his face before he dives back down between my legs and starts going to town on me. What the hell is he thinking? Is he trying to get me fired? I try to stifle the squeal that comes out of my mouth when his tongue connects with my clit, but it sounds like I'm having a stroke instead.

"You okay?"

I shake my head and try to pull Hendrix off me, but then he slips a finger in, and my eyes roll back. I want to murder him, which makes him chuckle silently.

"Yes, sorry, I startled a bird, and it flew in my face," I say in a panic.

Silence falls between us as Vanessa processes my response. "Anyway, I'm calling to check in on the boys. How

are they going? Are they giving you trouble? Have you been able to get them playing music or even writing again?" she asks hopefully.

"Yes," I answer a little more enthusiastically than I meant to as Hendrix hits the right spot. I look down and glare at him; he just smiles up as he continues to push me toward the edge.

"Oh my gosh, really?" Vanessa answers happily.

"Yes." Again, it sounds like a borderline moan before I quickly continue, "They've started writing and making new music for the past week. Things seem to be going great," I explain to her.

"Really? That is fantastic. I knew you were the right woman for the job. Once the boys had sex, drugs, and alcohol taken off the table, I knew they would thrive. Thank you," Vanessa says.

My entire body stiffens at her praise, and my stomach sinks as the rock star who I'm not supposed to be touching is touching me. Hendrix notices the change and stops teasing me. He wipes his face on the bed and looks up at me with concern.

"It's my job and I take it seriously," I tell her, feeling bad that I'm lying.

"I knew you wouldn't fall for their charms. As hypocritical as that is for me to say because I worked for Christian and I had rules about not crossing the line between us, but I eventually did. You did better than me," she says with a chuckle.

I feel even worse because I'm the exact opposite of the person she thinks I am. Hendrix sees my face fall and starts demanding the phone. I shake my head, but he tries to get it off me, then I jump up naked out of his bed and he does the same.

"Did you want to speak to one of the boys? Hendrix is walking past," I lie to her.

"That would be great. I would love to hear from them," she says happily.

“Hendrix, it’s Vanessa for you,” I say, holding the phone out to him.

He takes it from me and places it up to his ear, and I nervously bite my nails.

“She’s been a godsend. I was resistant at first, but she eventually wore me down. Don’t think any of us would be writing again if it wasn’t for her,” he says, giving me a bright smile that makes my stomach flutter. “I’m not sure if we are looking forward to going back to LA. Montana has been good to us,” he answers, and that surprises me. “Yeah, might have to try some country. Everly hasn’t played any of that to us yet or taken us to a bar with any music,” he adds.

“Really? No.”

My eyes widen at his comment.

“Thanks, Ness. I appreciate that. We’ve been cooped up in this house for the past two weeks. It might be nice to get out and explore Moonlight Falls.” He turns to me. “Yeah, we might get more inspiration.” He grins. “I think we’ve got a solid five songs,” he tells her. “You want us to send them through, they will be rough,” he adds. “Great, thanks so much, Ness. Honestly as much as I came here kicking and screaming, I’m glad I did,” he comments, staring at me, and I feel warm and fuzzy all the way to my bones. This man has me wrapped around his little finger. “Okay, let me pass you back over to Everly,” he says, handing me back the phone.

“Hi, again,” I say nervously.

“He sounds like a different person. Whatever you’re doing, keep doing it,” Vanessa says excitedly. Yeah, I don’t know if she really wants me doing that. “Also, I mentioned to Hendrix that if you think they are up to it, I would allow one night out to one of the bars in town, reward for them writing again.”

Oh wow. That sounds good, but I kind of love our little bubble. What happens if we go out into the real world and what we have doesn’t translate? “Sounds good, they’ll love that,” I say.

“Just make sure they don’t get wild,” she adds. “Before I go, though, I do have a favor to ask,” she says.

“Sure, what is it?”

“It’s a big one, and I completely understand if you need to say no, but I would love your help on it.”

“I’m sure I can help.”

“Good, not sure if you have heard of Shelby Underwood, the country star?” Vanessa asks.

“Of course, she’s great.”

“She’s part of the Dirty Texas Records family. She’s been having a rough time lately with a stalker, and we want her to get out of LA, and she doesn’t want to go to her place in Nashville in case they know where she lives there too, so I thought of you. You’re in the middle of nowhere. You have top-notch security as per Jackson’s comments. Do you think the boys would be okay with her coming?” she asks.

What she’s really meaning is will the boys try to fuck her and have all their good work go down the drain. Shelby is stunning, this gorgeous blonde, bubbly country girl, someone who could easily turn the boys’ heads. My stomach sinks because I could see Hendrix being attracted to a girl like her.

“I’ll keep an eye on them, I think they will be fine,” I say hesitantly, which makes Hendrix frown.

“Good, thank you again so much for helping those guys get back on track. I appreciate it so much,” she says, and I feel guilty about taking her praise. “I’ll send you through the details about Shelby. Expect her to arrive tomorrow, if that’s okay?”

“That’s fine,” I say quietly.

“Great, okay thanks again, bye,” she says and hangs up.

“Are you okay? What did she say?” Hendrix asks, looking concerned.

“Shelby Underwood is coming to stay with us. She has a stalker problem or something,” I say, shaking my head.

“Oh, okay, and you’re not happy about that?” he asks.

I turn and look up at him. “She’s beautiful.”

“And you’re worried about Zeke and Eli?”

When I don’t answer, his eyes widen, realizing I’m not worried about them.

He steps forward and cups my face. “You’re my groupie, the only one I want. They could fill the room full of supermodels, and I’ll only have eyes for you,” he tells me before pulling me in for a fierce kiss. “Now get back onto that bed so I can show you that I don’t want anyone else.” And with that, I quickly scramble onto the bed, and seconds later, that man has me screaming.

HENDRIX

Everly is meeting Shelby as her helicopter lands to bring her back to the house. Seeing her face drop yesterday over the news that Shelby would be coming to stay and the concern she had that I would want her, hit me hard in the chest. Does she not know how much I want her? *It's been three weeks, that's not a long time.* No, it's not, but I thought with the number of orgasms I was giving her she would understand that all I can think about is her. This entire song list is about her for fuck's sake. She consumes me every fucking day, and last night and this morning, I showed her how obsessed I am with her, over and over again until she was clawing my back, begging me to stop. I told her I would stop when she understood that all I can think about is her. Do I have an unhealthy obsession with this woman? It seems like it, but for the first time in my life, I can relax and be myself, someone I haven't seen in who knows how long—if ever. She feels like home to me. Maybe that's a lot of pressure I'm putting on us when we are so new, but now that the fucking dam has burst, I can't hide it. I want, no, I need the world to know she's mine and mine only. I don't need another man coming around and showing her that she deserves better than a fucked-up rock star. I know I don't deserve this angel, the one that holds me, soothes me, when the demons visit late at night. It's the reason I spend most of the night between her legs, to keep them at bay.

“Shelby fucking Underwood. That woman is fine,” Eli states as we patiently wait for her arrival.

“Thank fuck Hendrix is loved-up,” Zeke teases.

“You in love, man?” Eli asks as he turns to see my reaction.

“Obsessed yes, but love, no. It seems early, don’t you think?” I ask them both.

“The fact that you’re questioning that makes me think feelings are a little stronger than we thought,” Zeke adds with a grin.

“How could you not fall in love with Everly? I love her already,” Eli states, which pulls an annoyed growl from my lips. “Like a fucking sister. Easy there, tiger.” He chuckles.

“We both love her, so don’t fuck her over because if we have to make a choice between the two of you, I’d say your stock is sliding.” Zeke glares at me.

“I don’t want to fuck it up,” I tell them.

“We know you don’t want to, but ...” Eli lets the rest of his sentence fall away.

“You have that little faith in me?” I ask, genuinely hurt by their assumptions.

“It’s not that,” Eli adds.

“Things have been tough since Brodie’s passing for all of us. And we are all finally getting our shit together, but we all could slip back into that dark space when we head back to LA to our old life,” Zeke explains.

Guess he’s right there; I hadn’t thought about that, going back to our old life. Back to our home that the four of us shared. That life we left behind in LA seems like a lifetime ago. Is it something that I want anymore?

“Maybe we should sell the house,” I say.

The boys still and turn to me, eyes wide.

“We all deserve a fresh start.”

“Away from each other?” Eli asks.

I shake my head. “I don’t know, maybe we could buy something and turn it into a studio that we go to together, and then maybe we have our own spaces. It’s time to grow up, I guess.”

“Is this because of Everly?” Zeke asks.

“No, not really. Your question about going back to our life in LA has me thinking. I don’t want to go back to that life of partying, endless women, pity, hatred, anger. I want that in the past, and I want us to look forward to the future again. I want The Lost Boys to be back on top again,” I tell them.

“I’m not looking forward to going back to that home either,” Eli confesses.

Wow, I had no idea. I thought it was only me.

“It feels like Brodie’s energy is still very much there,” he adds.

I know the feeling. Brodie’s death has been a dark cloud over us for such a long time, and it consumed us. I’m worried about us moving back into that environment, that all the good work we’ve done here in Montana might slip away. And I don’t want to go back to the person I was when I was there. Do I still feel guilt over Brodie? Of course I do. I don’t think I can ever rid myself of that, but that guilt isn’t a great big, all-consuming chasm like it used to be.

“I feel strange selling the house though. It’s the last piece of Brodie we have,” Zeke states.

“We could rent it out or it could be our studio. Get a designer in and change it around so that it’s not what it used to be,” Eli suggests.

“Yeah, that way we can still honor Brodie, but it’s a fresh start for all of us,” I agree excitedly.

“What about his room?” Zeke asks.

My stomach sinks at the memory of the way his room was left, his sheets still crumpled from where he had been fucking my girlfriend, everything untouched since that night.

“Maybe we can keep the door closed,” Eli suggests. Zeke nods in agreement.

“This means we’re growing up, doesn’t it?” Zeke muses.

“Guess we are, boys,” I say.

“Had to happen sometime,” Eli adds.

Moments later, we hear the rumble and see Everly’s truck zooming down the dirt road and parking out the front. Eli and Zeke are running out the front door, ready and willing to welcome our new guest. I’m a little slower to walk out because I don’t actually care about meeting Shelby Underwood. I’m more concerned about my woman and reassuring her that she’s all that I see.

“Welcome to the cabin,” Everly states to Shelby. “Oh, I see the welcome crew is here. This is Eli and Zeke,” Everly introduces the boys. Zeke and Eli eagerly greet Shelby and help her with her bags.

“Anything you need on your stay, we are your men,” Eli tells Shelby.

Her cheeks turn pink at my bandmate’s innuendo as she looks both men up and down, intrigue lacing her eyes.

“And this is Hendrix, the other member of The Lost Boys,” Everly says, giving me a smile. I give Shelby a wave, but that’s it, my attention is back on Everly. Shelby smiles, but her attention is pulled back to my boys, who are vying for her attention.

“Follow us, Shelby. We will show you to your room,” Zeke says as the two of them lead the way, her luggage in hand. Shelby follows them with her guitar on her back.

“Things just got interesting,” I say, turning to Everly.

“Don’t think the boys could be any more obvious with their intentions regarding Shelby,” she states.

“Seems like she didn’t mind by the pink of her cheeks,” I tell her.

“Really?”

I nod. “Now come here and let me kiss you.” Everly smiles, jumps into my arms, and kisses me.

This is exactly what home feels like, and I never want this feeling to end.



“WHAT IS THIS TOWN CALLED?” Shelby asks as Everly starts the truck.

“Moonlight Falls,” she says.

“Did you know Everly used to be the rodeo queen of this town,” Eli explains to Shelby.

“I wasn’t rodeo queen. I was barrel racing champion and Miss Rodeo,” Everly says, correcting Eli.

Can’t wait for her to ride me when we get home, I think as I turn and give her a heated stare, which flushes her cheeks pink—she knows exactly what I’m thinking. She’s asked me to keep my hands to myself in front of Shelby in case she says something to Vanessa, and I respect her wishes, for now. But wait until we get home; my hands are going to be all over her.

“That’s so cool,” Shelby says, giving Everly a wide smile.

Sitting in the back together, Shelby is sandwiched in the middle of my brothers, something they both look like they are enjoying way too much. I notice the sly touches, the patting of legs, the hands on thighs as they speak; my boys are working it, and it doesn’t look like she’s hating it either. All we know about Shelby Underwood is she’s a country star from Nashville, and she has a stalker who Jackson is looking into who has been harassing her at her place in LA and around Nashville. If anyone can find out who this jerk-off is, it’s Jackson Connolly.

I’m not sure where this town is that Everly is taking us to, but all I see is darkness, and it’s a while before we finally see the lights of the town.

“It’s not a big town, it’s spread out. But everyone knows everyone and it’s a Saturday night so they will all be at the Midnight Moose bar in town,” she explains.

“There’s moose here?” I ask her.

“Yeah,” she answers.

Okay, I don’t want to run into one of those, especially at midnight. We continue through the town which looks like it’s a leftover set piece from a Wild West movie. I couldn’t imagine growing up in a small town like this. Maybe if we all had, our childhoods wouldn’t have sucked.

“Okay, we are here,” Everly states excitedly as she pulls in and parks out the back of the bar with all the other trucks and motorcycles; seems like the place is full tonight. “I’m so excited for y’all to meet my family and friends.”

This gives me a moment of pause. Family. Am I ready to meet her family? That seems like a big step. My heart starts to thump wildly in my chest. I let the rest of the group head in first while I suck in a couple of deep breaths before stepping inside and solidifying what Everly and I are.

I can do this.

It’s what you’ve wanted. Man up and meet her family and friends. Put on that Hendrix Meyer charm you are known for.

When we step into the place, everything stops, and everyone turns around and stares at the blow-ins.

“Everly Nash is back,” someone hollers from the back, and everyone in the bar shouts and waves their cowboy hats in the air before turning back to what they were doing, and the chatter continues. As she walks past, everyone greets her warmly, chatting to her; she is clearly well-loved in the community. She answers questions about her family, her brother, and her parents before carrying on to the next person. Until screams erupt and a blonde comes rushing out from the back of the bar. Everly screams, too, and they rush toward each other. They hug for ages, laughing and even crying a little.

“I’ve missed you so much. Look at you, looking like Miss LA,” the girl says to her.

“Charlie and I miss you. When are you coming out?” she asks.

“You know LA isn’t my scene.”

Everly nods in understanding, then the blonde looks over her shoulder and notices Everly’s entourage. “You brought me hot men? And Shelby Underwood. All my dreams coming true.” She chuckles.

“Guys, this is my sister, Faith,” Everly explains. “Faith, this is Shelby as you know, then Zeke, Eli, and Hendrix from The Lost Boys.” Everly’s sister hugs us all.

“Wow, you really have brought LA to us.” She chuckles.

“Everly,” another woman screams as she places her drinks down on the nearest table and hugs her.

“Lacey Price, how the heck are you? It’s been ages,” Everly says, greeting the woman.

“It’s been years. Yours and Charlie’s going away party probably was the last time. But I follow all your socials, so I feel like I know what you’ve been up to, except I didn’t know you were in Moonlight Falls,” she says.

“Yeah, no one is meant to know we are here.”

Lacey touches her nose letting Everly know her secret is safe with her. Everly then turns around and introduces Lacey to us. She explains that Lacey is her sister’s best friend, and they are wild together.

“Jesse, Austin, and Hadley are coming in a little later,” Lacey explains to her.

“No way, I haven’t seen them in years,” she says excitedly. I’m not sure who this Jesse and Austin are, but I’m not liking how excited Everly is to see them. *Calm down, Hen. She’s just catching up with old friends.* “Oh, shit guess who else is in town, Stella, and her fiancé EJ. They are out here to check in on the house they are building,” Lacey tells her.

“I heard that she got engaged. Elliott Jones is so hot,” Everly croons.

Who the hell is Elliott Jones?

“She got lucky with him, hot and can cook. He’s started working with Jesse over at his ranch. He’s supplying beef to his restaurants,” Lacey says, filling her in on the gossip. They continue like that, talking about people I have no idea who they are.

Moments later, a round of beers ends up on the table, and I stare down at it, wondering if I should have one. Everly notices my hesitation.

“You don’t have to have one. I can order you a soda or something else. I don’t think they sell non-alcoholic beer.”

I notice Eli and Zeke hesitate too. It’s been a couple of weeks since I’ve tasted alcohol and I don’t know if having a beer will halt all the progress we’ve made.

“I’ll grab us some soda,” Eli says, turning and heading to the bar with Zeke on his heels. Yeah, good idea. Everly decides on a soda too.

“We heard trouble was back in town,” a cowboy states as he walks over to our table. “Little Everly Nash, how are ya?” the cowboy asks, and I hate the way he is eyeing up my woman.

“Austin Price, trouble as always,” she says, hugging him.

“You know trouble loves company,” he says, giving her a wink.

I don’t like it. I walk over and stand behind Everly. “Hey, man, I’m Hendrix,” I say, holding out my hand to him.

He frowns for a moment before realizing I’m with her. “Hey, nice to meet you. You look familiar,” he says, shaking my hand, hard.

“He’s Hendrix Meyer, from The Lost Boys,” Everly says, looking up at me with admiration in her eyes.

“Oh yeah, that’s right. Great music, man,” he says before a female comes up behind him with a beer.

“Everly, look at you. It’s been too long,” she squeals, giving her a hug.

“I know, it’s hard to get back here. I miss it so much,” she says. “Oh sorry, Hendrix, this is Hadley Hunt. Her dad owns the rodeo school. She trained me in barrel racing,” she explains.

I nod and greet her friends. “She was my best student.” Hadley smiles widely. “Hey, you’re not that musician, are you?” she asks me.

“Yes, he’s Hendrix Meyer, you know that. You’re obsessed with The Lost Boys,” Austin states angrily as he glares at Hadley.

She turns around and thumps him in the arm. “Dick,” she grumbles at him. “I promise I am not a weirdo,” she reassures me. “Did you bring him?” she turns and asks Everly.

“Yes, she’s been helping us work on our new album. I’d even go so far as to say she’s my muse,” I say, sliding my arm around Everly’s shoulders. She tries to nudge me off, but I ignore her. This is just two friends hanging out at the bar together. Hadley eyes us suspiciously but doesn’t say anything.

As the night wears on, every male in the room keeps coming over and saying hi to Everly, and I see them trying to make their moves on her. I’ve had enough when this one guy slides his hand around her hip and pulls her into him.

“Everly, do you have a moment? I need to talk to you, outside,” I say through gritted teeth.

She blinks a couple of times at me, disentangles herself from the fucking cowboy, and follows me. I head out the side door, and it brings us into the alley. I don’t give her a moment before I push her up against the wall and kiss the life out of her.

“Those men won’t stop fucking touching you,” I growl at her as my teeth nip her neck.

“They were being friendly.” She moans.

“It’s killing me not being able to touch you. You’re fucking mine, Everly, and I want every man in that bar to know you are mine,” I tell her.

She looks up at me stunned by my aggression. “Would it be wrong if I said the fact you are jealous of those men inside is making me wet?”

“Fuckin’ hell, Everly, don’t fucking say that. I’m on the edge.”

She grabs my hand and slides it under her denim skirt, my knuckles slide against her wet underwear.

My fist thumps against the brick wall as I glide a finger into her aching cunt.

“You fucking tease,” I curse her, but I continue to finger fuck her in the back of the alley. I need her to know who fucking owns her, just like she owns me.

EVERLY

As soon as Shelby and the boys disappear into their rooms, Hendrix is dragging me to his. He then slams the door shut and pushes me up against it.

“You were driving me crazy tonight, Everly. Not being able to touch you, having to share you with everyone, and watching every man in that fucking bar salivate over you. It was driving me mad not being able to let them know you were with me,” he grits as his hand slides over my throat and tightens.

My chest is heaving with excitement at seeing a man like Hendrix Meyer lose control with jealousy over me. It’s exhilarating; I feel like a goddess having this man worship me.

“I feel the same way. Those busty blonde bartenders leaning over trying to catch your eye. The waitresses asking every two seconds if you needed anything, wanted anything, being obvious that what they meant was them.”

Hendrix grins as his hand around my throat tightens, and his other hand is slowly undoing the buttons on the front of my denim skirt until it falls to the ground around our feet. He then kicks my feet apart and slides his thigh between them. I’m wet and I’m wearing a barely there G-string so I can feel my wetness coating his denim-covered thigh.

“I’ve never wanted anyone as much as I want you.” He groans as I start to rub myself all over his leg. “I feel out of control with need when I’m around you.” His hand pulsates around my throat before he leans forward and kisses me, his

teeth nipping my bottom lip as a metallic taste slides across my lips. “You’re my new addiction, Everly,” he confesses, those blue eyes peering into my soul.

The hand around my throat moves away and he uses both hands to rip open my blouse, the buttons scattering everywhere. I don’t care, I can buy another one. *That was hot.* I shimmy out of the shirt, and he throws it to the floor before undoing my bra and it follows suit.

“Fuck these tits, Everly, they are perfect,” he growls as he cups them, his thumbs playing with my nipples until they are hard peaks. “Look at my marks all over them.” He grins, staring down at the hickeys he’s left all over my breasts. “Mine,” he says, raising a brow at me.

“Yours,” I reply.

He leans forward and sucks a nipple into his mouth. He started all hot and heavy, but now he’s regained his composure and is moving tortuously slow when I want him to rail me against the wall. I subtly start to rub myself harder against his leg. Then suddenly, his leg falls away from me, making me groan.

“Your greedy little cunt is going to have to wait till I’m ready for her.”

I pout. “I need you, Hen, please.”

“Does my little groupie want her rock star?” He smirks.

Oh roleplay, okay, I’m down for that.

“Yes, and I’ll do anything to get backstage,” I say, putting on a ditzy voice.

“Anything you say?”

I nod and continue to pout.

“Get on your knees, groupie, and show me who’s your favorite rock star,” he growls at me.

Instantly, I fall to my knees and desperately undo his jeans and pull them down with his underwear, releasing his thick cock from its restraints.

“That’s it, groupie. Show me how much you love my music.” He groans as my hands wrap around him and my thumb slides over the tip and across the piercing which has him groaning more. I give his cock a couple of tugs until it’s nice and thick before I wrap my lips around and slide him ever so slowly to the back of my throat. His hands come out and entwine into my hair, his fingers tugging at my strands, and the next thing I know, he’s pushing further into my mouth. “That’s it, groupie, open your throat nice and wide for me. I promise you can take it.”

And I do, relaxing my throat a little, and when he slides further down, his legs almost buckle.

“Fuck, fuck, such a good girl, fuck,” he curses when he starts to slide back and forth down my throat, and his fingers tighten in my hair painfully, but I don’t care; listening to him almost losing himself in my mouth has me practically dripping all over the floor. “So good, fuck, groupie, you’re a good girl, take it, take me all the way.” He groans as I choke around him. “That’s hot, keep gagging on it.” I do, I put on a show for him, and he is lost in the sensation my throat is giving him until he suddenly pulls himself from me. “You almost made me come down your throat. I want to so badly, but I need you coming too.” He steps back and moves to the bed where he quickly undresses himself, clothes flying everywhere until he’s naked, and then he’s hopping onto the bed.

“I want your cunt on my face and my dick down your throat.”

How can I say no to that?



THE SUN IS SHINING BRIGHTLY through the windows, but that isn’t what wakes me, it’s my phone constantly ringing that does.

“What the hell is going on? Whose phone is that?” Hendrix moans beside me.

Turning over, I see it's mine, and when I read the screen, it says *Charlie*. What the hell is he doing calling me so early? Now I'm awake. Something must be wrong; he wouldn't be calling me so early in the morning otherwise.

"Charlie, what is it? Is everyone okay?" I answer quickly.

"Look at your socials," Derrick calls out in the background.

Huh, what does he mean?

"Evie, I promise you we are trying to work out who sold the images, and when we find them, I'm going to make them pay," my brother tells me.

My stomach dips.

"What photos?" I ask him as my heart thumps wildly in my chest.

This has Hendrix sitting up, paying attention to the conversation as he reaches over to his phone and opens it.

"Shit, you don't know?" Charlie says.

"You look hot. The two of you together are setting those photos on fire," Derrick adds.

"Not helping, D," Charlie tells him.

"Two of us together?" I ask.

No. No. No. Please don't tell me someone has photos of Hendrix and me.

"Of you and Hendrix in the alley outside the Midnight Moose," my brother explains to me.

Tears start to fall down my cheeks. No, this can't be happening.

"Shit, E. We're trending," Hendrix says.

No. No. No.

"What can you see?" I ask Charlie.

"Nothing. But you can tell he has his hand up your skirt, and your head is thrown back," Charlie explains quietly.

Fuck.

“I have to go,” I say, hanging up on him before the phone drops on the bed.

“It’s going to be okay, E, I promise, I’m going to make it okay,” Hendrix tries to reassure me.

My life is over. My career. My reputation. Everything is gone.

“It’s not going to be okay. Don’t you get it? I’m the one that has been caught with her client’s fingers in her fucking pussy in front of the entire world. I’m going to be ridiculed, talked about, slut-shamed, and you’re going to be given high fives from your fucking bros,” I yell at him.

“What do you want me to do?” he asks, panic lacing his face.

“Nothing. There’s nothing you can do,” I tell him as I get up out of bed and scramble to find my clothes. “This was a mistake.”

Silence falls around me but I’m too panicked to notice.

“What was a mistake?” Hendrix asks.

I stand up and put my skirt on, then find my bra and do it up. Now I must find the shirt he shredded. “This,” I say almost yelling; how does he not understand it? “Us.” I wave my hands back and forth between us. His face falls as if I’ve sucker punched him, and maybe I have. This was never going to work, I was living in a fantasy world. Who did I think I was, falling for a fucking rock star? Not just any rock star, Hendrix Meyer. I was delusional.

“I never thought we were a mistake,” he says quietly.

“Of course not, this won’t affect you. I’m about to lose everything, everything, and my reputation is ruined. You’ll be just fine. This will probably even make you more famous,” I scream, shrugging into my shirt as tears fall down my cheeks.

My phone rings again, and this time I see it’s Vanessa calling. I turn the phone around and shake it at him. “Look, see, she’s about to fire me. I can’t believe I did this again. I’m

so fucking stupid.” Gripping my phone tightly, I rush out of his room, leaving the shell-shocked rock star behind in his bed.

Vanessa rings again, and I pick it up. “Hi,” I say hesitantly.

“Guess you’ve heard what’s been blasted everywhere,” she says.

“Charlie just told me.”

Silence falls between us. “We will find out who filmed the two of you and bring them to justice. But in the meantime, I have to say I’m disappointed, Everly. I thought you were different to all the others,” she says, sounding frustrated with me and the situation.

“I’m disappointed in myself too,” I tell her. What else can I say?

“What happened?” she asks.

How do I explain to her he grew on me, that things between us never felt like a one-night stand. “He got behind my defenses,” I tell her honestly.

She lets out a sigh. “I understand that. I will say the silver lining was Hendrix started writing again, so I’m not sure if you have anything to do with that or not?” she asks.

“You would have to ask him,” I tell her.

“For what it’s worth, I can see a change in them. You did it, you helped them deal with their demons, but ...”

“But I stepped over the line you asked me not to,” I finish for her.

“Yeah, exactly that. I know you’re a good person, Everly. None of this has changed my mind regarding you as a person, but this is also business and you signed a contract that you wouldn’t sleep with your client. So you understand what this means?” she asks.

“I understand, Vanessa. I messed up.”

“Yeah, you have. I’ve organized for the plane to come and get the boys and bring them back to LA. We need to get them

ahead of this scandal as well as distract the media with news that they have been writing and creating music again. Distract them from your photos. I will say though, the two of you do look hot together. I don't know what is going to happen now this has blown up, but I wish you luck with whatever happens. And I know Jackson and Charlie are on the case to find out who betrayed you like that," Vanessa explains.

"I appreciate the heads-up, and again I'm so sorry for breaking your trust."

And with that, she hangs up the phone, and I fall into a puddle of tears.

HENDRIX

I understand Everly is upset the world is seeing those images of her in a vulnerable position, and I know she's worried that Vanessa is going to fire her over them, but what I don't understand is how quickly she threw us away. Yes, we may not have been officially anything, but I thought we were more than a "mistake" as she put it. It felt like a knife through the heart when she said that.

"Fuck, just heard what happened." Zeke comes rushing in with Eli hot on his heels.

"What lowlife scumbag did this to you two?" Eli adds.

"Is Everly okay?" Zeke questions.

I shake my head. "She wants nothing to do with me," I tell them.

They look between each other before joining me on the bed.

"What do you mean?" Zeke asks.

"It means she told me we were a mistake and basically ran out of my room half-naked because Vanessa was calling her."

"Shit," Eli curses.

"You think Vanessa is firing her?" Zeke asks.

"Have no idea, but Everly thinks so."

Then my phone rings and it makes us all jump. When I look down at the phone, it's Vanessa. I pick it up and answer.

“Hello,” I say, putting it on speaker.

“Hey, Hendrix. I think you know why I’m calling,” Vanessa says.

“Yeah, I have Zeke and Eli here with me.”

“Hey,” they both call out to her.

“Good, I’m glad I have you all on the phone at once, it will save me the phone calls. I’ve organized for the jet to come and collect you and bring you back to LA,” she explains.

What the hell? “No,” I answer immediately. “I’m not leaving Everly.”

“Unfortunately, Everly no longer has a contract with us which means we no longer have access to her home. The jet will be there this evening, and I want the three of you and Shelby to be on that plane,” she says.

“Shelby’s coming?” Zeke questions.

“Yeah, unfortunately, due to the circumstances, it’s for the best. I was hoping that Shelby might be able to hide out at your place for the next couple of days until we can get her sorted and find another option for her,” Vanessa states.

“You’re wanting us to do you a favor when you couldn’t do one for us and not fire Everly,” I argue with her.

“Hendrix, she signed a contract saying she wouldn’t sleep with any of you. She broke that contract in spectacular fashion. There was no other choice,” she explains.

“It was consensual, she didn’t take advantage of me. I pursued her, I was the one that kissed her first at your party, way before we were working together,” I explain to her.

“Wait, what did you do?” Vanessa asks.

Zeke and Eli stare at me blankly, and I realize I dropped my foot into it. “I thought she was a groupie and when I tried to kiss her, she kicked my feet out and I ended up on the ground and then kissed her anyway.”

“He hasn’t stopped thinking about her since he met her that night, then she showed up in Montana, and he had a heart

attack,” Eli explains to Vanessa.

“Everly had kissed you before accepting the job?” Vanessa asks.

“Think you said the wrong thing,” Zeke whispers to me, and I think he is right. Seems in defending Everly, I may have made it worse.

“To be fair, she almost punched me in the dick that night for kissing her, so she wasn’t thrilled to see me in Montana,” I add.

“And yet here we are with an almost sex tape of the two of you in an alleyway,” Vanessa states.

“Look, I know it doesn’t look good, but if it wasn’t for her the three of us wouldn’t be writing or making music again.”

“She’s Hendrix’s muse,” Eli adds.

Not helping, man.

“Your muse?” she asks, sounding skeptical.

“Who do you think ‘Sunshine’ was written about?” I ask her. We recorded the song on our phone and sent it to the team at Dirty Texas Records to show them that we were back.

“That haunting song was about her?” Vanessa asks.

“Hendrix wrote it about her saving him,” Zeke adds.

“Because she did, she saved Hen. He was a mess before she came into our lives, we all were,” Eli pipes in.

“I’m not denying that what Everly has done for the three of you is a miracle and I told her that, but we still had a contract. I’m disappointed over the situation. I thought Everly was different and that I could trust her around you all.”

“You can, you could. Hendrix is just in love with her that’s all,” Eli confesses to Vanessa.

The entire room goes silent at Eli’s bombshell. Zeke elbows him and gives him a *what the fuck* look. I’m stunned that those words came out of his mouth, even if they may be true—I’ve fallen for her. There’s no one else for me. Everly is

my muse, but she also has my heart. And I just hope one day soon when this all blows over that she might be willing to give me another chance.

“Is that true?” Vanessa asks.

“That I’ve fallen for her? Yeah, that’s true. It may be a little early for the L word, but my feelings for her are real, Ness. I’m sorry we messed up and went behind your back, but if I’m honest, I wanted what the two of us had to be just us until we were certain. When we got back to LA I was going to ask her if she might be interested in pursuing things further. The thought of leaving Montana and she’s not with me turns my stomach. I don’t want to return without her,” I confess.

“You’re refusing to get on that plane?” she asks.

“Yeah, I’m refusing to get on the plane,” I tell her.

“Me too,” Zeke says.

“Me three,” Eli adds.

“Seriously, the two of you, too. What’s been going on down there?” Vanessa asks.

“Nothing like that, Ness. She’s like a sister to us. She’s family now and we don’t leave family when things get rough,” Zeke tells her.

“I can’t believe I’m even thinking what I’m thinking. If I say yes ...” she starts, and we all rejoice in victory. “I said ‘if’ I say yes, I need something from the three of you.”

I’ll give her anything.

“Finish the album and then come home,” she states.

The three of us pump our fists in the air at her request; we can do that.

“I’m not talking about six months or even three months. I’ll give you all an extra month to have it finished. I’ll cancel the plane, but you have to promise me that you’ll do it and not spend all your time with your new girlfriend,” Vanessa warns me.

“I promise we will work our asses off and get this album finished for you. Does that mean Everly has her job back?” I ask.

Vanessa sighs. “No job, but I can hire her to babysit Shelby. At least I know she’s not going to sleep with her, hopefully,” Vanessa says with a chuckle.

“I’d pay to see that,” Eli pipes up.

Zeke and I both punch him in the arm.

“Ouch,” he says, rubbing his arm and pouting.

“I’m going soft in my old age, but I mean it, boys, hard work, and get that album finished. Then we can record it when you get back to LA,” she says.

Sounds great to me. I don’t care as long as I get to be with Everly, that’s all that matters.

EVERLY

“Hey, are you okay?” Shelby asks as she knocks on my door.

I’ve been bawling my eyes out into my pillow since getting off the phone from Vanessa. “Oh, sorry, um, yeah, I guess.”

Shelby comes in and takes a seat at the edge of my bed, reaches out, and starts rubbing my back, which makes me sigh. “I heard what happened, actually I saw it on my socials.”

“It’s everywhere, isn’t it?”

She nods. “To be fair, the two of you did look hot in the clips I saw. That’s what a lot of people have been saying online, too. Others are saying that you’re Hendrix’s muse because the boys posted photos of them on their instruments or something again. And they are applauding you for that,” she explains.

She’s too kind telling me about the nice stuff that’s been posted online, I can only imagine what the negative stuff says. “I messed up, and I’m sorry this has blown up on your first day.”

She waves me away. “Please, your scandal is helping me forget my own.”

Guess there’s that.

“How are you and Hendrix?” she asks.

“I don’t know. I panicked, I told him that he was a mistake, that I was stupid for sleeping with him, all these horrible things all because I was scared and upset that Vanessa was going to fire me. I had signed a contract that said no sleeping with the boys, and I broke it,” I explain.

Shelby nods in understanding. “Bet it was good though. I mean, those photos don’t lie, the two of you are scorching,” she says, giving me a smile, obviously trying to cheer me up.

“It is so good,” I confess to her, “but I also should have known better. A year ago I was dating a client who I thought I was in love with. He said all the right things, he took me out, we acted like a real couple, he never hid me, then his wife walked in on us in a compromising position and decided to ruin me. I promised myself that I would never ever do that again and slowly rebuilt myself, until Hendrix,” I say, and I start to cry again.

Shelby reaches over and gives me a warm hug. “It’s not your fault about that other guy, even if he was a client. You can’t help who you fall for. And I’ve only been here for one day, but I could see the way that man looked at you last night at the bar. He’s obsessed with you, in a healthy way not a stalkerish kind of way,” she says, giving me a giggle, trying to make light of her situation.

Oh gosh, here I am moaning about my life, and she has something happening to her that’s more serious than me losing my job.

“I’m sorry, here I am talking about me. Are you okay? Vanessa didn’t tell me anything other than you needed a place to stay,” I tell her as I wipe away my tears.

She shakes her head. “Honestly, please don’t take this the wrong way, but your drama is the only thing helping me forget mine,” she tells me.

And for the first time, I burst out laughing in between hiccups of tears.

“I’m glad I could be of service,” I say, and we both laugh at the entire situation.

“One day I’ll tell you my story, Everly. I promise,” she tells me just as my phone rings. “Get it, I’ll leave you be.”

“Thank you,” I say as I look down and see Vanessa’s name on the phone. *Oh shit.* “Hello,” I answer nervously as I try to sound confident but fail horribly.

“Oh, Everly. Have you been crying?”

I sniffle and try to think of an answer for her but fail as my mind is too frazzled.

“Please, don’t cry. Honestly, I’m calling because I have good news and I’m hoping it might cheer you up,” she says.

Oh.

“Okay,” I say shakily.

“I’ve just got off the phone with Hendrix,” she starts, and my stomach sinks. Oh no, what happened there? “And I have to say he surprised me. You might need to talk to that man. He had your back, he even threatened to not come back to LA unless I rehired you.”

He did what?

“I appreciate his loyalty. I did tell him, unfortunately, the contract states the terms but ...”

There’s a but? My heart starts to thunder in my chest. What does that mean? I don’t understand. Why would he threaten Vanessa for me? That wouldn’t be good for his career.

“... but Shelby needs a babysitter for the next month while we work out her situation and the best place for her is I believe in Montana where she is safe and I want to hire you to look after her,” Vanessa explains.

My mind blanks. She’s hiring me. I don’t understand. After everything that’s happened, she’s giving me a second chance?

“As long as you don’t sleep with Shelby,” she adds, chuckling.

She’s cracking jokes already about the situation. I’m going to be okay. I’m still so surprised that I don’t say anything.

“Everly, as I told you earlier, I still like you as a person, and you are still very much welcome in my home. Derrick would insist on it anyway, and as I said earlier, I don’t hate you over the situation, I was just disappointed. But the way that man fought for you reminded me a bit of Christian when he fought for me too. That rock star has feelings for you, and I’m not sure how you feel about him, but I think you both need to talk and if you decide that the two of you are going to date then I’m happy for the both of you, and I support it one hundred percent,” she tells me.

“I don’t know what to say,” I tell her.

“Say yes. Then go and talk to that man,” she demands.

“Okay, yes. And thank you, Vanessa. I know I don’t deserve this second chance, but I won’t let you down.”

“I know you won’t. Also, don’t worry about the images. I promise you Charlie and Jackson are doing everything to find out who the hell is behind these photos, and we will deal with them. I have to go but welcome back to the team. I’ll send through the new contract. Please sign it and get it back to me as soon as you can.” And with that, she’s gone.

What the hell just happened?

I need to find Hendrix. I throw the covers of my bed back and rush out of my room, down the corridor, and to his door. I don’t even worry about knocking as I rush straight in and come up short when I see Hendrix and the boys sitting together talking. Tears begin to well in my eyes when I see him. He looks distraught while the boys are trying to comfort him.

“E, are you okay?” Eli sees me, gets up, and comes over, giving me a hug.

I see Hendrix’s eyes widen as he watches me, but his face is still stony.

“I think we might leave you both,” Zeke says, giving me a hug too.

The boys walk out of the room and close the door behind them, leaving Hendrix and me alone together. The air in the

room shifts and I can feel the tension radiating off him. Silence swirls around us as panic starts to rise up in my body, setting it on fire; my throat is closing up, and my mind is going blank as I stare at my broken rock star.

“I love you, Hen,” the words come out and I freeze. What the hell did I say? No. No. No. Tears well in my eyes as my hands come up and cover my mouth. That wasn’t at all what I wanted to say.

Hendrix’s eyes pop open wide at my confession.

“Um, I’m going to go,” I tell him as I turn around and hightail it to the door.

Seconds later, I hear footsteps and then a hand slams the door shut as I reach it. He is behind me; I can feel the warmth of his body as my hands press against the wood of the door.

“My little groupie loves me, does she?” he says, and his warm breath slides along my neck, sending goosebumps over my flesh.

“I think I do.”

“You think you do?” he asks, then spins me around and glares down at me. “Should be easy. Yes or no?”

“It’s not easy to answer because I don’t want to be the one standing on the ledge. For all I know you hate me again. I hurt you this morning. I panicked, flashbacks of what happened a year ago hit me and consumed me. I’m sorry.”

Hendrix is silent as he stares down at me. “I never hated you, E. I wanted you and that’s what I hated. From the moment I kissed you at Vanessa and Christian’s, I wanted you. You got so far under my skin so quickly it confused me and then I was subjected to you running around in that skintight fucking activewear and my dick was constantly hard. You stood up to me every chance you got, you never backed down, and fuck did it make me want you even more. So, I never hated you, Everly. I craved you. I keep telling you I’m obsessed with you, but you don’t seem to want to believe me. I’m not going anywhere, groupie. Especially not when you own my fucking heart, my mind, and my soul.”

Tears rush down my cheeks, my chest heaving at his confession.

“Is this what love feels like? I don’t know as I’ve never been in love before or felt love. But if it is then it’s what I feel for you, E.”

Damn him and his words. The tears flow as I slowly break down.

“Baby, please, don’t cry,” he says softly, wiping away my tears.

“They are happy ones, I promise,” I say through hiccups.

“They are?” He doesn’t sound convinced.

I nod and launch myself at the rock star. Maybe he is right; I am a groupie because I’m just as obsessed with him. I’ve never felt this way before, and like he said, if this is love then I love it. As I kiss the ever-loving hell out of him.

“Did you talk to Vanessa?” he asks, breaking our kiss.

“Yes, and I can’t believe you threatened to not get on the plane.”

“As if I would leave you here with all those fucking cowboys that would be knocking on your door the moment I left.” He grins.

“I don’t know how I can thank you for doing that for me. No one has stuck up for me like that before.”

“I have a few ideas on how you can thank me.”

I giggle as I roll my eyes at him. I have a couple of ideas myself.

“She gave us her blessing if we want to continue whatever this is,” I tell him.

“Whatever this is? If you don’t know by now that you’re my woman and I’m your man, then I’m going to have to fuck that right back into you so that you do.”

Yes, please.

EVERLY

“Hey, any news?” I ask my brother. It’s been a couple of days since the news of Hendrix and I broke, and I’ve been wanting this entire saga of my compromising images to just disappear. People on the internet are cruel, and I’m trying to stay away from socials at the moment. The Lost Boys groupies are not happy with me.

“Yes, we found them. Is Hendrix with you?” my brother asks.

I turn and look over at the naked rock star beside me. “Yes.”

“Good, put it on speaker, he will want to know.”

So, I do. Hendrix frowns and stares at the phone.

“It was Alice, your old assistant. She had contacted a private investigator to track the band and find anything on you that she could use to bring you down. He tracked you down to Moonlight Falls, not sure how, and he lay in wait until that night. He was the one who took the photos. What he didn’t realize in Moonlight Falls is the alley was private property because old man Sanders owns the entire block and when he found out what had happened, he contacted me and said he wanted to sue on your behalf.”

My heart blooms.

“Because of this, the private investigator has distanced himself from Alice. We struck a deal with him that we will keep his name out, but he needs to make a statement that he

supplied Alice with deep fake images and that the couple in the alley weren't the two of you it was another couple. That he couldn't find you and he wanted the job done so he faked them, but he didn't know she was going to use the images to sell."

He's going to do what?

"But what about the people at the bar? They saw us there," Hendrix asks.

Charlie laughs. "You're a city boy so it's hard to explain, but there is no way in hell Moonlight Falls would sell out one of their own."

Hendrix looks over at me, and I nod in agreement.

"Vanessa is preparing the label's statement. She is going to talk about how Alice was fired and had been threatening the label or something like that. She is demanding the news outlets retract the story and ask them to make a statement about how they shared something that wasn't authentic. It won't delete it forever, but it might be something."

This is good news. It's better than nothing.

"Derrick, I'm on the phone. No, you can't ... here's Derrick," my brother states.

"Everly, sweetie, I just need a word with your man," Derrick says.

Oh no, this isn't going to be good.

"Hendrix, if you're listening, if you hurt our girl, I will find you and cut your pretty pierced dick off and shove it where the sun doesn't shine," he warns Hendrix, who looks shocked at the sudden outburst. "We miss you, Everly. When you get home we need a family dinner. Hendrix, you are invited too."

"Thanks," he says, clearly confused by the sudden change.

"Thanks, D. I miss you all too. I should be back in a month," I tell them.

“That long?” I can hear Derrick pouting on the other side. “Maybe we need a trip to Montana, Charlie. You know I look great in ass less chaps.”

“Derrick,” my brother screams at his partner. “Okay, well, I’m going to let you go. Love you and see you when you get home. Oh, and Hendrix, I ditto Derrick’s statement about your dick.” And with that, he hangs up.

“Um, right, I don’t know if I should be frightened or not,” he says, holding his hand over his dick.

“They are harmless, kind of,” I tease.

He doesn’t look convinced.

“How do they know I have a piercing?” he asks.

I bite my bottom lip and smile.

“Everly,” he shouts before he launches himself at me, making me squeal. “That’s weird my future brothers-in-law know what my dick looks like.”

“I didn’t take a photo. Wait, what did you say?” My face instantly heats at his words.

“You’re stuck with me, groupie,” he says. Looking down at me, his thumb slides a strand of my hair away from my cheek.

“Who’s the groupie now?” I tease, but my insides have turned all smooshy because of his words.

“Fuck yeah, I am, and will be every single day of our lives.”

And with that declaration, he kisses me until I’m a puddle.

HENDRIX

“I’m nervous,” I tell the boys.

“Don’t be, she’s going to say yes,” Zeke reassures me as he places the last couple of rose petals at the front door.

“This is a big step, man. Are you ready for it?” Eli grins.

Damn right I am. That extra month in Montana was exactly what we needed together, it only solidified my feelings for her, and that I am one hundred percent in love with Everly Nash, and that there is no one else in this world for me and no one else I want. We also finished the album plus may have written more songs for the next one. What can I say? I was fucking inspired.

“Okay, good luck. Keep us in the loop and congratulations again,” Zeke says as he and Eli wave me goodbye.

You’ve got this. Yes, it’s a big step but it’s the right one. Coming back from Montana after two months of living with Everly and now not having her in my bed every single night doesn’t work for me. I don’t like this distance, I hate the fact that she is so far away. It doesn’t feel right, it’s like something is missing.

And it is, it’s her.

A little while later, I see Everly drive up to the house in her white Tesla and stop. She’s dressed in a cute white sundress, her blonde hair is pulled up in a high ponytail, and she’s not wearing any makeup. She looks like an angel, and I am the luckiest man in the world to have her by my side.

“Hey,” she says, her face lighting up when she sees me, and my heart thuds in my chest. There isn’t a better feeling in the world than the one she gives me, making me feel invincible. “This place looks incredible,” she says, looking around at the multi-million-dollar home I just bought, my first by myself. Zeke and Eli have bought one, too, literally at the back of mine, and we have created a gate between the two homes so that we are always connected.

When we got back from Montana, the home that we shared with Brodie had been transformed, except for his room, which is now bolted shut. And we’ve turned it into our studio, work offices. The darkness that was once there has gone, and a new creative energy has replaced it. We won’t ever forget about Brodie, he was our brother, but we also won’t let his memory take us down a self-destructive path ever again. The three of us have too much to live for and my main reason is standing right in front of me.

Reaching out, I take her hand and lead her into the home. As soon as the door opens, Everly gasps as she notices the hallway littered with rose petals.

“Hendrix?” she asks hesitantly.

I ignore her question as there is so much more I need to show her before I answer. We continue down the corridor until we reach the living room and the open space which extends out to the backyard with its views of LA. There are rose petals strewn everywhere, the boys had gone a little overboard.

“I wanted to ask you something, Everly.” I turn and look down at her.

“You do?”

I nod as I reach out and cup her face. “I never thought anyone could love me, until you. You are the reason I wake up and choose to step into the sunshine every single day. Since getting back to LA, I realize how much I’ve missed you. I hate waking up in the morning and rolling over and you’re not there.”

“I do too,” she answers.

“Good because, Everly Nash, I bought this house for us. For us to start creating memories together in. Maybe one day we might get married, start a family, who knows what the future holds, but all I know is I want it with you. So, will you move in with me?” I ask her.

Everly’s mouth falls open in surprise. “Move in?” she stutters over her words.

I nod my head.

“I thought you were proposing?”

Oh. Is she sad that I’m not? Should I have? I mean, I want to but I thought it was too early.

“You deserve a proposal better than this. Believe me when the time is right, it’s going to be epic,” I tell her.

She gives me a wide smile. “Oh, thank goodness. I would have said yes, but also, it’s too soon. I mean, I love you with all my heart, and you’re my one but ... you know,” she says with a chuckle.

“I know,” I tell her as I reach out and wrap my arms around her. “So, what do you say? You wanna be roomies?”

“Yes. Yes. Yes.” She squeals.

Thank fuck.

THE END



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JA Low lives on the Gold Coast in Australia. When she's not writing steamy scenes and admiring hot surfers, she's tending to her husband and two sons and running after her chickens while dreaming up the next epic romance.



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ROCKSTAR SERIES

Dirty Texas

Book 1 - Wyld & Dirty.

Book 2 - Dirty Promises

Book 3 - Bound & Dirty.

Book 4 - Dirty Trouble

Book 5 - Broken & Dirty.

BILLIONAIRE SERIES - 1

The Paradise Club

Book 1 - Paradise

Book 2 - Lost in Paradise

Book 3 - Paradise Found

Book 4 - Craving Paradise

This series has characters that interconnect with The Dirty Texas series & The Playboys of New York & The Hartford Brothers

BILLIONAIRE SERIES - 2

The Playboys of New York

Book 1 - Off Limits

Book 2 - Strictly Forbidden

Book 3 - The Merger

Book 4 - Taking Control

Book 5 - Without Warning

This series interconnects with The Hartford Brothers & The Paradise Club & Dirty Texas Series.

BILLIONAIRE SERIES - 3

The Hartford Brothers

Book 1 - Tempting the Billionaire

Book 2 - Playing the Player

Book 3 - Seducing the Doctor

This series interconnects with The Playboys of New York & The Paradise Club

BILLIONAIRE SERIES - 4

Under the Spanish Sun

Book 1 - The Hotshot Chef

Book 2 - (Coming Soon)

Book 3 - (Coming Soon)

This series interconnects with The Dirty Texas Series

BILLIONAIRE SERIES - 5

The Art of Love Series

Book 1 - Arrogant Artist

Book 2 - (Coming Soon)

Book 3 - (Coming Soon)

This series interconnects with The Paradise Club Series.

BILLIONAIRE SERIES - 6

Italian Nights Series

Book 1 - The Sexy Stranger

Book 2 - (Coming Soon)

Book 3 - (Coming Soon)

This series interconnects with The Bratva Jewels Series

MAFIA SERIES

Bratva Jewels Series

Book 1 - Sapphire

Book 2 - Diamond

Book 3 - (Coming Soon)

ROYAL SERIES

The Twisted Royals Series

Book 1 - Three's a Crown

Book 2 - (Coming Soon)

Book 3 - (Coming Soon)