



HUGHES RACING SERIES

SHIFTED

LORI MATTHEWS

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BOOK 1

LORI MATTHEWS



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ABOUT THE BOOK

Former racing driver, Dalton Hughes, renowned for his lightning-fast reflexes and insatiable desire for speed, faces his biggest challenge yet: Being team manager on a shoestring budget. When one of his drivers dies in a fiery crash, his world starts to skid off track. To make matters worse, the insurance adjuster assigned to the case is none other than the woman who stole his heart.

Greer Styger, a talented racing driver in her own right, dreads the prospect of confronting the past she'd left behind. Sent to Austria to investigate a death on the track, her curiosity ignites a suspicion that the accident was staged to cover up a murder. Reuniting with Dalton, the reckless man who once stole her heart, will thrust her into a mystery filled with danger and deceit.

As they race to unravel the truth, the attraction between them rekindles. But a killer lurking in the shadows will do anything to stop them. Dalton and Greer discover that their love never truly died; it has only shifted gears. Now, with the truth on the line, they are in for the ride of their lives. Will they reach the finish line, or will they crash and burn?

Shifted

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DEDICATION

This one is for my husband. Thanks for taking me on so many wonderful adventures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the last couple years my husband raced with the Porsche Track Experience doing the Rennsport Season. It was a truly amazing experience for both of us. He learned how to race and I learned more than I ever wanted to about the sport. I decided to put all that knowledge to good use and write a racing series.

There are so many people I need to thank for all their help with this project so here it goes:

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Sascha Maassen for answering my endless questions in detail and with a great deal of patience. I learned so much without ever having to get behind the wheel of a race car for which I am profoundly grateful. Frederic Klein, from Porsche Track Experience has been nothing but helpful and kind with my interminable questions.

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I miss all your smiling faces. Hugs to everyone. xoxo

Any and all mistakes are my own and the characters in this book are just that, characters, figments of my imagination and have no resemblance to any real person living or otherwise.

CHAPTER ONE

Dalton Hughes leaned on the wing of the Porsche 911 GT3 Cup car and savored a sip of his coffee. This was his favorite time of day. Early morning, the sun shining, the air crisp. The snow on the Austrian Alps sparkled in the distance. Today was a new beginning. A new season stretched out before them. At this moment, anything was possible.

He caressed the wing of the powerful sporting machine. The car was as special as the morning. A mechanical wonder, designed with exceptional track control, air-cooled brakes and engine. The car was sexy, and never failed to rev his sense of tradition and victory.

Settling more comfortably, he scanned his surroundings. Red Bull Ring was one of his favorite tracks. He'd won here quite a few times back in his racing days. Now, as a coach and team manager, it was the ideal place to see what this year's crop of new drivers could do. The surroundings and the facilities were top-notch, but it was more than that. This place had a unique, exciting energy.

The crew felt it, too. They were positively giddy at being at a track again. The winter in Mullenbach, Germany, had been long. Being on the road again brought smiles to everyone's faces.

“Do you know where the router is?” Greta Willem, his second-in-command, skidded to a halt in front of him and tapped her foot impatiently. “We need to get the laptops online. Also...” She paused when one of the mechanics used the air gun to remove a tire. He stopped, and she started speaking again. “We’re missing the—” The air gun went off again. She waited. It stopped. “The cords to the—” The air gun started again.

Dalton looked over Greta’s shoulder at James Macht, a gifted mechanic with a comedic sense of timing. He responded with a grin and a wink at Dalton.

Greta turned, but James used the air gun on the tire one last time and then walked away without a backward glance. Greta refocused on Dalton. “The cords to download the data from the cars.”

Dalton bit back a grin. James loved to wind up Greta. They all did. She was more intense than an F1 coach on race day. With the nervous energy coming off her, he’d have sworn she must’ve inhaled an entire pot of coffee this morning, but she didn’t touch the stuff.

“Look in the cabinet at the back of the new office, under the cushion seat.”

She turned and zoomed back through the garage toward the trucks.

“Wound a bit tight, that one.” Gus Richards, the head mechanic, shook his head. “It’s going to give her a heart attack.”

Dalton grinned. “She’s twenty-seven. I think she’ll be fine.”

Gus shrugged. “You’d think so but, man, she’s just a jumble of energy. She makes me jittery.” As if to prove his point, he strolled slowly toward the large workbench with the video screens on the wall above it. Gus thought everyone was dying, mostly because he was in his sixties, and death was on his brain.

“Dalton,” called Mario Bauer. His lead engineer stood in front of an identical setup to Gus’s on the other side of the room. His expression was grim as he jerked his head to the side, beckoning Dalton over.

Dalton’s shoulders tightened as he made his way across the garage. “What’s up?” he asked warily.

Mario leaned over and spoke quietly. “Rory isn’t here yet.”

Dalton’s good mood sputtered. His brother’s tardiness was not a good sign. “When did you last speak to him?”

“This morning at breakfast. He was fine then.”

“You sure? You know how good he is at hiding it.”

Mario insisted, “I know the signs to look for. Rory was stone-cold sober. He was in a good mood and excited about the start of the season.”

“So, where the hell is he then?”

Mario shrugged. “He was supposed to pick up his driver, but he didn’t show. I asked Timo to pick up Moore when he picked up the other two.”

“Thanks.” Dalton stared unseeing at the wall of screens in front of him. “Did Rory say anything at breakfast that might give a clue where he went?”

“Said he was going back to his room to get his stuff and then he was going to pick up his driver. As he was leaving the

dining room, he got a call. He waved and left, still chatting on his phone.”

Dalton drummed his fingers on the countertop. “Was his car still there when you left?”

“Yes, but I left directly from the dining room about five minutes later.”

“And you’ve called his cell?”

“Multiple times. Straight to voicemail.”

Dalton pulled his cell out of his pocket. He used the Find My Phone app and looked for his brother’s location. The app focused on the moving target on the map. His brother was on A9, driving away from the track and, it appeared, quite fast. Dalton cursed silently.

“Can you check everything to make sure there’s paperwork for Rory’s driver? I’ll take his training for the day. Tell anyone who asks that I sent Rory to Munich to talk to someone about the business. That buys us a day.”

“Should we send someone out looking for him?” Mario asked.

Dalton held up his phone. “I can see where he is, or at least where his phone is. Keep trying him periodically, and I’ll do the same. He’s got to stop at some point. Hopefully, he’ll call.” History had taught Dalton to not cling too tightly to that hope. He wrapped one hand around his nape and massaged the tension building there.

A commotion behind him drew Dalton’s attention. His other coach, Timo, had arrived with three drivers. Putting on his game face, he strolled over. “Gentlemen, I hope you slept well and are ready to get started.”

“Can’t wait,” Tatum Chandler, the new American driver grinned boyishly. He was in his mid-thirties, on the younger side for gentlemen racers, which is what the European Cup catered to, but the drivers were getting younger by the year. Formula One had drawn more attention to the sport, and avid fans were becoming aware of the opportunities available to participate in something they’d only been able to enjoy vicariously through TV.

“It is all very exciting,” said the soft-spoken German driver, Hans Muller.

Dalton grinned and scrubbed his palms together. “You guys can get your fire suits on, then your coach will go over what to expect in the practice session.”

Hans and Tatum nodded, and Timo directed them to a truck where they could change and gave them the door code.

The third driver, Dennis Moore, ignored Dalton as he passed by, phone pressed to his ear.

He spoke into the phone, “I don’t have time for this, and clearly, you’re not listening because we’re still having this conversation.”

Dalton glanced at Timo, who gave a small shrug. “Been on his phone since I swung by to get him. He was upset about Rory not picking him up.”

“Okay. I’ll see if I can’t smooth over his ruffled feathers. Rory had to run to Munich for a meeting.”

Timo raised his eyebrows but said nothing.

“It’s not going to work. I said no, and I meant it!” Moore ended the call and strode back to Dalton. “Not a very auspicious start today, Hughes. Where’s Rory?” Moore frowned as he stowed his phone in his pocket.

“I’m sorry about that, Dennis. A bit of miscommunication between me and my brother. I’ll be training you today.”

Moore nodded. “Fine. That will work.”

Dalton took a breath and held it for a slow count of five. Considering he was a former factory driver and a racing champion, it damn well *better* work. If Hughes Racing didn’t need the money so badly, there was no way he’d have welcomed Moore onto the team. But the company was in a huge bind. In fact, they were circling the drain. If he didn’t find a big influx of cash soon, this would be their last racing season.

“Timo will show you where to get changed. Come to the office”—he pointed at the trailer next to him that would be his office for the season—“when you’re ready, and we’ll go over a few things before the first session starts.”

Moore nodded, and Timo started walking him toward the other trailer. He shot a look over his shoulder at Dalton. *Better you than me.*

Dalton closed his eyes and swore under his breath. Whatever Rory was up to it had better be good.

“Got you another coffee.” Kendra Ballentyne shot him a smile as she handed him a cup of the jet-black brew.

“Thanks. How’s everything? We all good?”

“Yup. Finished setting up last night. The mini fridge is stocked. Lots of chocolate and fruit. Plenty of water. We’re good to go.” She started to turn away but paused. “I checked all the radios and headsets. One wasn’t working, so I put it back in storage. When we get back to the office, I’ll see if I can get it going again.”

“Thanks for staying on top of it, Kendra.”

She waved as she walked away. She, like his entire crew, knew that money was tight, and they all did everything they could to help keep expenses low. But they also knew not to scrimp when it came to safety. That was the main priority.

Coffee in hand, Dalton walked up the steps into the office trailer, the last big purchase his father had made before he passed away. While having rigs where the sides expanded so they had a full office with a small sitting area in the back was amazing, but unnecessarily expensive. His father never should have made the purchase.

The trailer where the drivers changed also had storage space so that helped, but running three trucks to transport all their equipment was a massive line item in the budget. One they really couldn't afford.

Dalton glanced at the sitting area to his right. Greta must have found the cables because the cushions were back in place. He walked through the door on his left, around the large conference table in the middle of the room and took a seat at the far end. That was his space. Mario sat across the table closest to the door.

“Mario, do you have—” He hadn't finished the words before Mario handed him the track book for Dennis Moore. “Thanks.”

He sat down and flipped it open. Rory had made some notes for Moore on the track map worksheet, which was a huge plus. Rory and Moore had already worked on the simulation for the track, but Dalton had no clue how Moore would handle the real thing.

Pulling out his phone, Dalton glanced at the on-screen app. His brother was still driving toward Germany. He hit the

button to call and was not surprised when the call went to voicemail. A frisson of disappointment inched through him.

“I need to make some calls, so we need to make this quick,” Moore announced as he entered the mobile office.

A snarky response flicked through his brain, but Dalton held his tongue and just pointed to the seat next to him. “Let’s get started.”

He waited until Moore was settled and then began, “Rory noted that you need to watch your line going up to turn one. Stay on the outside. The inside is the defensive line. That’s the line you take when you’re racing with someone, but for this session, our real concern is nailing the exit on the corner. So, let’s practice the outside line. Remember to start feeding the gas a hair before the apex of the turn. That will get you up to speed on your exit but avoid the curbing on the way out of the turn. It will unsettle the car, and you’ll bounce all around like this.” He put his hand in the air and moved it back and forth and up and down.

Moore glanced at Dalton’s hand and then down at the paper. “Fine. Got it. Don’t hit the curb.” And then went back to staring at his phone.

“Dennis, I need you to focus on what I’m saying.”

“I said I’ve got it.” The man looked up. “What’s next?” He let out an exasperated sigh.

Twenty minutes later, Moore left to prepare for the practice session. As soon as the door closed behind the man, Dalton leaned back in his chair and blew out a harsh breath. He hadn’t given his brother enough credit. Dealing with Dennis Moore would drive anyone crazy, yet his brother hadn’t complained

once. He'd said they had a good rapport. *Was that even possible?*

Timo breezed into the office. "Time to go. You okay?"

Dalton shook his head. "Sometimes I think I should have quit the racing world and gone into selling insurance. It's got to be easier than this."

Timo grinned. "It's not always that bad. Moore is a very particular client. Mostly, coaching is fun."

"Sure. Sure. That's what they all say." Dalton shook his head as he stood and stretched. Time for him to get ready. "Hey, Mario, can you make sure to keep a close eye on Moore's car? I want to see exactly what he's doing on the track."

"Will do."

Dalton headed to the other trailer to change into his fire suit. Pulling on his gear never failed to make him smile.

It meant he was going to be racing, and there was no place and nothing on earth he'd rather be doing. Nothing touched the thrill of being in the driver's seat of a powerful race car. He might not be racing now, but he'd have some fun going around the track, something he didn't get to do very often anymore. Might just make dealing with the likes of Dennis Moore worth it.

"Good luck out there," Kendra said as she walked by him to install the water bottle in his car.

"Thanks," Dalton replied.

The smell of grease and fuel, mixed with the buzzing of tools and people, made his adrenaline surge. He had to admit, just like a junkie, he couldn't wait for his next fix, his next lap

around the track. Racing was an addiction he'd never wanted to give up, but time and experience dictated otherwise. Still, moments like this, the anticipation, the buzzing excitement, were amazing.

Moore wasn't in his car yet. Scanning the garage, Dalton finally saw him emerging from the restroom. "You ready to go?"

Moore grabbed his helmet. "Yeah. Looking forward to it." Moore pulled on the protective gear and headed toward his car.

Dalton did the same and then nodded to his head mechanic. "Ready?"

Gus grinned. "Good to go."

Dalton gave him the thumbs up and then crawled into the car. It was still up on the pins. The guys would put the tires on last to keep them warming in the sun as long as possible. In the European Cup, tire warmers weren't allowed so they used whatever advantage they could.

Gus pulled the seat into position and fastened Dalton's six-point safety harness. Then he hooked up the comms and water. He gave Dalton the thumbs up. Dalton nodded in return and gave his old friend the all-ready sign. They'd done this for years. Gus had been his mechanic from the beginning.

Gus hung the safety curtain across and closed the door. After they went through the adjustments with the mirrors, Mario joined them and tested the comms. They were good to go.

Dalton settled in. The air gun hissed as Gus juiced up the tires on this car. Taking a second, he glanced around to check his student's progress.

Moore was not in his car. Dalton scanned the part of the garage he could see, but no Moore. He could see Mario standing at the screens. “Mario, where the hell is Moore? I thought he was in his car.”

Mario looked up from the screens and then looked around the garage. He hitched a thumb over his shoulder. “He’s on his phone.”

Dalton didn’t bother to reply. Frustration revved in his veins, spinning higher. The rest of the team, along with their coaches, were already heading to the pit lane. The cars were lining up, ready for the start of the session while he sat there waiting for Moore. The mechanics were stowing their tools as the engineers manned their laptops and stared at the wall screens. Everyone had a job, and they were doing it. Except him. He was just sitting, and it drove him nuts.

Ten minutes later, Moore finally climbed into his car. The session had already started. Dalton was ready to go and gave the thumbs up to Gus, who was standing at the door to the garage, watching for other cars coming down the pit lane. Gus was holding him due to traffic, but Moore shot out right in front of him. He looked over at James, Moore’s mechanic, noting the kid’s shocked look. Moore had almost hit another driver as he flew out of the garage.

Dalton needed to have a chat with Moore when they got back to the pits. Safety first. Always the priority.

Dalton left the garage and steered up pit lane. He hit the track in traffic, and it took him a few turns to catch up to Moore. He stayed behind his student, keeping a watch on what he did. The racing lines he took around the track were all incorrect. They’d have to work on which side of the track he

needed to be on and when. Moore let off the gas too much going into the turns and never got a clean exit.

After following him for two laps, Dalton radioed him. “Hey, Dennis, we’re coming up to the straight. I want you to be on the outside leading up to turn one. Remember, start feeding the gas just before the apex and watch the curbing. You don’t want to unsettle the car.”

“Got it,” was the swift reply.

They entered the straight, and Moore took off. He stayed to the outside and then braked at the right point. “Good job,” Dalton said.

Moore was a bit off on the gas but not bad, and he’d managed to exit the turn without hitting the curbing. Dennis Moore wasn’t the fastest man out there, but if they could put together the rest of the lap like the first turn, he’d be fine.

They went around four more times with Dalton coaching him on every turn. As much as Moore didn’t seem to like to listen off the track, he paid close attention while driving. He was steadily improving his lap times. Dalton was satisfied.

“Okay, Dennis, last lap. Let’s see if we can clean up some of these turns.

“There’s something off with the car,” Moore said.

“What?”

“The car,” Moore replied, his tone panicked, “there’s something off with it.”

“Mario,” Dalton asked, “what do you see?”

There was a pause. They were coming up to the pit lane entry. “Dennis, take it into the pits if there’s something up. There’s only one lap left anyway.”

Moore didn't bother to respond and went flying by the pit lane entrance.

"Mario?" Dalton asked.

"I'm checking. He's right. Something is off. Checking the sensors."

"Dennis, take it easy on this lap," Dalton advised as they came around the corner to the Start/Finish line. "Your tires are old, and the car is acting up. Be careful."

There was no response.

"Dennis?"

"I've got it. I can handle it." He floored the gas, and the car shot forward.

Dalton had no trouble keeping up, but he was pissed. Moore took the outside line, but the back end of the car slid like it was losing downforce. As they started up the hill into turn one, movement on Moore's car caught Dalton's eye. The wing oscillated violently. Moore wouldn't have enough downforce to keep the car in place. He was going to have a massive oversteer.

"Dennis, ease off the gas slowly and run wide."

It was like the man wasn't listening. The back end of the car slid as Moore added gas, causing the car to jump the curbing. The already unsteady car shot across the track and hit the right wall, bounced, rolled three times, and burst into flames.

Dalton yelled, "Moore! Get the hell out of the car!"

There was no response. Dalton's heart thudded as he continued to drive the rest of the track to pit lane. He wasn't allowed to stop because it could cause more accidents. It was

the strictest rule in racing. He made it around as quickly as he was allowed. Back in the pits, he climbed from the car and raced toward his crew. “Anything?”

Mario shook his head. Moore hadn’t responded. The internal camera had gone offline with the crash, and Dalton wasn’t behind him any longer, so they were blind.

Dalton raced toward the medical building. He rushed inside. “How is he? How’s the driver?”

A woman and a man were standing next to a counter that contained a radio. One was dressed in a fire suit and the other had a white coat on. They stared at him.

“My driver. How is he?” Dalton demanded.

The radio barked to life. “*Er ist tot.*” The words were squawked loud and clear.

Dalton’s German was not great despite having lived there for two years, but he knew that phrase. He’d heard it when his father died. *He is dead.*

Dennis Moore was dead.

Dalton remained still for a moment, and then turned and blindly walked out of the medical center. The next few hours and days would be a nightmare. But the worst of it was he’d been behind the man’s car and knew the truth deep in his bones. This wasn’t a racing accident. What happened hadn’t been driver error.

This was murder.

CHAPTER TWO

“He’s dead!” the man yelled into the phone and then quickly glanced around to see if he’d been heard. He was in the far corner of the parking lot by the fence. No one was around but he dropped his voice anyway. “He’s dead.”

“Yes, he is,” came the reply.

“That was not supposed to happen. I didn’t mean for that to happen. I did what you said. You said make him have an accident but—” Suddenly the other man’s tone of voice registered. “Wait. You’re not upset.”

“No.”

It took a moment for the reality of the situation to sink in. His stomach rolled. “You wanted him to die.”

The other voice was cool. “Yes, I did.” The voice hadn’t changed, as if admitting that Moore’s death was the plan all along was no different than ordering a pizza.

He was speechless, gasping for breath as if he’d just run a marathon. “But why didn’t you tell me? I never would’ve—”

“Which is why I didn’t tell you. I needed you to do your part.”

“I want no part of this. Moore’s death wasn’t what I agreed to. I’m done. I’m out.”

“Don’t even think about it. You are a part of this now. You say anything and you will go down for murder.”

Shivers wracked his body with the coldness of the tone. This wasn’t fair. He hadn’t agreed to this. “No. No. No. I want no part of this. I...what did you do? What I did shouldn’t have killed him. How did you make it happen?” He paused. “No. Don’t tell me. I don’t want to know anything.” He put a hand over his face. “But the *polizei* are investigating. What if they find out what I did? I am not going down alone for this.”

“Relax. They aren’t going to find out. It’s fine.”

“But how do you know?” he demanded.

“Just keep your mouth shut and we’ll all be fine. You’ll get your money in due course and we’ll all go on, only happier and much richer.”

The annoying dial tone met his ear. He leaned back against the fence. This just couldn’t be happening. How had things gotten so out of control? He stared bleakly ahead at the paddock area. His contact had been right about one thing. He had no choice. He couldn’t say anything. All he could do was pray no one found out about his part in this and pray that luck had finally turned in his direction.

CHAPTER THREE

Dalton was seated at the conference table in the trailer staring at the wall but not seeing anything. How had this happened? What would become of Hughes Racing now? This had catastrophe written all over it, and Dalton was paralyzed, numb.

Mario touched his arm. “Dennis’s wife and son are here at the track.”

“What? How did they get here so fast?” Dalton demanded. “The cops haven’t been here for more than a few minutes. Who called his family?”

Mario shrugged; his brown eyes filled with sympathy. “Your sister brought them earlier. They wanted to come with Moore, but he told them no, so Jordana drove them over. They arrived a few minutes after Moore. Jordana took them for breakfast in the hospitality tent. His entourage is also here.”

Dalton stared. “His what?”

“Entourage. I’m pretty sure he told your brother about them. He brought a bunch of guys with him. Three or four, I think.”

Dalton closed his eyes and rubbed his face. He wanted to strangle Rory for not being here and for not telling him about

the entourage.

Mario gave a small shrug. “Rory didn’t tell you because he knew you’d want to say no, and he said that wasn’t really an option at this point.”

Dalton cursed under his breath. Rory knew him well. Too well. He was going to have to talk to them. All of them. The family and the entourage. It was an awful situation. There were no words for this sort of thing.

“Where are they now?” he asked.

“Jordana took the family over to the medical center. She’s with them. And I have no idea where the entourage is at this moment.” Mario shrugged.

Dalton stood up. “I’ll head over. Get me on the radio if you need anything.”

Mario nodded. “Will do.”

Dalton had started out of the trailer just as Timo came in. “The drivers want to know what’s happening.”

“What do you mean? Nothing’s happening. The whole place is shut down. If they look down pit lane at the paddock, they’ll see everyone is back in their respective garages. No one is moving. We have to wait until the *polizei* finish their initial investigation. What the hell were they expecting? Someone dying on the track is a big effing deal. Nothing is going to happen for today and possibly the weekend.”

Shoulders hunched Timo mutely stared at him, and Dalton suddenly realized he’d been yelling. “Shit.” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Sorry, Timo.”

“Don’t worry about it. What I mean is that I think they’re scared. It’s like, suddenly, they realized that racing is a

dangerous sport. They think there's a chance they could die on the track."

Dalton blew out a breath. "I get it. I'll talk to them. They need to know—" He stopped speaking. He was about to say that Moore's car had been sabotaged and this was murder, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to share that just yet. He assumed the *polizei* would come to talk to him. He'd tell them and then see about telling anyone else.

"They need to know," he repeated, "these cars are incredibly safe, and the chances of this happening again are more than one in a million. Hell, the chances of this happening in the first place were astronomical. It won't happen again."

"Okay," Timo said, "I'll go tell them and let them know you'll come talk to them."

Dalton followed Timo out of the trailer and down the stairs. "I have to go speak with Mrs. Moore, but then I'll be over."

Timo gave him a wave and headed back to the other trailer. Dalton started walking toward the medical center. As he passed other teams' trailers, drivers and staff eyed him. Looks of pity and sympathy were etched on their faces. Their stares, the entire situation, made him feel ill.

Could he be mistaken and the wing wasn't oscillating? He wanted... He must have been mistaken—the accident really was a combination of pilot error and bad luck—but he knew that wasn't the case. He nodded to several of the drivers from rival teams as he walked the length of the paddock. They stopped talking as he approached and just stared. Then they spoke in hushed voices as he passed. This death would be something that would hang over him and his team for a long time. It was as if he'd broken some unspoken bond with all the

other teams and they were retreating from him lest they catch some horrible kind of luck from him.

Day one of the new season and one of their drivers dies. He couldn't remember the last time a driver died. He needed Hans Muller and the American, Tatum Chandler, to stay for the season, or Hughes racing was done. Finished. He needed another driver, or possibly two, to fill the slot that Moore just created. And he needed some kind of miracle to keep his team, his people, moving forward.

He ran a hand through his hair as he crossed the parking lot to the medical center. And what kind of an asshole was he for even thinking this way? *Jesus*. The man hadn't been dead for more than an hour, and Dalton was already looking for replacements. The whole thing made him want to take off for the U.S. and never come back. It was a shit show. But, if Hughes Racing was going to survive he had to think this way. He had to be realistic, and sometimes reality was not all that nice.

Fingers wrapped around the door handle, he paused and hauled in a deep breath before pulling open the door to the medical center. His step faltered when he spied his sister, Jordana, sitting next to a woman with pale blond hair pulled back into a bun. The stranger was dressed in a pale blue sweater and dark blue jeans. Some kind of fur stole surrounded her shoulders. She looked to be at least twenty years younger than Moore. In her early thirties, if Dalton had to guess.

The man sitting beside her had to be Moore's son. He looked like a watered-down version of his father. Same dark wavy hair but maybe a bit less of it. His eyes were a washed-out blue and his jawline was a little less firm than his dad's.

He was older than the woman sitting next to him. That had to make for interesting times in the Moore household.

Jordana stood. “This is my brother, Dalton.” She gestured to the two on the bench. “Claire and Brian.” She offered her brother a quick smile. She looked so much like their mother, especially with her dark curly hair pulled back into a ponytail. A wary expression lurked in her big green eyes.

“I am so incredibly sorry for your loss,” Dalton said.

Claire Moore stood up. “How could you let this happen?” she demanded, pulling the fur wrap tighter around her shoulders. “He didn’t even get to race! These cars are supposed to be safe. This is all your fault!”

Her words were delivered shrilly with a level of hysteria behind them, but somehow it didn’t ring true. Her eyes were clear, and if anything, she looked almost bored.

“I am so sorry. There was nothing I, or anyone else, could’ve done. The cars are safe, but accidents happen. I still don’t understand what went wrong for your husband, but I can promise you I will be looking into it, as will the local police and the racing officials.”

Brian Moore put a steady hand on Claire’s shoulder but she shot him an icy glare and he removed it. He cleared his throat. “If this is your fault, we’ll sue for wrongful death. We’ll clean you out,” he snarled.

That wouldn’t be hard, nor would he get much of anything.
“Mr. Moore—”

The door opened behind Dalton, and a uniformed officer entered along with a man in a suit. Dalton assumed the well-dressed man was in charge. Probably a detective. Austria didn’t have much crime, and certainly not murders. He

couldn't imagine the *polizei* had much experience dealing with them. That was a worrying thought.

"Mrs. Moore?" the sergeant asked.

Claire stood and wobbled slightly. Brian took her arm to steady her. Again, Dalton was sure it was an act. None of it rang true. Brian's outburst was more emotional, but it still didn't quite sit right.

"We need to have a talk," the man in the suit said.

"Of course," Claire responded, keeping her voice soft.

Dalton took that moment to signal to his sister. He jerked his head toward the door, and she slid away from Claire. Outside, Jordana walked beside him back toward their trailers, turning her face up to the sun. "How are you doing?" she asked.

"I have no idea."

"Me either," she agreed. "How the hell did it happen? Not the accident. That's easy enough, but the fire?"

Dalton shook his head. "I don't know, but I've been wondering the same thing. He had a fire suit on with gloves and shoes. Everything in the damn car is as fireproof as it can be. It makes no sense."

"You haven't heard anything about it?"

"Not yet. I was thinking about talking to Juan Carlos Rodriguez, the senior race official, but I'm not sure that's a good idea. He's going to be in the thick of it at the moment. Plus, people will want to ask me questions, and I don't have any answers just yet."

Jordana nodded to one of the truck drivers as they passed. "Do you want me to go poke around a bit? I tried at the

medical center, but they're keeping everyone out, including Claire and Brian."

"Interesting." He scratched his jaw. He wasn't sure if that was standard protocol or not. No one wants to see a badly burned body, so it stood to reason they were keeping the family away. "See if you can find out anything but do it quietly. I don't want to catch any flak for you asking questions. We're going to be under a microscope on this."

Jordana stopped abruptly. "You don't think..." Her voice died out as she glanced around to see if anyone was paying attention.

"I don't know what to think," Dalton said as he ran a hand through his hair. "There are some...anomalies."

She frowned. "What do you mean 'anomalies'?"

"The wing... I... I don't want to get into it now, but I'll fill you in later once I have a better understanding of the situation."

"Okay." Her look was skeptical as she started moving again. "I'll see what I can find out." With that, she hurried down the paddock area.

Jordana was the shrewdest of his siblings. She rarely ever had to have someone give her all the details for her to understand what was going on. She was also loyal to a fault. As the baby of a family of five kids, the only girl to four boys, she knew how to keep her mouth shut. They were always in trouble growing up, but she never ratted them out. Not once. Of course, she probably had gotten into her own trouble now and then, too, but there was never any proof.

"Dalton."

He turned at the sound of his name. Karl Claasen, team owner of Claasen Racing, was striding toward him. The sight of the tall, blond man with close-cropped hair and clear blue eyes made Dalton's lip curl into a snarl. It was all he could do to keep from turning and rushing away. The man was all flash and no substance, and that's how he ran his team as well. All about the glitz and glam, see and be seen at all the best places and events. Too bad he didn't pay as much attention to racing. His team won the European Cup last year by a combination of one good driver, luck, and a fluke. As a result, the man had become even more insufferable than usual.

"Claasen." Dalton crossed his arms over his chest.

"I wanted to extend my condolences on your driver." The other man touched his heart.

Freaking insincere gesture as far as Dalton was concerned. He kept his growing annoyance out of his voice as he replied, "Thank you."

"It is not the best way to start a season, eh?" Claasen shook his head. "Will you be able to compete this season?"

Dalton stared at him. What the hell was he talking about? "I'm not sure what you're referring to."

"Oh, come now, my friend. The whole paddock knows you are having some—how do you say—financial difficulties, yes? The season is long and expensive. You have to have the resources to compete."

The urge to punch the man was intense. Dalton grabbed onto his own bicep and anchored his fingers in the muscle. If he let go, he would break the guy's nose. "Don't believe everything you hear," he growled.

“That’s great news,” Claasen said with a big smile. “I look forward to beating you again this year.” He cuffed Dalton on the arm and walked by him.

Counting to ten wasn’t going to work. He’d need to count to five hundred to calm down. Instead, he flexed his fingers and slowly made his way back to the Hughes Racing garage. Entering the office space, he found the drivers gathered around the table.

Instead of taking a seat, he remained standing, hands jammed into his pockets.

“Gentlemen, I cannot express to you how sorry I am this happened. I know it has cast a pall over the season, but I do want to reassure you that once the race officials complete their investigation, we will be able to get back to racing. I also want to allay any fears you have about continuing.

“What happened here today is a tragedy, but it is not the norm. There hasn’t been a fatality in racing in years, and in this class, none that I am aware of. I’m sure as the investigation progresses, we’ll get details, but I want you to know I have full confidence in my team and in these cars. They are safe. I personally have rolled the cars more times than I can count. I’ve hit walls, tire barriers, other cars...it’s all part of racing. These cars are built with that in mind. What happened today is an anomaly...a fluke. I’m confident there’s nothing anyone could have done differently to stop what happened from occurring.” He took a breath. “Do you have any questions?”

He did his best to appear confident, but his gut was churning like a washing machine. The image of the wing oscillating haunted him. He wanted to watch the video from

his car. But he feared that if it showed what he thought it would, an entirely new can of worms was about to open.

As much as he disliked Claasen, the man was right. Hughes Racing was done if there was any kind of hit to their reputation. To survive, they needed to fill Moore's seat for the rest of the season. How the hell they were going to convince someone to take the dead man's place was beyond him. They needed a miracle, and they seemed to be short on luck.

CHAPTER FOUR

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Greer Styger said into the phone she had tucked between her chin and her shoulder. She was trying to water the plant on her desk without having the water gush out of the bottom. Holding the water in one hand and the paper towel in the other, she was pouring slowly.

“Why don’t you just put a plate or something underneath the damn thing?” her co-worker Louisa Alcorn asked as she watched Greer struggle.

Greer shot a frown at Louisa as she spoke into the phone, “No, Mom, I’m not coming home for the bridal shower.”

“But you are in the wedding party. You have to be there for your sister,” her mother pleaded.

Greer set the water bottle down on her desk. “Actually, I don’t. From what you’ve been telling me, Lyric is being a total bridezilla, and I don’t need to be anywhere near her right now.”

“She’s your sister,” her mother said again. “And she’s not being a bridezilla. She just wants her day to be perfect.”

“Mom, you just told me she wants to kick her best friend out of the wedding party because she’s pregnant and Lyric thinks her belly will ruin the pictures. That’s pretty bridezilla if

you ask me.” She glanced over at Louisa, who nodded her agreement. “Louisa agrees.”

“Still, I can see her point.”

“No, you can’t. You would never do something like that. Face it—you raised a monster, and she’s being a pain in the—”

“She’s still your sister.”

“Half sister, Mom. She’s seven years younger than I am, and we have nothing in common.” They really didn’t. Greer had taken after her father and had little in common with her half sister, or her mother for that matter. The fact that Greer didn’t currently speak to her father was beside the point. She was not close with her mother or Lyric, and nothing was going to change that. “I’m only in the wedding party because you forced her to ask me. We don’t like each other at the best of times. This is not the best of times. Plus, it’s way too long of a flight to go from Germany to L.A. for a bridal shower. I’ll be there for the wedding, and that’s it. I’ve got to go.” She said goodbye to her mother and clicked off the call.

“Your sister is something else,” Louisa said, rolling her eyes.

“My sister is a bitch. She’s a total princess because my mother and my stepdad never told her no. Not once.” Greer tossed the paper towel into the trash can and pulled out the last drawer on the right side of her desk. She immediately rested her feet on it. It was the best impromptu footrest ever. She loved sharing a cubicle with Louisa. They’d become instant friends the moment they’d met.

Louisa leaned back in her chair and ran a hand over her short dark hair. “You have any plans for the weekend?”

“No. Maybe do some hiking. You?”

Louisa shook her head. “Want to do a Hallmark movie marathon? They’re available on streaming.”

Greer smiled at her friend. Hallmark movies were not her thing, but Louisa loved them. “Sure.”

“Hold that thought,” her boss, Frank Foster, said as he came around the end of the cubicle. “Greer, I need you to go to Red Bull Ring. Hughes Racing had an accident.”

Greer’s throat closed over, and her blood froze. *Please don’t let it be Dalton*. She held the arms of her chair in a death grip and managed to force the air back into her lungs.

After clearing her throat, she said, “Race drivers always have accidents. It’s racing. What’s so special about this one?” She tried to sound nonchalant, but the loud thump of her heart almost drowned out the buzzing in her ears. Seven years later, and she still panicked at the thought of Dalton getting hurt.

“A driver died,” Frank said.

Greer’s stomach dropped to her knees, and she broke out into a cold sweat. “Died?” Her voice squeaked. “Are you sure?” It seemed incredibly unlikely that someone would die in a Porsche Cup car accident. Those cars were built to take a beating. She couldn’t get her brain around it. “Was it a massive pileup?”

“Nope. Just one guy.”

She willed her breakfast to stay down. “Um—” she croaked again, so took a sip of her coffee. “Do we know who?”

Louisa sent her a funny look, but Greer ignored her friend. Her voice had sounded weird even to her own ears, but she wasn’t about to get into her past in front of her boss.

“A newbie driver that came on just for the season. I think he’s American.”

She let out the breath she’d been holding. Dalton was American, but he’d been living in Germany for a couple of years, or so she’d been told. He also owned the team, so he wasn’t a newbie. It wasn’t Dalton. Her shoulders sagged in relief.

She glanced at her boss and realized he was waiting for some kind of response from her. “That makes no sense. You know as well as I do that the safety level of those cars is very high. How could someone die?”

Frank leaned on the cubicle wall. “That’s what you’re going to find out. If you leave now, you can be there in about five hours. Hughes Racing has an insurance policy with us. Go see if we’re going to have to pay out on it or not.”

The last thing she wanted to do was go to Red Bull Ring. Not only would she have to see Dalton after seven long years, but she’d have to talk to everyone about her aborted racing career and her father. Two topics she hated. Her father owned his own team. She’d been on that team at one point. Never again. She wasn’t interested in getting anywhere near the racing world ever again.

Greer groaned. “Can’t you send someone else?”

Frank shook his head. “No one knows the racing world like you do. It shouldn’t take long, but you’d better get to it. The drive is going to be a bit on the long side.

“Why can’t I fly?” At least then she wouldn’t have to sit in a car alone for the next half dozen hours.

“Too close, according to the dragon lady. She said it’s faster for you to drive from here than waste all that time in the

airport for a short flight to Vienna. And then you still have to drive again. Munich is too close,” he said in a voice that perfectly mimicked the head of HR, Inga Swenson.

“Fine,” Greer agreed reluctantly. “But I’m doing this under duress. I was supposed to be taken off the racing insurance jobs. Heinrich was supposed to take over. He loves racing.”

“He does, and he will take over just as soon as this mess is sorted. Heinrich is great at the paperwork, but when it comes to an actual investigation, there’s really only you two. Louisa doesn’t know a damn thing about cars.” He shot a smirk at her cubicle mate.

Greer closed her eyes and rubbed her face. “Fine,” she said again as she opened her eyes and stood up. “I’ll go home and pack my stuff. The sooner I get started, the sooner I can get there and get this sorted.”

“That’s the spirit,” Frank said with a grin.

She wanted to tell her boss to get lost, but she just gathered her keys and her purse. She said to her friend, “It’s only Tuesday. With any luck, I’ll get this sorted and be back here by the weekend in time for our movie marathon.”

“Okay, sounds good. Fingers crossed it’s an easy one,” Louisa said and gave her friend a small wave.

Nothing about this was going to be easy. Greer headed out of the building and over to her car. It was cold today. She was glad she’d worn a sweater. It was her favorite. A deep forest green that complemented her coloring. She was going to have to break out the thick winter jacket for Red Bull Ring. April in Austria could go either way, but it was bound to be colder at night. It would be colder in the mountains for sure.

Twenty minutes later, she parked her car in front of her building. She was entering the lobby when her phone went off. She glanced at the screen. Her mother again. “What is it, Mom?” she asked as she took the stairs two at a time.

“Your sister is very upset you aren’t coming for the bridal shower, but she says you can make it up to her by coming home for her bachelorette this weekend.”

Greer couldn’t help it and snorted with disgust. “Mom, I have to work this weekend. I’m just home to grab some clothes, and then I’m off to Austria. I don’t have time to come home for a bachelorette party.” Her sister only wanted her there so she could stick Greer with the bill. Lyric was like that. Someone else always had to pay. *This time it’s not going to be me.* “I’ve got to go, Mom.”

“What do I tell your sister?”

“Tell her to grow the eff up.” Greer hung up.

She was done with the whole wedding debacle. It was a nightmare, and she was half a world away. It would be horrific for her mom and stepdad, but they were the ones who created this particular monster. It was their job to deal with her. It was Greer’s job to figure out how a man died on the track in one of the safest cars in the world. And when it came down to it? As much as Greer hated racing, it was preferable to spending time with her sister. She could not stand her sister. Not. One. Bit.

CHAPTER FIVE

“M^ario, anything?” Dalton asked in a quiet voice.

The other man shook his head. “Your brother is still out of touch.”

Dalton grimaced. “Okay.” They were standing outside the paddock between the two trailers. Glancing around, he made sure no one was close by. “I need you to review the video footage of the first session from my car. The cops will be over to see it eventually. It’s only a matter of time.”

Mario glanced up as Kendra walked by. She shot Dalton a wide smile and nodded to Mario. Mario grinned once she was gone. “Yet another victim of the famous Dalton sex appeal?”

Dalton glared at him.

“Glare all you want but you know it’s true. Half the paddock is in love with you. The female half.” He grinned again. “Mostly.”

“I need you to be serious.”

“Sorry,” Mario said immediately sobering up. “I was just trying to lighten the mood. It’s been a...tough day for all of us.”

Dalton gritted his teeth against the guilt washing over him. Mario was trying to help, and he was being an ass. “I’m sorry.

I know. It's a tough one."

Mario nodded. "So, am I looking for anything in particular?"

"You tell me," Dalton responded. "But make a copy of the video. The *polizei* might take the original, and I want to make sure we have a copy."

Mario studied Dalton's face. "You think there's something on the video."

"I think we need to be very cautious. You know the score, Mario. This could break us."

"Okay, got it. I will make a copy and find somewhere to view it. When do you think the *polizei* will be over to talk to us?"

He shrugged. "They spoke to the family, and I know they'll have to see the track where it happened and talk to the race officials." He glanced at his watch. It was about three hours since the accident had happened. "Honestly, they should be here any minute."

The words had no sooner left his mouth when Juan Carlos came around the front of the trailer, *polizei* in tow. Dalton recognized the man in the suit from the medical center. The man he'd assumed was the detective. He wasn't so sure about the other uniformed officer. There were many around, and they all blended to him.

"I'll go now." Mario hustled up the steps into the office trailer.

"Dalton, how are you?" Juan Carlos asked.

He merely nodded. There was nothing he could say that would make things better, but he appreciated Juan Carlos

asking. As race director, he had a tough job but was very good at it. They'd always had a good relationship, and he appreciated that now more than ever.

“Mr. Hughes, I am Detective Jakob Haas. I was wondering if my colleague, Officer Paul Moser, and I could speak with you for a moment.”

“Of course. We can go into the office in the trailer if you would like.” Dalton pointed up the stairs.

The detective nodded and then gestured for Dalton to lead the way. Dalton climbed the stairs and then keyed in the lock code for the door. It was already open, but he was buying Mario another few seconds. Detective Haas may not want them to have a copy of the video once he saw what was on it. Or, at least, that's how Dalton would handle it, but what did he know about being a cop?

Pulling open the door, he called out a hello as he entered. All conversation died once. The coaches and engineers went silent and stared at the cops. Mario was in the far corner with his laptop, the screen turned away so no one could see. He met Dalton's gaze and gave a small nod.

Dalton's gut relaxed just a fraction. He had no idea if having the video would make it better or worse for them, but he wasn't going to let the *polizei* take the only copy.

“Perhaps we could speak privately,” Detective Haas suggested.

The whole trailer seethed to life. Everyone got to their feet and filed out the door. Mario grabbed his laptop and went with them. Dalton took a seat about midway down the table, and Detective Haas sat next to him. The uniformed officer took a seat across the table from them. Juan Carlos started to sit, but

Detective Haas gave a slight negative shake of his head. Juan Carlos shrugged but nodded to Dalton and then left.

“So, Mr. Hughes, can you take us through what happened this morning?” Haas’s accented English was excellent. Dalton had found that to be the case in most places in Germany and Austria.

He paused before answering. So much had happened in such a short time span. “Um, where would you like me to start?”

Detective Haas seemed to expect this question. “I understand your brother did not pick up Mr. Moore at the hotel like he was supposed to do.”

“No, Rory was called away. Timo brought him with the other drivers.”

Officer Moser took notes in a small book.

“Was Mr. Moore upset about this?”

Dalton frowned. “I guess. He was a bit annoyed. I don’t know if that qualifies as upset. I think he was more upset that Rory wasn’t here to coach him, but I assured him that I would coach him since Rory couldn’t be here.”

“And where is your brother?” Detective Haas asked.

“Munich.” Dalton desperately wanted to get off the subject of Rory. “Can you tell me anything about the accident? Do you know what caused the fire?”

Detective Haas nodded. “The thinking is debris on the track from a previous accident must have cut the fuel line as Mr. Moore was sliding across the track. Then when he rolled the car, gasoline spewed out over the hot engine and ignited it.”

Dalton nodded. That scenario was about the only thing that made sense. If debris had gotten beneath the under-tray, then it could have cut the fuel line, and since it was the end of the practice session, the whole undercarriage, the whole car actually, would've been damn hot. Ignition was inevitable.

Detective Haas asked, "After you agreed to coach Mr. Moore, what happened?"

"He went and got his fire suit on. Then he came in here and we went over what we were going to work on during the session."

Officer Moser kept scribbling in the notebook, and it was starting to get under Dalton's skin. He bit back a sigh and tried to calm the rapid beating of his heart. His blood pressure had to be through the roof at this point.

"And then?" Detective Haas pushed again.

"He made some calls, and then we got into the cars."

Detective Haas frowned. "I was told there was a delay in him getting out onto the pit lane."

"Right. Like I said, he was making some calls. He came out about ten minutes after everyone else."

Detective Haas leaned forward in his chair. "And how did he seem before he got into the car?"

"Fine, I guess. Maybe slightly annoyed. I'm not sure. I didn't speak with him. I was in my car waiting, so I can't really say."

"Could he have been angry?" Detective Haas was staring at him intently.

"I...guess...that's a possibility." Moore had seemed pissed off all the time, but Dalton didn't want to paint a negative

picture of the guy to the police. Neutral seemed like the best way to go. But he had the distinct impression that Detective Haas wanted him to say Moore was angry and upset. He had no idea why that would matter. What did it mean if Moore was angry? None of this was making sense.

“Did anyone else interact with Moore before he got in the car?”

Dalton wasn't throwing anyone under the bus until he knew what Detective Haas was after. “I feel like you're looking for something specific. What's going on?”

Detective Haas remained silent for a beat and then said, “I've already spoken with your coach, Timo Korhonen who brought Mr. Moore here along with the other drivers.”

“When?” Dalton demanded.

“Before we came here. He was coming back from the hospitality tent.” Detective Haas continued, “He mentioned that Mr. Moore seemed angry not only about the mix-up with your brother but about some kind of business deal. There was some disagreement over the phone.”

“I wouldn't know anything about that,” said Dalton.

“Who else might have been around Mr. Moore during his call in the garage before he got into the car?”

Dalton still wasn't keen on giving Detective Haas any names.

And the man obviously knew it. “Mr. Hughes, I am going to have to interview your entire crew over the next couple of hours. It would help greatly if I could start with those who would have the most to share.”

“Fine,” he said. He still had misgivings. “Try James Macht. He was working as Dennis’s mechanic. Mario was at the screens but might know something. Also, talk to Kendra. She would have given Moore his water bottle, which means she would’ve been around as well.”

“Thank you.” Detective Haas glanced at Moser, and the uniformed cop gave him a nod. Detective Haas turned back to Dalton. “Please continue.”

“There’s not much more to say. We finally went out and worked on some things during the session.” He was still undecided on whether to share about the wing. No, that wasn’t true. He wanted to tell the police because it was the right thing to do, but he wanted to present it in the best light since it would damage the team’s reputation, which was all they had left at this point, no thanks to his father. The little devil sitting on his shoulder kept telling him to keep his mouth shut. It would be better for the team. But if he did that, a murderer might go free. *Shit*. He didn’t have time for a moral dilemma.

“And in the final lap?” Detective Haas prodded.

Dalton thought back to Moore saying there was something wrong with the car. It wasn’t recorded. The car was too loud for it to catch anything that was said with a helmet on. Only he and Mario had heard anything, and Mario had been paying attention to the other drivers who were coming into the pits.

“We discussed coming in, but Moore wanted to do the last lap. He accelerated into turn one and then lost control, hitting the curbing on the exit. With the car already unstable, that made it unrecoverable. Moore hit the wall and then bounced off. The tires must have caught oddly because the car rolled over a couple of times and stayed on its roof. Then it burst into flames.”

Dalton had done his best to keep his voice neutral, but it was hard. He was used to seeing accidents. They happened a lot in racing. He was even familiar with fires, but usually, they were put out very quickly and no one was injured, at least not seriously. This was something altogether different.

“Did the medical team say if Moore was conscious when...?” He looked at Detective Haas, who just raised his eyebrows at Dalton. “When the fire started?”

“They did not. I’m not sure we’ll know that until the autopsy is performed.”

“Was he badly burned? I mean, it killed him so I guess that’s a stupid question, but I just meant—”

Detective Haas shook his head. “The fire did not kill Mr. Moore. He was not burned. The car burned some, and his suit had a very small amount of fire damage, but he was not burned. The marshals got to him quickly and put the fire out.”

Dalton stared. He was dumbfounded. “Then what killed him?” With all the safety features in the car, he just couldn’t fathom what could have killed Moore if it wasn’t fire.

“It appears Mr. Moore had a heart attack.”

CHAPTER SIX

The air left Dalton's lungs in a *whoosh*. It was like he'd been holding his breath since the accident, and now his lungs could finally work. He'd been wrong. The wing couldn't have been oscillating. Moore had been wrong. There had been nothing wrong with the car. Probably just the tires had gone off. He lost control and then hit the curb. Maybe that was what caused his heart attack.

"I... That's..." He didn't really know what to say.

"You are surprised," Detective Haas noted.

"I... When I saw the car burst into flames, I guess I assumed that's what killed him. It's a horrible way to go. A heart attack just seems...better somehow." The wing was moot if he'd had a heart attack. *Maybe*. If Mario confirmed there wasn't a real problem with the wing, then maybe Dalton could let it go.

"Mr. Moore is still dead but yes, I agree, dying of a heart attack seems less horrific than dying in a fire." Detective Haas glanced at Moser. "I think that's it for the moment. If I have more questions, I will contact you." He stood, as did Officer Moser.

Dalton got slowly to his feet. It suddenly clicked into place. "That's why you wanted to know if Moore was angry."

Detective Haas gave him a tiny nod. “Thank you for your time,” was all he said, and then he and Officer Moser left the trailer.

Dalton’s knees almost gave out and he sat down hard on the chair. Relief coursed through him. He’d been wrong. It had been a freak accident. Moore had a heart attack, and that’s what had killed him. Probably what caused the accident, too. This was good news. *Not for Moore*. Dalton rubbed his face with both hands. He hadn’t liked the man, but he didn’t want to see him dead. It was a tragedy. Thankfully, though, it wasn’t one that he or his team had caused. He’d known that, but he’d been worried that other people would jump to conclusions. Claasen had not been wrong. People would assume Hughes Racing had made an error and a driver died. It would’ve finished them.

He just needed to get the word out that Moore had had a heart attack. Then he could find another driver to fill the seat for the season. And Moore’s family couldn’t sue.

Dalton stood on shaky legs. He felt horrible he had to think in these terms, but the reality was that his company was hanging on by a thread, and Moore’s death could’ve taken them down. Now, at least, they still had a fighting chance. He had started walking toward the door as Mario walked in, holding his laptop.

“The *polizei* want to talk to me next, but Haas said he had to make a quick call first,” he said as he set the laptop on the table.

“It’s okay,” Dalton said. “I was wrong. Moore—”

Mario shook his head. “No, you were right. There was something on the video.”

“But Detective Haas said—” The look on Mario’s face made his shoulders tense. He sat back down, and Mario brought the laptop over in front of him and hit play. It was the last lap going into turn one from Dalton’s car camera.

He watched in horror as what he’d seen that morning played out in front of him again. He hadn’t been wrong. The wing was oscillating. The car was losing downforce. There was no way Moore could control it at that speed with no downforce. Nothing would hold the tires on the track. Moore’s car swerved and hit the curbing, and then bounced into the wall. After the third roll, it came to a stop on its hood and a split second later, burst into flames.

“The wing,” Mario said. “I’ve never seen one do that.”

“That’s because it’s not supposed to happen. Not ever.” Dalton wanted to puke. He’d known the truth all along, but he wanted so badly to believe Detective Haas: A heart attack had killed Moore.

“Detective Haas said that Moore had a heart attack. Or, at least, that’s what they think killed him. He didn’t burn up in the fire.” Dalton rubbed his face again. “I was hoping that was true because that put us in the clear.”

Mario stared at him. “You don’t think we did this, do you? James screwed up somehow?”

“No, I don’t. James is a great mechanic. He wouldn’t miss something like this, not in a hundred years. Not on his worst day. Plus, Gus would’ve been around and noticed something like this. This wasn’t us.”

“So... you think someone did this on purpose?” Mario asked, disbelief dripping from every word.

Dalton nodded. "It's the only way it could've happened." He rewound the video and started it again from the point on the straightaway before Moore got to the curve. The wing was clearly oscillating. He paused the video. "James would have noticed the give in the wing when he closed the engine cover. He would have felt it if the screws were loose. Moore wouldn't have been able to make it around the track even once if the wing was like this when he left the garage."

"But then what happened?"

Dalton shrugged. He wasn't about to share his thinking with anyone, not just yet. It gave everyone plausible deniability until he figured out what the hell he was going to do.

Mario frowned. "You think someone wanted Moore dead? Seriously? I just can't imagine."

"I know," Dalton agreed.

Mario shook his head. "No, it was a freak accident. There was no way to predict where he would crash or if he would die. Very rarely do cars catch on fire. No one could time it like that."

Mario was right.

Dalton repeated, "Someone wanted him to have an accident." He tried to make sense of that in his head, but he just couldn't get his brain around it. "But if that was the case, why? What could they possibly gain from that? If he wrecked the car, we would've given him one of the instructor's cars. At most, he might have missed one practice session. It makes no sense."

Mario leaned his butt on the table. "I can't figure it out, either. Maybe whoever it was didn't know we'd give him

another car?”

“Maybe.” But that logic didn’t hold. If someone knew enough to sabotage the car then they knew enough about racing to know Hughes Racing would supply Moore with another car. Still more info he wasn’t going to share. Mario wasn’t on the same page at the moment and maybe that was better. The fewer people who knew the better to keep it a secret. His stomach churned. He hated himself for thinking that way. Moore had been murdered. He couldn’t let someone get away with that, nor could he let this take his team down in flames. There had to be another way.

Mario shook his head. “Maybe the wing doesn’t matter. Moore had a heart attack. That’s what killed him. Maybe the wing was a coincidence.”

Dalton didn’t share that level of confidence. “Either way, the result is the same. The car crashed probably because of the wing, and now Moore is dead.”

“Are you going to tell Detective Haas?”

Dalton leaned back in his chair and closed the laptop. “I don’t know, and I hate that I don’t know. It makes me a horrible person. But, if I point all this out, suspicion will fall on James or someone in the garage because it’s our team and our car, so it had to be one of us being negligent. That suspicion would kill any chance we have of filling the seat and quite possibly keeping the other drivers.”

Mario argued, “If someone did something to the car, it doesn’t have to be us. The paddock is open. You and I know twenty different people walked through that garage this morning. The driver’s families, including Moore’s, by the way.”

“Seriously? They were in the garage?”

“Your sister brought them and gave them a tour while you were in the trailer with Moore. Then she took them over for some coffee and snacks. And they weren’t the only ones. The whole entourage was there along with members of other teams. You know Kendra keeps the fridge stocked with the best stuff, and the coffee maker is the top of the line. Everyone comes to see us just for that. I spoke to five different guys myself. It could have been anyone. It was busy. No one would’ve noticed.”

The door opened. “Mr. Bauer.” Officer Moser stood in the doorway.

Mario straightened and started toward the door. “Could you bring the laptop? I assume you have video of the event on it from Mr. Hughes’s car, yes?”

Dalton stood. “Why don’t you two come back in here? It will be more private. Not sure showing the video out there would be the best idea.”

Moser paused for a second and then nodded. He stuck his head out and called to Detective Haas.

Dalton moved to lean on the wall as Detective Haas entered. He nodded to the detective and then waited for him and Officer Moser to get settled, taking up their previous positions. Mario took the seat beside Detective Haas. Dalton wanted to stay to gauge Detective Haas’s reaction to the video, but he wasn’t sure the other man would let him.

Detective Haas didn’t say anything to Dalton, merely started questioning Mario about what he saw and heard. The questions about Moore being angry came up again. Mario was much more forthcoming than Dalton had been. “Yes, Mr.

Moore did seem angry. He seemed...frustrated with something or someone.”

“I see,” said Detective Haas as Officer Moser scribbled furiously. “Did you happen to hear any of his conversation on the phone while”—he gestured toward Dalton—“he was in the car, waiting for Moore?”

So Detective Haas hadn’t forgotten him and was letting him stay and listen. That was interesting. Dalton wasn’t sure what it meant, but it made his shoulders tighten painfully.

“I was closer to Dalton’s car and had headphones on so I could hear what was going on out on the track and with Dalton, so I didn’t really hear much.”

“But you heard something,” Detective Haas pushed.

Mario nodded somewhat reluctantly. “He said something like, ‘I don’t care what you think. I’m not paying you to think. You do what I say, and I said no.’ Then he took the phone away from his ear and slammed it down into his cubby. That’s all I heard.”

“Any idea at all who he could’ve been speaking with?”

Mario shook his head. “I’m sorry. I don’t know the man at all. I have no clue who he was talking to.”

Detective Haas let out a sigh. “Right. Let’s see the video then.”

Mario opened his laptop. “Do you want to see the whole session?”

Dalton’s stomach dropped. That would be excruciating. A long twenty-seven minutes since they’d missed the first laps.

“No, just the last lap. I assume you have that cued up?” He gave Mario a hard stare.

“Yes, we were just reviewing it.” Mario kept his gaze steady on Detective Haas.

Dalton felt like cheering. Mario was open about it, so it seemed less ominous, less like they were doing something wrong.

Detective Haas went on to say, “My understanding is you have it from both Mr. Moore’s car and Mr. Dalton’s car. May we see Mr. Moore’s car first?”

Mario did as he was asked, and Dalton found himself leaning over Mario’s shoulder. “It’s the last two laps if that’s okay?”

“Yes,” Detective Haas agreed.

Mario hit play as Officer Moser came around the table. The video sprang to life. They watched as Moore weaved in and out of a bit of traffic. Then he was clear. Dalton leaned in a bit, watching Moore’s line on the track more out of habit than anything else. Moore wasn’t bad. He’d done some racing before, but not at this level. It would’ve taken a few races, but the speed with which he implemented the changes Dalton had suggested told him Moore would have been a contender to be in the top three this season if he’d taken it seriously. That would’ve helped Hughes Racing immensely. Dalton stifled a sigh. Someone had put a stop to that. But none of it made any sense. None at all.

As Moore went down the straight for the last time, the car started weaving. He was struggling to keep it on the track. He went up the hill and lost control at the apex. He hit the curbing and careened over and hit the wall, bouncing off and rolling the car onto its roof. The flames took thirty seconds before they appeared on camera, but you could see the legs of the

race marshals appear on camera and then the flames disappeared. The camera then shut off.

“Is that it? Is there no sound?” Detective Haas asked.

“No. No sound. The drivers have a mic in their helmets, and they communicate through the headset I wear. In this case, Moore could communicate with Dalton and me through his helmet. There’s no sound recorded by the camera because the car’s engine is too loud. You would never be able to make anything out.”

“I see.” Detective Haas turned and asked Dalton, “May we see the video from Mr. Hughes’s car? I understand you followed him for the session?”

“Yes, we did what we call lead/follow. I followed him out of the pits, and then after watching him for a few laps, I took the lead for two laps and had him follow me so he could see what I was doing, then I dropped back and let him lead again while I offered feedback. It’s an effective method for drivers learning the track because it gives them auditory and visual cues to use to improve their skills on the track.”

“Thank you,” Detective Haas said, acknowledging the explanation.

Mario cued up Dalton’s video for the last two laps as Officer Moser made some notes in his book. When everyone was ready, Mario hit play, and Dalton’s stomach knotted. He tried to maintain a neutral stance so Detective Haas wouldn’t pick up on his anxiety, but it was damn hard. He wasn’t sure if he wanted Detective Haas to see the issue with the wing or not. He didn’t want a murderer to get away with killing Moore, nor did he want the bad publicity and the cloud that would end up hanging over his team. It would be the last nail in their coffin.

They watched as Moore blew by the pit lane entry, and then a few seconds later started up the straight. It was clear to Dalton the wing had started oscillating more profoundly as Moore started up the incline. He got to the apex and lost control. They all watched as the scene played out on the screen, ending with the car bursting into flames. Dalton passed by the accident and had to drive the rest of the course to get back to the paddock.

Detective Haas quietly thanked Mario for showing him the videos and asked for a copy to be sent to his email. Then he stood. “I am sure this is very difficult for you.” He turned to face Dalton. “Once I have spoken to the rest of your crew, you may send them back to the hotel if you’d like. I know we are approaching lunch, so they may eat now if they would like. We must speak with Race Control again and see if our forensic people have finished.”

“Wait, that’s it?”

Detective Haas stared at him, raising an eyebrow. “Was there something else you wanted to share?”

This was it. The moment he’d been dreading. If he was smart, he would let Detective Haas leave and never bring up the video again. That’s what was good for the team. Someone had murdered Moore, whether it was intentionally or inadvertently, and they had to be caught. How did he do the right thing for both?

“No, nothing else. Sorry I haven’t been part of any kind of investigation before. I just assumed there was...more to it.”

Haas nodded. “Our investigation is ongoing but we’re good for the moment. As I said before, once we finish talking to your whole team, you may send them back to their hotel.”

“Okay,” Dalton said. Haas and Moser left the trailer and Dalton sank onto a chair.

He was dying inside. He wanted to yell at Haas and tell him that it was obvious someone tampered with the car but what good would it do? Haas was sure Moore died of a heart attack. If Dalton pointed out the issue with the wing, it would only damage his team’s already tarnished reputation. But letting a murderer go free was against his DNA.

“What are you going to do?” Mario asked.

“Not sure.” Dalton stared at the table. “That’s not true,” he said suddenly. “I’m going to poke around on my own and see if I can figure anything out. No need to involve the cops unless I know for sure someone tampered with the car. Until I can find proof, I don’t want the world thinking Hughes Racing is negligent. We keep our mouths shut until I can prove something one way or the other.”

Mario frowned but then nodded. “Okay. Let me know what I can do to help.”

“Keep trying to find Rory. I’m going to go talk to the entourage. You said they were all here in the paddock this morning as well?”

“Yeah. Jordana gave them a tour of the place while Moore was in with you. Then they went over to the hospitality tent.”

“Okay. Maybe they’ll have a clue about what’s going on.”

Mario paused. “Are you sure you want to do this? Maybe it’s better if you don’t get involved. Tell Detective Haas and let him handle it.”

“I really don’t want to do this but I don’t have a choice. My conscience won’t let me ignore it but I can’t let the team go down in flames. This is the only option. I know everything

is riding on this season going well. The chances of me screwing this up somehow are probably huge. Whether Moore is dead because of the heart attack or the accident almost doesn't matter. We just need to find out who wanted to hurt Moore in the first place.

“Just be careful,” Mario warned. “The more involved we get, the more it could look like we've done something wrong.”

“I know,” Dalton agreed. It was a tightrope, and he wasn't sure he could cross it without falling and bringing everything down with him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dalton entered the packed hospitality tent and glanced around. The various teams were sitting at picnic-style tables, chatting and eating. The lines at the tables set against the back wall of the tent were long as people waited to fill their plates.

He tried to identify who the entourage could be, men who stuck out somehow. Most Dalton recognized, and the others he didn't were wearing team gear of some sort, a shirt, or a hat, so he walked around to the right side.

Finally, in the far back corner, he spied a table of four men who looked out of place. He didn't recognize any of them, and they weren't speaking to any of the other racers. They were also dressed for upscale L.A. streets, not the middle of Austria and the mountains. He was sure they were only still at the track because Haas had asked them to stick around until he had a chance to speak with them.

Dalton walked over to the table, "Gentlemen, I believe you were here with Dennis Moore. I'm—"

"We know who you are," said the man at the end, rather abruptly. His dark blue designer shirt stretched across his lean chest as he folded his arms over it and glared at Dalton. "What do you want?"

Dalton tried not to stare at the man's overly-styled hair or his lack of wrinkles. Botox or plastic surgery? Either one would've given him the ultra-smooth look his skin had. No man in his late fifties looked like this naturally but whatever.

"I wanted to express my condolences," Dalton said. Then he gestured to the bench. "May I sit?"

The man nodded grudgingly.

"I'm Philip Lyle." He pointed to the man on his immediate left. "This is Donald Bainbridge."

Bainbridge was also of a similar age, only he looked it. His face was weather-beaten as if he spent a lot of time outside, like sailing or mountain climbing—he seemed the sort—but his blue eyes were alert and appeared intelligent. His graying hair was thinning on the top and as he offered his hand, Dalton noticed he had a deep gash on his forearm.

"Joe Plover," Lyle said, pointing to the man across from him. Plover was a bit younger than the rest. The blond's hair was cropped short but in a styled manner. He also wore designer clothes but seemed uncomfortable in them. He kept tugging at the collar of his shirt unconsciously as he shook Dalton's hand. But it was his eyes that were the problem. They were a watery blue and darted all over the place. His pupils were dilated way too much. The guy was high as a kite, probably on coke or amphetamines.

"And this is Richard Goodman," Lyle said, gesturing to the last man next to Plover. Goodman was stocky and balding on top, and while the halo of brown hair was a little longer than was the norm, it was tidy. He was trying to appear relaxed, but tension oozed off him in waves. He offered his hand, and Dalton tried not to grimace as his hand was enclosed in Goodman's slightly clammy grip.

Dalton pulled a chair from the corner and sat down at the head of the table. “I am truly sorry for your loss.”

“Are you?” Bainbridge demanded. “This is your fault. I thought these cars were supposed to be safe. Your people said they were safe. Dennis should be here right now.”

Dalton didn’t take offense at the other man’s anger. He understood it. Shit like this wasn’t supposed to happen. This man’s grief seemed real. Dennis did have people who were mourning his death. That was good to know. It made Dalton feel better somehow that he was risking everything. If no one but him cared that Dennis Moore had been murdered, it would have made things that much harder.

Dalton said evenly, “The cars are safe. This wasn’t Dennis’s first race. He’s raced in other leagues and finished a three-day event with us using these cars before. He knew there was always the chance, no matter how slim, that something bad could happen.” He glanced around the table. “Have any of you done any racing?”

Bainbridge and Lyle both nodded. Goodman merely gave him a small smile, and Plover was zoned out. “Then you know that things don’t always go the way you expect them to.”

Lyle agreed, “It’s true. I’ve done a few races where weird things happened.”

“Still,” Bainbridge commented, “you’re supposed to be there to mitigate the weirdness. To stop it if possible.”

“And I was, but some things are beyond my control.” Bainbridge opened his mouth again, but Dalton held up a hand. “Before you continue. I think you should probably know that the *polizei* think Dennis had a heart attack and that’s what caused the accident.”

Silence fell over the table as they all absorbed that news. It was a true statement. He didn't think that's what happened, but Detective Haas did, and that story suited Dalton just fine. It gave him cover as he poked around, and hopefully, he'd find out what really happened.

"Are...are you sure?" Bainbridge asked.

"Detective Haas said as much to me."

Bainbridge glanced at Lyle. "Did he say anything to you about his health?"

Lyle shook his head. "Not a word. He'd just gone to have his annual physical. Said everything was good."

Goodman piped up. "His cholesterol was high, and his doctor wanted to put him on pills for his blood pressure. Told him his stress level was way too high for a man his age."

"What?" Bainbridge demanded. "He never said a word to me."

Goodman glanced at Bainbridge and then at Dalton. "Mr. Hughes—"

"Dalton, please."

He nodded. "Dalton, Philip and Don are...*were* Dennis's best friends since they were kids. I was his financial advisor and trusted friend for many years as well."

He completely ignored the other man at the table. *Interesting.* How did he fit into the picture? "I see."

"I tell you this to give you some background, that's all. Philip, you and Don know Dennis didn't like to talk about anything about his health. He was tightlipped about all that stuff."

“With everyone else, yes,” Lyle agreed, “but with us? He was always more open. Why did he tell you then?” he demanded.

Goodman didn't take offense at the other man's words. “Because I'm not just his friend but his financial advisor. He wanted to make sure he had all his ducks in a row.” He held up his hands. “Not that he expected anything bad to happen. He just wanted to be prepared. There's a lot at stake and a lot of tax issues that needed to be sorted should anything happen to him. He also wanted to arrange some things in case he needed long-term care. It was just smart business, and I think the visit to the doctor put the fear of God into him. It also made him think he might not have as much time left as he thought. I think this whole racing season was a direct result of that.”

Bainbridge stared at him for a second and then shrugged. “I guess that makes sense. No offense, Dalton, but we were all surprised when Dennis decided to do a whole season. He'd done some racing events and things, but a whole season was a huge commitment for him. Dennis was always on the go. He worked long hours.” He glanced at Lyle. “We were surprised he was willing to make the time to participate for a whole season.”

Lyle nodded his agreement. “Long-term time commitments were something Dennis avoided at all costs.” He shot a quick glance at Plover, whose gaze continued to dart around the room while he was fidgeting with his soda can. Lyle continued, “He said he liked to be able to pivot on a dime without any issues.”

“You think Dennis decided to do the season because... well, no time like the present? That type of thinking?” Dalton asked.

Lyle nodded. “Must’ve been. I can think of no other reason for him to sign up and do the whole season.”

Goodman cleared his throat but stayed silent. Dalton glanced at Plover, who was now playing with a fork on the table in front of him. “And were you and Dennis good friends, too?”

When Lyle snorted, Bainbridge shot him a look.

“No, it wasn’t like that. I’m Claire’s brother. Dennis was kind enough to let me come along on this trip.”

The instant feeling that Dalton got from the men around the table was that no one wanted Joe Plover anywhere near them. He stuck out like a sore thumb. Nothing worse than feeling out of place. Dalton asked, “So what do you do, Joe?”

“I’m a vet tech, uh... a veterinary technician. I work in California.”

“Nice.” Dalton had zero idea what that occupation entailed, but it was not the high-level job that the rest of the men at the table probably enjoyed.

“Did Dennis mention anyone that he was particularly upset with at the moment?” Dalton asked. It wasn’t the smoothest of transitions, but he couldn’t think of any other way to ask it.

Bainbridge frowned. “No, why do you ask?”

“Um, he was heard having an argument with someone over the phone a couple of times this morning. The police asked me about it. I guess they think him being upset might have added to the stress level.”

“Ah, that was probably me,” Goodman said. “Dennis was upset that some of the estate planning was taking so long. He wanted it all done and settled before he started racing. I told

him that it would take a bit longer, but it was all in order.” He gave a half-hearted smile. “Dennis liked things done immediately, if not sooner.”

Interesting. Moore had been yelling about paying someone to just do what he wanted. If he treated Goodman that way, how did he treat the rest of his friends? Moore seemed less and less like a nice man.

“Was there anything or anyone else that might have upset him? Or anyone in particular who might have...had an issue with him?”

Lyle narrowed his eyes at Dalton. “Why are you asking that? You said he had a heart attack. Is something else going on? Did he have a heart attack or not?”

Dalton had pushed his luck too far, and now they were suspicious. The thing was, he didn’t know how else to find out who Dennis Moore’s enemies were. “I was just...curious for lack of a better word. I mean he had a heart attack and it killed him. If he had fights with people every day what made this one so different? I guess that’s all I was thinking.”

Goodman looked pale. “Dennis wasn’t the easiest man to get along with, but no one would want to upset him on purpose.”

Bainbridge snorted. “Yes, they would. Dennis was a jerk a lot of the time, and he had lots of enemies who will be happy to hear of his passing. He had killer instincts in business and never took prisoners. He went for the jugular every single time. He destroyed a lot of careers and crushed a lot of egos. I’m sure there are lots of people out there who would be more than happy to get into a yelling match with him, but if it was a heart attack, whoever he was angry at today was just the straw that broke the camel’s back.”

“You’re probably right.” Dalton suspected the list of who Moore might consider an enemy was a lengthy one. “It’s a shock for all of us. Again, gentlemen, I’m sorry for your loss. I’m not sure what the plan is in terms of racing for this weekend. I assume the powers that be will let us know in due course. If you would like to go back to the hotel, please let me know, and I will have someone take you.”

“We have a car here,” Lyle volunteered. “But we can’t leave until that policeman Haas has a chance to interview all of us.”

That confirmed what Dalton had expected. “Okay then,” he said as he stood. He had nothing else to say to these men. He was trying to think of an exit line when someone touched him on the back.

“Dalton, I’m so sorry, mate. Tough luck,” Jack Roundtree said. “Just bad luck.” The driver was short with a craggy face and a crooked nose. His blue eyes looked sad, and his expression was solemn, his normally happy disposition nowhere in sight.

“Thanks, Jack.” He turned to the table. “This is Jack Roundtree. He’s a driver for one of the other teams, Johnson Wright. Jack, these are friends of Dennis Moore.”

“Fellas, I’m so sorry.” Jack’s British accent became apparent. “Just bloody horrible.”

There were a few murmurs of thanks, but their voices died out.

Jack nudged Dalton again. “Got a minute?”

“Sure.” Dalton nodded to the table and then followed Jack across the room to the coffee area. “What’s up?”

“Just wanted to say again tough luck today, mate. Any ideas on how it happened?”

“None. The cops are saying it was a heart attack, but who knows.” He wasn’t getting into it with Jack, but he decided since the rumor mill would take on a life of its own, maybe it could work to his advantage if people started wondering if something else could have happened. Maybe someone saw something that would help but hadn’t thought it was important at the time.

Dalton took a breath. It was a huge risk. If it backfired and people started blaming his team, then he really was screwed.

“Dalton,” Albert Becker said as he lumbered up to the two men. “Sorry about what happened. Just brutal. Any news on the cause or when we can start racing again?” the team owner asked.

His belly had grown over the winter, as had his beard. It was going whiter, and it was now below his chin. If he wore a red suit, he could be mistaken for Santa.

“No word yet on either. You’ll have to talk to Juan Carlos about restarting. The *polizei* are still putting everything together at this point.”

Becker shrugged. “Ach, accidents happen. It’s sad but not out of the ordinary. We all spin and crash. He just had bad luck.”

Dalton just gave a small nod. “Maybe.” That was enough to get Becker to give him a second look, but Dalton wouldn’t say anything else.

“I heard this will be your last season. Is this true?” Becker asked.

“What?” Jack stared at Dalton. “That’s not right, is it, mate?”

“No, not our last season. Not sure where Becker came up with that, but we’re all good.”

“That’s excellent news, although if it changes, please let me know first. I would like to talk to your engineer Mario Bauer. He’s really good, and some of your mechanics, too.”

Becker would be the first of the team owners trying to poach the members of the team that Dalton had painstakingly assembled. Scavengers trying to pick the meat off his bones already. He gritted his teeth. “Well, I hate to disappoint, but we’ll definitely be here next year.”

“It’s not a disappointment,” Becker tried to reassure him.

“It’s great news,” Jack agreed. “I’d heard that rumor, too. Claasen is running up and down the paddock, telling the world.”

Dalton crossed his arms over his chest. Claasen was the biggest pain in the ass. He wanted Hughes Racing to fail because he was the number two team as long as Hughes was around. “Claasen wants to be number one. He won last year by a fluke.”

Jack nodded. “The last race was a nightmare. Losing the transponder information from the cars so they had no idea who crossed the line first was outrageous. We thought they should’ve run the race again. The points were so close. It was down to your team, ours, and Claasen. We know there’s no way he had enough points to win. He was third. They just made shit up and handed out first, second, and third position for the race *and* the series. So unfair.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t Juan Carlos’s finest hour,” Dalton agreed.

“It should’ve been yours. We were second. Everyone thought so, but Marisol, Juan Carlos’s daughter, was sleeping with Claasen, so his team won. Just bloody stupid and unfair. I told Juan Carlos exactly what I thought of it, too.”

Dalton nodded. There was no point in mentioning that Juan Carlos had come to him afterward and apologized, but the race was over and done and the prizes had been awarded. There wasn’t a damn thing Dalton or anyone else could do about it. He’d vowed to make it up this year. The purse for winning the season was sizeable and that money would go a long way to saving Hughes Racing, but the bigger help was the reputation bump his team got from winning. If his father hadn’t spent faster than he could make it, they’d be in great shape.

“Well, you can tell the world we’ll be here next year, and the year after. We’re not going anywhere. I’ve gotta run, guys. See you on the track.”

He left the tent before he could say or do something he’d regret. His father, even after his death, was the bane of Dalton’s existence. He’d hoped that it would get better after the man passed, but Dalton was still cleaning up the mess. Some days, it just felt like Lady Luck held a grudge.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Dalton Hughes knows something.”

“What do you mean, he knows something?” the person on the other end of the phone line demanded. “Dennis Moore had a heart attack. Didn’t you hear?”

“Yeah, but Dalton knows there’s something weird about it.” He licked his lips. “You made him have a heart attack, didn’t you? Otherwise, none of this makes any sense.” He knew it was true. He had no idea how it had been done, but no doubt about it... Dennis Moore had been murdered by this man.

“Don’t worry about it. It doesn’t concern you.”

“Doesn’t concern me? You made it my concern when you involved me,” he complained. “I did what you asked. How the hell was I supposed to know that he’d die? And *you* killed him! I’ve got nothing to do with that part of it.” He glanced around. No one was nearby, but his heart rate was through the roof. If anyone found out, he would go to prison. “No one dies in this type of racing. No one. Killing Moore this way was stupid.”

“He had a heart attack. No one can prove otherwise. No one wants to.”

“Dalton Hughes wants to. He’s making comments all over the paddock. Nothing direct, but he’s making it seem like he knows there was more to it.”

There was a long pause. “You need to take care of Hughes. We can’t afford for anyone to ask questions. If people ask questions, everything will fall apart. Dennis died in a freak accident after having a heart attack. There can be no doubt.”

“I’m not doing it. No effin’ way. I’m not a killer. I’m out of it.”

“You’re out of it when I say you’re out of it. You need to take care of Hughes. I don’t care if you kill him or just take him out of commission for a while. As long as the cops sign off on the heart attack, we’re golden.”

“I’m not—”

“You will, or I’ll call a certain man in Las Vegas and tell him where he can find you.” The voice had gone cold.

He thought he might puke. Las Vegas. That guy *would* kill him. No question, and he’d make it as painful as possible. “But I—I don’t know how to do it.”

“Fuckin’ idiot. Figure it out. And don’t say anything to anyone about it.”

“Say anything? Jesus Christ, I’ll never breathe a word of it. If this gets out, I’m ruined. Beyond that. I’ll be in jail. I’m not saying a word.”

“Keep it that way.”

The caller hung up, and the man stared at the cell phone. Maybe he should get rid of it. Break off all communication. Killing Dalton Hughes hadn’t been part of the plan. Even hurting Hughes seemed outrageous. How in the hell was he

supposed to do that? Better to be done with everything. He started walking toward the hospitality tent. There were garbage cans all around. He could toss it in one, and no one would notice.

As he approached the entrance, he noticed the tent was still full. The teams were all bored and frustrated at their forced idleness. They all wanted to be running practice sessions, but Race Control hadn't told them yet if they were closing for the day, or for the next while, or what, so everyone was hanging out. That meant they all went to eat.

There was a garbage can in the corner on his left. Nodding hello to a couple of racers, he made his way toward it, but then another thought occurred to him. If he threw away the phone, he had no way to contact the person who had hired him, but more importantly, he had no link to prove he didn't do this on purpose. If he got arrested, he had to be able to give the *polizei* something. Just the thought of being arrested made his stomach churn and his bowels loosen. He changed direction and grabbed a bottle of water. He didn't have a prayer of keeping anything down at this point. The food didn't even smell good to him, thanks to his nerves. No, keeping the phone was essential. He would need leverage, and this was all he had.

Heading back out of the tent, he lamented the day he had said yes to this stupid scheme. He'd known at the time it was a bad idea, but he was desperate. His gambling debts were out of control, and he'd had no other options. *Las Vegas*. The nightmare that never ended. Now he wished he'd just gone to rehab. Maybe it wasn't too late. Maybe he could figure a way out of this mess. Or maybe he should just run. Go far and go fast. The people in charge of this weren't people he wanted to cross. His luck had run out.

Yes, running was looking better and better. Now, he just needed a few dollars to live on...

CHAPTER NINE

Dalton climbed into his SUV and dropped his head to the headrest as the vehicle heated up. He even turned on the steering wheel heater. The weather had been warm and sunny when they were here last year. Now the place was locked in an unseasonable cold snap. Maybe he was unable to warm up because of the cold hard fact that Moore's untimely passing could mean the death of Hughes Racing. He rolled his head from side to side as if to negate the thought.

Or maybe he was just getting old and cranky. Had there ever been a longer day? He wasn't sure he'd made any progress on the whole Moore mess. Was he kidding himself? Maybe it really was a heart attack. In the end, did it matter?

He rubbed his face. Yes, goddammit, it did matter. Someone wanted Moore to have an accident, but for the life of him, Dalton couldn't figure out why. None of it made sense. He'd spent the afternoon talking to his drivers and then spreading the word up and down the paddock that Moore had a heart attack so the other teams stopped looking at him with either pity or disgust. He'd been hopeful someone would remember something or let something slip that might be useful, but so far nothing. Turned out, Dalton sucked as an investigator.

Detective Haas had left mid-afternoon and said he'd reach out if he had any more questions. Was he satisfied with the heart attack theory? Maybe he was right, but Dalton just couldn't let it go. The wicked vibration of the Porsche's wing was not an accident.

He pulled out of the paddock and headed back to the hotel. No moon brightened the night and the darkness was thick. The temperature had been slowly warming up. Weathercasters had predicted rain later but it had started snowing a little while ago. Big, fat flakes that would switch to a cold rain. He glanced at the dash. The temp was currently hovering around freezing, making black ice a possibility.

Dalton pulled out his cell and glanced at the screen. Still nothing from his brother. Rory would be the death of him. All this disappearing shit on top of Moore's accident had aged Dalton by years. He felt like he was ancient. He'd thought working with his father before the man's death was the worst of it, but now that seemed like child's play compared to the hell he'd faced today with Moore's death and Rory missing.

He ran a hand over the back of his neck as he turned onto the winding road that led to the hotel. Europe was full of tiny roads that were only wide enough for one vehicle. It had taken him a long time to get used to driving on them. No one back in the US would tolerate having to get around on roads like these. They were all used to massive interstates and parking lots with large spaces. Here, it was all about being compact.

The jolt came out of the blue. The crunch of his bumper buckling came at the same time as the steering wheel being wrenched from his hands. *What the fuck?* He glanced in his rearview mirror. There must be a car back there, but the

headlights were off, and with no streetlights, he couldn't see any detail.

The vehicle hit him again. Swearing, he fought to keep the SUV on the road, gripping the wheel as hard as possible. The narrow road dropped off on the right and a hillside rose on the left. If he went off on the right, it would be ugly. Too steep a drop, there was no way he wasn't getting hurt.

The road curved sharply to the left up ahead. He gauged the drop on the right had to be at least fifty feet, ending with a fenced field at the bottom. On the other side was a steep hill full of trees. Either way, he was in trouble. He knew the guy behind him was biding his time. Once they reached that corner, whoever was back there would hit him hard and he'd go flying. No fucking way. That was not happening. His fight or flight instinct kicked into overdrive and adrenaline rushed through him.

Fuck this. He waited until the other car was closing in before he braced himself and slammed on the brakes. The other car smashed into the back of him, making his airbags go off. They slid on the slippery road and Dalton fought to keep his SUV from going over the side. The car behind him fishtailed and skidded into the hill. At least that's what it sounded like from the crash. Dalton's front right tire dropped over the edge of the embankment before the car came to a halt.

He took a second to make sure he was okay before he looked behind him. The car was pulling out of the hillside and making a U-turn. Whoever it was, swung the car around and was gone within seconds. Dalton pushed the airbag out of his way. His SUV was undrivable, but he was okay. A little shaken up, and his hand hurt from when the steering wheel

had been ripped out of it, but other than that, he was in one piece.

Who would want to kill him? And why? He'd hoped whoever was driving would hit him full force so it would total his car and stop him from getting away. Instead, the guy had been able to react fast enough so the hit wasn't as hard. Had to be a racing driver. Not many people out there possessed that kind of skill.

But why would one of the other drivers want to kill him? Only one theory came to mind. This had to be the work of the person who'd killed Dennis Moore. All that chatting up and down pit lane had had the desired effect. Someone knew something.

It had never occurred to him that he was asking for trouble by poking around. With sudden clarity, he realized just how much of a fool he'd been.

Now, not only did he have to find Moore's killer, but he had to do it without being killed himself.

CHAPTER TEN

What should've been a five-hour drive for Greer had turned into an epic slog. One of the major tunnels was closed, and she'd had to sit for several hours in traffic. She had always admired the tunnels in Europe. They were huge. Tall, wide, and clean. The ones in the US were much shorter and darker. These were always well-lit and graffiti free but there were so many of them because of the mountains and when they were closed it was a nightmare. When she pulled into the hotel parking lot, she was frazzled, starving, and just generally pissed off.

After getting her stuff out of the car, she walked to the reception area. "Checking in," she mumbled.

"Good evening. Do you have a reservation?"

Greer gave the young woman behind the desk her details and spent the next few minutes getting everything sorted.

"Do you need help with your bags?" the woman asked.

She shook her head. "No, I've got it. Can you tell me if there's still space for dinner?"

"Yes, of course. It's just across the hall. You can go in and sit. Someone will help you. The restaurant opens at seven-thirty."

She nodded her thanks, grabbed her key, and trudged through the building. She crossed a courtyard into the second stone building that looked like a refurbished barn. The antique structure only had two floors. A spa occupied a corner on the ground floor, down from the elevator, and a set of stairs going up to the second floor adjacent to the spa. The stairs were open with only a low wall. She pulled her roller bag, with her backpack on top, behind her into the elevator. After getting off on the second floor, she walked down the hallway to her room. Number twelve.

She sighed as she unlocked the door and went in. The room was a suite with wooden floors and a large living space. A set of stairs led to the sleeping loft and full bathroom. On the main level, two large sliding glass doors took up most of the end wall. The balcony overlooked a cherry tree with the Alps rising in the distance. She spied what she thought was a private horse barn with a fenced-in paddock at the back end of the parking lot.

The view was stunning. Or it would be if she wasn't too tired and hungry to take in the majesty of the countryside. Turning away from the sliding doors, she decided she needed food and a game plan, in that order. Losing time on the road had cost her. She'd been trying to think of the best way to deal with Dalton the whole way here, but despite the extra time, she still had no ideas.

Evening thinking Dalton's name sent excitement through her veins. And fear. The butterflies in her belly were partly because she couldn't be sure how he would react when he saw her. Likely, he was going to be pissed. There was no doubt, but maybe he'd get over it quickly. After all, wasn't she bringing good news? His insurance policy might pay out, and he would get a large lump sum of cash. That had to make him somewhat

happy, didn't it? *Might* pay out. There were no guarantees. It would depend on what happened but she couldn't imagine there was any fault besides driver error on this one. Still, she had to keep an open mind.

Dalton may not be happy anyway. He did lose a driver. Maybe he'd be so pissed off he wouldn't want to see her. Her breath caught at that thought, and a small sigh escaped her lips. She wasn't going to dwell on that. It was tomorrow's problem.

She unpacked her stuff and took a quick shower without washing her hair. The hot, stinging spray helped unwind her muscles and made her feel marginally more human. All the effort she'd gone to that morning was for naught. So, she pulled on a fresh pair of jeans and a pale blue sweater. She rearranged her messy bun and tucked a few stray hairs behind her ears. She touched up her makeup and then grabbed her key before heading out of the room.

"I have no idea how long it will take," a woman said into her cell phone. She was standing down the hallway at the top of the stairs. She, too, had blond hair, but hers was pulled into a tight bun. She was wearing a designer tan cashmere coat over a black skirt and black turtleneck. Her tall boots were also black. The woman looked like she was ready for fashion week in Paris.

"I will be out of here the moment I'm allowed. I can't wait to get back to you, baby. I miss you so much." she crooned.

Gag. Greer walked toward her, trying to keep her face blank. Did people really talk like that to each other? So not her thing. The woman finally spotted her and stopped talking. Greer was almost at the top of the stairs when she caught movement out of the corner of her eye. A man dressed in a

hoodie and baseball cap sprang from around the corner and shoved the woman at the top of the stairs. The woman screamed, stumbled, dropped her phone, and started to fall. Greer lunged at her, grabbed the back of her coat, and yanked her back as she reached out for the railing. The man flew past them down the stairs.

“It’s okay,” Greer said, “I’ve got you.” She guided the woman to the railing where the woman grabbed on with both hands.

“Oh, my God. He tried to kill me!” she exclaimed.

Greer held onto the railing with one hand and sat down on the top step. Her knees were wobbly. If the woman had fallen down the stairs, she would’ve been seriously injured or maybe even died. “Are you sure it was on purpose?”

The woman jerked her head to look at Greer. Her eyes were wild, and she clung to the railing so hard her knuckles were white. Greer didn’t blame her one bit.

“Sit for a moment,” she suggested.

The woman sat sideways on the third stair down. “I... Thank you. You saved me from a nasty fall.” She shuddered. “Did you see who did it? Who pushed me?” she demanded.

“Not clearly. Just some guy in a gray hoodie with a black ball cap. I didn’t see his face.” She had seen his sneakers, though. They were orange, and she could’ve sworn they had a 7-11 logo on them. *Weird*. “Are you okay? Do you want me to call the police? Do you need medical attention?”

The woman just sat there, staring out into space. Her face held no expression. “No, no. I’m fine.” She stood. “No need to call anyone.”

“But if you think he pushed you on purpose, you should report it.”

She put a hand to her face. The woman appeared to be about Greer’s age, maybe slightly older. “No. It was just me being silly. Probably some kid in a hurry, and I got in his way.” She tried to laugh it off, but hysteria edged the chuckle, making it brittle. She held onto the railing with a death grip as she turned and then walked back up the stairs around Greer. “I think I’ll eat in my room. Thank you again for saving me.” With that, she lurched down the hall and around the corner.

Greer watched her go. The whole encounter was odd. She was inclined to believe, as the woman first had, that whoever it was had hit her on purpose. She thought it was a man based on build, but she couldn’t be sure. She couldn’t be sure about anything really. And it was none of her business.

After standing slowly, keeping a firm grip on the railing, she walked down the stairs. She wanted a drink. This day hadn’t turned out like she’d planned, and now she was losing her nerve. The only reason she was okay with going to the dining room was because Dalton Hughes always stayed late at the track after the first day of practice. He went over all the data from every car, from every session. He wouldn’t be back to the hotel until much later. She should have enough time to eat dinner and disappear back into her room.

She went through the courtyard to the other building and into the dining room. A rustic bar lined the wall to the right. Technically, the restaurant didn’t open until seven-thirty and they had no expectation to turn the table which had taken a lot of getting used to. On the one hand, it was lovely because there was no rush, but it was painful on the other hand because there was no rush.

She went over to the bar and claimed a barstool. Maybe she could just eat here. That would save her a lot of hassle. The bartender smiled at her. “*Guten abend.*”

“Hello,” she responded.

“What can I get you to drink?” he asked, immediately switching to English.

“I’d love a glass of...” She paused. What she really wanted was a shot of bourbon. The whole encounter on the stairs was fresh in her brain, and her hands were still shaking, not to mention the next few days were going to be hard. But God only knew who could be lurking. The racing world was not that big, and if she drank too much or got tipsy, it would no doubt get around in no time, and her father would call her. Yeah, no. She just didn’t need that in her life. “Wine,” she finished. “Maybe a nice red. Something dry-ish.”

He nodded and reached for a wine glass as he moved away to pour her drink.

She checked her phone. Still no response from her boss. She’d asked him for an update. He had connections with the national police force in Austria, so she’d been hoping he might get some details.

Someone leaned on the bar a few stools away. “Can I have an Erdinger, *bitte*?”

Her stomach knotted. She’d recognize that voice anywhere. Dalton Hughes. She glanced in his direction, but he was busy studying his phone screen.

Anyone who saw Dalton Hughes never forgot him. He was over six feet of hot sexiness with a bit of a wild reputation. A tall, dark, dangerously sexy man who drove race cars for a

living, adding to the bad boy appeal. He was walking catnip to most women, her included...in her younger days.

As soon as the bartender placed her wine in front of her, she took a large gulp. This was not how this meeting was supposed to happen, but there was no way around it now. She braced herself.

“I can hear your teeth grinding from here. You must have had a day like mine,” Dalton said while still staring at his phone. His voice rumbled out of his chest just as she remembered it. He put his phone down on the bar and looked in her direction. “What the hell are you doing here?” he demanded. His eyes were wide, but his mouth was a narrow, hard line.

She swallowed. *Butterflies*. Jesus, she was no longer the young kid she’d been when she’d first met him, and yet she still had goosebumps. “It’s nice to see you, Dalton. You look good.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” he ground out, glaring at her.

Her heart skipped. “I’m here to see you.”

“Me? Why, after all this time, do you want to see me suddenly? Are you racing in the European Cup?” His eyes narrowed. “Whose team? I thought you’d given up racing. I believe ‘I’m quitting, Dalton,’ were your exact words.”

“I’m not here to race,” she murmured. This was not going how she’d planned. Not at all. He was still angry. Heat crawled up her neck and into her cheeks.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded again. “Are you scouting for someone? Who are you working for?” He glared at her, crossing his arms over his chest.

She closed her eyes for a brief moment. *So* not the way this was supposed to happen. She opened her eyes. “No, I’m here on business. We need to talk.”

But when she looked into his steel-gray gaze, all the words flew out of her head. He was so much...more in person than she remembered. She’d done her absolute best to forget him, to block him from her mind, but she couldn’t forget those eyes or the fun they’d had. She’d fantasized about him a lot before finally managing to banish him from her thoughts.

But now, standing here, the memories were impossible to ignore. Black hair curling over his forehead, a gaze that could turn a woman to stone, and a body that could make any woman swoon. He was still the poster child for the stereotypical “bad boy” racing driver. Her heart gave an extra thump.

He leaned forward until he was inches from her. “Whatever it is, I’m not fucking interested. Stay the hell out of my way,” he growled.

“Dalton,” a voice called. He turned to look over his shoulder at a man who’d entered the dining room.

“Mario?”

“It’s your brother.” He held up a cell phone.

Dalton finished his drink in a couple of gulps and slammed the empty glass down on the bar before stalking out.

All the air rushed out of her lungs. She’d let him get to her. Again. *Stupid*. She was a grown woman. How could just sitting next to him reduce her to such a mess? Too many memories and not many of them bad. Her hand shook as she picked up her wine glass. There was nowhere to go from here but up.

Twenty minutes later, she'd finished her wine and chose a table in the corner of the room. She pulled her laptop from her bag and set it on the table. She would study some of the other racers at Red Bull Ring and see if she could glean something that might help her investigation.

“Guten abend. Was möchten sie trinken?”

“Sorry, my German isn't great,” she said with an apologetic smile. Her company was an American one and they operated in English. Truth be told, everyone in Germany mostly spoke English to her so there was no real need to learn the language.

“No problem. Can I get you something to drink?”

She normally wouldn't order a second glass of wine, but her encounter with Dalton Hughes had thrown her for a loop, so she ordered another glass of red. “I just had one at the bar, but I don't know the name of it. I told the bartender something dryish, if that helps,” she said.

The waiter smiled. “I will find it. Would you like dinner?”

When she nodded, he proceeded to tell her the evening's specials and then disappeared to get her wine and bring her some water. Greer leaned back in the chair and stared unseeing at the closed laptop.

“I don't know, Jack,” a man said as he and another man came in and sat down at a table next to hers. “I've heard the rumors, too. Hughes may deny them, but I have it on good authority that he's on the ropes. No cash. His father spent money like he had a printing press in the backyard. I think they were going to have a hard time making it through this season before today's accident. Now they're dead in the water.”

Accident? A man died. Not sure “accident” really covered it. She glanced up and froze and then quickly opened the laptop. She ducked down behind the device. Jack fucking Roundtree. She’d known him in the U.S., back in her racing days. He was one of the biggest gossips around. She did not want him to see her and tell the world she was here. The news would likely get back to her father and he might call, or worse...show up. She wouldn’t put anything past him. She might not have seen him in seven years, but she sure as hell knew he hadn’t changed.

She also didn’t want to explain why she quit racing or why she was back at the track. Biting her lip, she realized she’d been a fool to think she could get through this investigation without attracting attention. This assignment was going to be so much harder than she thought.

Jack set his beer stein on the table and slouched in his chair, with his back to her. “Aw, Clyde, don’t say that. I like Dalton and his brothers. His sister ain’t bad to look at either. And she can race. I’d be sorry to see them go.”

Racing gossip. She’d hated it when she was racing, but it could come in handy for her now. Fastest way to get the lay of the land. The other teams thought Hughes Racing was in trouble. That would kill Dalton. Her stomach dropped. He’d fight tooth and nail to keep the team going for his brothers and sister. She’d cut herself off from the racing world, so she had no idea if Niall and Cormac were still in the game, or if they’d gotten out. They weren’t directly involved with the team she didn’t think, but there’s no way they’d want to see the team go under either.

“Don’t bullshit me,” Clyde said. “You like ’em alright, but it means one less team on the grid that are actual contenders.

You know and I know with them gone it's down to Claasen, us, and maybe two or three other teams. We need the win." Clyde chuckled wryly. "Things aren't exactly raining cherries on this side of the paddock either."

Jack and his friend must be part of a British team. She sneaked a glance at them. His friend was a driver too, if she had to guess. The man's hands were too clean to be a mechanic.

The man named Clyde was the bigger of the two, tall, bald, and fit. Jack was shorter and wiry. Judging by his salt and pepper hair, he must be older, although with Clyde's shaved head, it was hard to tell.

The waiter returned with her water and her wine. She quickly placed her order for the house-made stew, and then the waiter turned and took an order for more beer and some menus for Clyde and Jack.

"This whole thing with Hughes sucks. We've lost a day of practice already," Jack grumbled.

"That's the least of our worries. Hughes isn't the only team in need of money. You still haven't paid me."

"You know I'm good for it, Clyde."

"Do I, Jack? I'm not so sure. Diana tells me you're into your retirement savings." He shook his head. "Not good. We need to win this year, or we're gonna be in trouble. The only other option is to take on more drivers, and I'm not sure I can afford the extra mechanics and engineers that would have to come with it." Clyde shook his head again. "We really need to win, or Johnson Wright Racing is over."

"Shit," Jack said as he glanced up at the man entering the dining room. The tall, blond man strode directly over to their

table. Jack said, “Claasen. How are you?”

Greer raised her wine glass to her lips as if she could hide behind the rim and not look like she was unabashedly eavesdropping.

The man’s easy smile didn’t reach his eyes. “Gentlemen. Nice to see you. How are things?”

“Not bad. Today was a waste,” Clyde said, “but at least the track will be open tomorrow. Sorry about your Carrera Cup races. I caught the last one. Nasty business.”

Karl Claasen. He’d been just starting to make a name for himself when she’d bowed out. He was decent as a driver, winning here and there, but he didn’t really have what it took to go all the way. At least not that she’d seen. She didn’t think he’d recognize her but slouched more in her chair to keep the laptop screen in front of her face.

“It was a tough season. We didn’t have the best luck. But this season, the European Cup, it will be good, eh?” Claasen offered a toothy smile.

It made Greer want to roll her eyes. The guy was smarmy.

Clyde pointed to a chair at another table. Claasen grabbed it and brought it over. “How was today for you?”

“Fine, fine,” Jack said, quick to reassure their competitor.

“Bollocks,” Clyde said. “We only managed one session, and now it’s supposed to rain tomorrow but be clear on race day. That means a waste of practice time tomorrow. We’ll have to practice on rain tires and then race on slicks.”

“Couldn’t be helped,” Jack supplied.

“Bah!” Claasen snorted. “Maybe, but with Hughes bringing in rank amateurs, something was bound to happen.”

Clyde snorted. “We’re all amateurs. His guys were no worse than anyone else’s, and you know it. You’re just trying to stir up shit. You want Hughes out because his team is number one. You need him gone and you need to win this season if you’re going to land the Landon family for next year.”

Claasen’s face flushed. “That’s not—”

“Save it, Karl. It’s all over the paddock. Mike Landon, the rich American who is looking for a team for his kid, told you your team needed to win again this year if he was going to let his kid race with you next year. His family only races with the top team, and his precious Mike Junior has to be the number one driver. That means if Hughes wins, Landon will go race with them.”

“Sounds like an effing nightmare to me,” Jack said. “Snot-nose kid with no skill.”

Clyde nodded his agreement and then took a swig of his beer. “You might want that family as your client, but I sure don’t, mate. That’s just a nightmare waiting to happen. What’re you gonna do when Junior loses? From what I’ve seen, he’s no Michael Schumacher. He’s a bunch of bollocks is what I heard. He loses and it will be all your fault. Daddy won’t like it one bit. A nightmare to be sure.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve made no such deal. I’ve spoken to Landon, of course, and I would be honored to have Michael Junior join my team, but there is no deal in place. Michael isn’t ready yet. That’s why he’s not driving in the European Cup this year.”

Clyde shook his head. “It’s all over the paddock, mate. You’re desperate for a win and will do anything to get it. Just like everyone knows Hughes Racing is on their last legs.

Daddy got them so far into debt they're drowning. Nothing stays secret in the paddock.”

Greer's mouth went dry. If what he was saying was true, then things really were desperate. Dalton would be beside himself.

Claasen stood as the waiter approached. “Yeah, and I hear you're in a bit of financial hot water yourself.” He glanced at Jack and then back at Clyde. “Maybe having your brother-in-law as your partner wasn't such a good idea.” And with that, he strode out of the dining room.

Greer had been taking notes verbatim on her laptop. As much as she hated gossip, this was how racing worked and also how she was going to find out the truth. Rumors usually had a basis in fact. She sipped her wine. Where there was smoke...as the saying went.

“Your dinner,” the waiter said.

Greer moved her laptop out of the way but kept it between her and Jack Rountree as the waiter placed her stew in front of her along with a basket of crusty bread. The divine smell made her mouth water and her stomach rumble. Taking another sip of wine, she surveyed the room while she waited for her stew to cool.

The room had filled up while she'd been eavesdropping. Now it was mostly full of men. European Cup drivers and team members. Italian, French, German, and even some Dutch, the jumble of languages flowed around the room. There was a tone of subdued excitement in the air. The first race of the season was always exciting.

Greer took a spoonful of stew and then chewed while she buttered the bread. It tasted as good as it smelled. She

remembered what it was like to be excited about racing. To be fired up and anxious to get behind the wheel and out on the track. And she remembered how it had all turned to shit.

She let out a sigh. Her past didn't matter, she reminded herself. This didn't have to turn into the nightmare she'd been dreading. *Keep it simple. Do your job and then get out.* That's all she had to do.

Greer lingered over her dinner waiting for Jack and his brother-in-law to leave. Finally, they disappeared, and she packed up her stuff. She signed the bill to her room and was heading out of the dining area when she pivoted on her heel and headed back to the bar. One more glass of wine wouldn't hurt. She needed a bit of courage.

She stood at the bar next to an older well-dressed man talking on the phone. "I told you I'm good for it," he hissed while his fingers drummed a rhythm on the bar. "I don't care. I've been a customer long enough. You can cut me some slack," he demanded. His foot tapped on the floor as he continued to fidget. The guy was totally wired. "I'll be able to get it to you by the end of the week," he said and then slammed his phone down on the bar.

Greer hoped he had a protector case, or that would be one smashed screen.

He gulped down the remainder of his wine and almost dropped the glass as he went to set it down. Then he scooped up his phone and stormed out of the bar area.

Greer looked at the glass. There was a residue on the inside of it.

"What can I get for you?" the bartender asked.

"Er, not what he had." She pointed to the glass.

The bartender picked it up and held it to the light. He frowned. Then he put it into the sink behind the bar. “He must have added something to it.”

“Huh,” she said. Suddenly she didn’t feel like another glass of wine anymore. “You know what? I think I’ll have a bourbon.” Being here was bringing up all kinds of memories she’d fought so hard to bury. It was overwhelming.

The bartender nodded at her and poured her a glass of bourbon. She took it and belted it back.

He raised his eyebrows at her, but she just smiled and said, “Have a nice night.”

Greer slung her laptop bag over her shoulder and was walking across the open courtyard between the two buildings when someone called her name.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

She froze. Turning, she broke into a big smile. “Gus!” she squealed and then gave the big man a hug. He picked her up off the ground and squeezed.

“How have you been? What are you doing here?” Gus put her down and held her away from him. “You look great.”

“Seven years away from racing will do that to you,” she said with a laugh. “But you look just the same. You haven’t aged a day.”

“Ha, very funny,” Gus said, “but I appreciate it. What are you doing here? Your dad isn’t here, is he?”

She shook her head. “No, I think he’s in California, or maybe Arizona. Not sure.”

Gus frowned. “It’s like that, is it?”

She shrugged. “He’ll never change.”

“Neither will you,” Gus reminded her.

She reared back like he’d just slapped her. What the hell was that supposed to mean? She was about to ask but thought better of it. What did it matter what he thought? Instead, she asked, “How are you? What’s been happening? How’s Martha? And the boys?” she asked.

“Martha’s good. The boys are all grown up and have gone back to the States. George is a mechanic for Winston in the Carrera Cup U.S., and Will is an engineer.”

“Tell them I said hi.”

“I will, but what are you doing here?” Gus asked again.

She sighed. “I’m with an insurance company. I’m here to investigate what happened at the track today. Dennis Moore’s death.”

His eyebrows went to his hairline. “I had no idea you were in Europe, let alone an insurance investigator.”

“I needed a job once I quit racing. My stepdad is in insurance, and he got me my first job with an American company. I moved up to investigator with them and they sent me to work out of the German office so I could deal with their American clients in Europe.”

Gus’s eyes narrowed. “Does that mean you’ve got to interview everyone?”

She nodded.

“Have you seen Dalton yet?”

“Unfortunately. It didn’t go well.” That was an understatement.

Gus snorted. “Did you expect it to?”

“I guess not.” She sighed. “But I have a job to do, so he’ll just have to get over it.”

“I don’t think that’s possible,” Gus said.

She chose to ignore that statement and asked something else instead. “Did the cops say anything yet?”

Gus shrugged. “I don’t pay attention to gossip. The cops did their investigation and then finally released the track late in the day. I don’t imagine we’ll find out anything for sure for a couple of days, but rumors are rampant.”

“I’m sure. Dalton must be devastated.”

Gus nodded. “We all are.” He squeezed her shoulder. “Did you eat? Want to grab dinner?”

“I just finished. Been a long day, and I’m headed back to my room. But I’ll be at the track tomorrow. We can catch up then.” She gave the big man another hug. “It’s good to see you, Gus.” Then she gave him a wave and headed into the other building.

It *was* good to see Gus. A blast from her past, for sure, and one of the bright spots from her racing days, but she’d be lying if she didn’t acknowledge that being here had her nerves jangling. The emotions were way more than she thought they’d be. She’d thought she’d be able to handle it better. Taking a deep breath, she decided she needed to get this sorted and get the hell out of Dodge.

She leaned against the wall while waiting for the elevator, but it seemed to be taking forever, so she opted to take the stairs instead. It was only one flight. Surely, going up them would be fine compared to the fiasco from earlier. Still, she held onto the railing in a death grip just in case the guy in the hoodie came back. It was an open stairwell, and as she climbed, voices floated down to her from the hallway above.

“Seriously? You couldn’t have called and told me?” Oh, God, it was Dalton again. His voice made her knees weak and made her want to run away at the same time.

She reached the second floor and started down the hallway. Dalton was standing with his back to her, speaking to someone else, but he was blocking her view of that person. His navy shirt was stretched tight across his wide shoulders. His hands were propped on his hips, and she couldn't help but notice how his jeans hugged his ass. He was still the finest looking man she'd ever seen. And at this moment, an angry one.

"I got a call from Hank," came the reply. *Rory*. His brother. Dalton was arguing with his brother.

"Hank, as in the no-good lawyer ex-friend of our father who took advantage of him?"

"Yes, that Hank." *Rory* sounded tired. "He didn't want to call you, so he called me and told me Dad had left another will and I had to go see this guy Otto in Munich. I told him I needed to talk to you, but Hank insisted I go right away. Dalton, it's bad. Really bad."

Bad? After today, what could be worse? Greer slowed her pace in the open hallway. They hadn't heard her coming. She could announce herself or continue to remain quiet and possibly hear more. Her moral compass was telling her to make herself known, but something in *Rory's* tone and Dalton's rigid posture made her stay quiet. Something major was going on, and it might have to do with the incident. Or, at least, that was the excuse she was going to use if anyone asked. She was wimping out. That was the truth. She didn't want Dalton to turn and spy her. It didn't matter that she wasn't part of this situation. He was livid with her, and she didn't want to give him any opportunity to yell at her.

"What's bad? The fact you didn't bother to call and tell me what was going on?" Dalton demanded.

“No. Okay, I’m sorry about that, but Hank had me freaked out, and it turns out he was right.” Rory ran a hand over his face.

Dalton crossed his arms over his chest. “Right about what?”

“Dad. He made another will and left it with a lawyer in Munich. Otto Dietrich

“Another will? What are you talking about?”

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you. Hank said Dad wanted to change his will, which was fine, and Hank would help him, but Dad said he knew Hank wouldn’t like what he was going to do, so he was going to go to someone else. Hank just thought Dad was being stupid. You know how he got sometimes. Hank didn’t hear anything more about it, so he assumed Dad had gotten over it, and that was that. Except that this guy Otto reached out to him earlier this week with the new will.”

Dalton suddenly whirled around and stared at Greer, thunder written across his face.

“Er, sorry but my room is down there.” She pointed to a spot just beyond where Dalton and his brother were standing.

She willed the color to stay out of her cheeks as she met his fierce gaze. His eyes were the color of steel, and his mouth was set in a straight line. A shiver passed over her skin. She just knew she wanted out of there, and fast.

“Greer,” Dalton said in a tight voice. “Just when I thought this day couldn’t get any worse.” He turned and gestured to the door behind his brother and pulled out his key. Rory shot her a look of surprise and then mimicked a phone to his ear with his fingers.

She offered him a tiny nod and walked past before letting herself into her room. As soon as the door clicked closed, she leaned against it, taking deep breaths. Ironic that Dalton was in the room next to her. What were the chances?

She'd love to be a fly on the wall in the room next door. What was in the new will? How would that change Hughes Racing? Not that it was any of her business, but it was interesting for sure. Connor had died at least six months ago. She'd thought about reaching out to Dalton and Rory when she'd heard but decided against it. A new will at this point? That could definitely change things. She was tempted to put her ear against the shared wall to see what she could hear. *Totally unprofessional*, she scolded herself as she walked over to the sliding glass doors and gazed out.

Two minutes back in the racing world, and she was already getting sucked in. That was the problem with racing. It was an addiction. Every driver knew it; every team member lived it. There was nothing like the adrenaline high of hurtling down the track at obscene speeds while chasing a win. Just being here was opening up old wounds.

She squared her shoulders. She could deal with it. With everything. At least that was what she would keep telling herself, but like any kind of addiction, there was no halfway with racing. It just didn't exist. *You were either in altogether or not at all.*

CHAPTER TWELVE

“What?” the voice demanded.

He licked his lips. “It didn’t work.”

“What didn’t work?”

“I tried to run Dalton off the road so he would be out of commission, but it didn’t work.” His stomach rolled. He hated this. Hated that he’d gotten himself into this situation. Not that it was his fault. It wasn’t. He had nothing to do with Moore’s death. All he’d done was sabotage the car. He had no idea Moore was going to die.

“Let me get this straight. I told you to take care of Dalton and you decided trying to run him off the road was the best solution? He’s a fucking professional race car driver. What part of that did you miss?”

“I thought—”

“That’s where you made your mistake. Don’t think. Do something else. Find a way to shut up Dalton Hughes. Dennis’s death has to be seen as an accident. No more mistakes.”

He opened his mouth to protest but his words were cut off by the dial tone. Rage overwhelmed him, making him want to hurl the phone across the room. How had he gotten here? All

he'd done was rack up a significant gambling debt. When he'd been offered a chance to wipe the slate clean, he hadn't hesitated. Dennis Moore's death wasn't his business. None of the rest of it was. How the hell was he supposed to fix this? He should run. Running was a good option. He could hide. But where? And what would he live on?

He cursed long and loud and maybe even stomped his foot like a toddler. Then he glanced around making sure no one was around to witness his juvenile behavior. Damn hotel had more nooks and crannies. Damn hard to make sure he was alone. The question remained; How the hell was he going to get Dalton Hughes to shut the hell up?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Dalton couldn't fathom what his brother was telling him. It just didn't compute. A new will? What the hell was going on? And then there was Greer. What the hell was she doing here? He rubbed his face with his hands. He couldn't deal with any more shit. But, damn, if she didn't look good. Really good. He'd immediately felt a tug at his heart when he saw her at the bar, the same tug he'd always felt when they were together.

Damned inconvenient to be sure. He didn't have time for this. What the hell was going on that his life had turned out like this? Were the stars misaligned? Did he insult some minor, vengeful god? Maybe he needed to sacrifice a lamb or something. It was like he was cursed.

He walked to the back of the room and stared out the sliding doors into the night. The mountains were shrouded in darkness, but the horse barn at the back end of the parking lot had a soft glowing light. His father was a real piece of work, but this...this was beyond the pale.

"Okay, Rory, start from the beginning."

Rory sat down heavily on the couch and ran his hands through his hair. He looked wrung out, and Dalton immediately felt bad for yelling a few minutes ago. But, hell, a

man had died on his watch today. He was already strung tighter than a Stradivarius.

“Are you okay?” Dalton asked.

Rory shrugged. “Not exactly. This will thing. It’s a lot.”

“Do you want to find a meeting? I might be able to track one down.” He was pulling out his phone.

“No. It’s fine. I went to one after leaving the lawyer’s office. I...just needed—”

“You don’t have to explain. This is a nightmare. Go to all the meetings you need.” He took a seat in the chair that was to the right of his brother.

“Thanks,” Rory said as he put his feet up on the coffee table.

“I’m sorry.” Dalton hadn’t meant to blurt it out. Now wasn’t the time, but he’d been thinking about it for a while now, and he knew he owed his younger brother a major apology.

Confusion shadowed Rory’s face and his brows lowered. “For what?”

“For not realizing earlier that you were struggling, that you needed help.” He leaned forward, placing his elbows on his knees. “I knew you were having a rough time, and I should’ve helped you somehow. I guess I didn’t really understand how much you were being crushed by everything.”

Rory didn’t say anything for a long moment. “Dalton, me being an alcoholic is not your fault. It’s a disease; one I’ve been fighting for a long time. Dad...did not make life easy for any of us. It wasn’t up to you to take care of all of us. That was his job, and he failed miserably at it. You did the best you

could. We all did. Some of us just managed it differently than others. It's mine to deal with, not yours. Just knowing you support me is enough."

Dalton's chest got tight. It didn't matter what his little brother said, he knew deep down he was responsible. He'd been off making a name for himself in the racing world when he should've been home looking after his four siblings. His father sucked at parenting. His mom had been the one that kept everyone on the straight and narrow, kept everyone going. Once she died, everything had fallen apart. He'd just been so happy to escape, get out from under the old man's thumb, that he'd left his siblings at their father's mercy.

Rory shook his head. "Let it go, Dalton. We have bigger problems."

Dalton leaned back in the chair. "Dad had a second will drawn up by someone in Munich because he knew Hank would argue with him about it."

"Yep. Hank called and said the lawyer reached out to him this week to inform him of the will."

"But it's been six months," Dalton protested.

"Yeah. The lawyer, Otto Dietrich, said he was over in the U.S. for work for several months, and then he had a family crisis. He just got back to the office this week. He wasn't told immediately that Dad had died. He happened to hear a small blurb about him during some race he was watching, and that's when he found out. Dad told him Hank would reach out when the time came but, of course, Dad neglected to tell Hank about it. Anyway, just another mix-up courtesy of our old man."

"So, how bad is it? I mean, there was nothing really left. The team is in massive debt and the garage and stuff right

along with it. Besides, who the hell would want any of this? What could be so different in this will?"

Rory slouched deeper into his chair and let out a long breath. He met Dalton's gaze. "Dad left fifty-one percent of Hughes Racing to a man named Lorenzo Bianchi."

Dalton stared at his brother. Fifty-one percent of the company... The words swirled in his head. To some... stranger. "What?" He couldn't have heard his brother right. "Say that again?"

"Dalton, I know, I can't get my brain around it either. but it's true. Dad left fifty-one percent of Hughes Racing to Lorenzo Bianchi."

"Who the fuck is Lorenzo Bianchi?" Dalton demanded. His brain was on fire. The loud buzzing in his ears threatened to overwhelm him. It was as if the whole world shifted on its axis, and he was struggling to regain his equilibrium. "Lorenzo Bianchi," he repeated. The name rang a faint bell. He put his head in his hands. What the fuck had their father done? "Was he in debt to this guy or something?"

"The lawyer didn't know. He didn't seem to know much. Everything else is the same as the old will."

"There *is* nothing else!" Dalton roared. "The whole fucking will *was* Hughes Racing. We've worked our asses off for the company, and he left the majority share to a—a stranger? What the fucking hell was he thinking?"

He finally looked at his brother. Rory was pale and his eyes sad. This news was crushing to Dalton, and Rory knew that he had been the one to deliver the worst news possible to his brother. "Shit, Rory, I just... I don't know what to say."

“I know, brother.” He reached out and squeezed Dalton’s leg. “It’s just dumbfounding. There are no words for this one. Dad—”

“Screwed us once again. I thought we were done with his stupid shit, but he left us with one last eff-you.” Dalton wanted to throw something hard at the wall, but instead, he asked, “Do you know the name, Lorenzo Bianchi? It sounds familiar somehow. I know I haven’t met him. Did Dad mention him? Was he a silent partner or something?”

Rory shook his head. “I don’t know him, but...”

“But what?”

“I think Hank knows more than he’s letting on.”

That didn’t surprise him. Hank had been his father’s best friend and confidant for years, and he used to be a family friend until Dalton found out that Hank had known their father had cancer well before anyone else and hadn’t bothered to tell any of them. Instead, he let the old man forgo treatment and waited until the cancer was in his brain before he finally told anyone.

By then, it was too late. His father had spent all the money the company had made from his racing, and more. He’d even spent the money Dalton had made during *his* race days. It was the stuff of nightmares. And now this. What was one more tortuous thing that Dalton had to deal with?

“I’ll deal with Hank. I’m sorry he called you instead of me. He should’ve called me.”

“He’s afraid of you. You threatened to sue him.”

“And we have a case. He got a couple of extremely expensive cars from the old man when Dad was sick and didn’t really know what he was doing. Hank didn’t call us

then. Only when Dad couldn't pay his bills did he bother to let us know. Those were assets we could've used. He benefited from his friend's illness, and he wasn't upfront about it. Yeah, he should be afraid of me."

"I was going to ask him to dig up stuff on Lorenzo Bianchi for us," Rory offered.

"Don't bother," Dalton snarled. "Shit, we have to tell Jordana. She's here. Then should let Cormac and Niall know, if we can find them. Have you heard from either of them at all?"

"I haven't heard from Niall in a few months. I think he reaches out to Jordana now and again. I can ask her. Cormac is racing in Dubai this week."

Dalton nodded. "I'll reach out to him and let him know. If you get a line on Niall, let him know, not that he'll care. He's pretty much washed his hands of us."

Rory shrugged. "We all had to cope somehow. You raced. I drank. Cormac went as far away from us as he could manage and Niall... just dropped off the radar. The only one that handled Dad well at all was Jordana."

"He was nicer to her, and she's also younger. Not as much time spent around the old man. Plus, she had Sydney's family to lean on. They practically raised her through high school, and beyond."

"Yeah, that's true. Thank God for her best friend and her family. It spared her from the worst of the old man." Rory stood. "I'm exhausted. I need to get some sleep so I can be fresh for tomorrow. Dennis Moore can be a bit of a handful, but he's got promise. I really think he could win it for us this

year. I'm sure he was pissed about today, so I'm going to have some making up to do tomorrow."

Dalton closed his eyes and swore under his breath. Rory had arrived at the hotel and hadn't spoken to anyone but Mario and that was only briefly. He came directly to Dalton since the news of the will had driven everything else from his mind. "Rory, you need to sit back down."

"Why?" Rory said, staring at his brother.

"Just sit."

"Did you piss off Moore enough that he quit? Seriously, Dalton, you need to work with the clients. We needed that money." He pulled out his phone. "I'll call him and smooth things over, but you really need to stop being such a condescending jerk to the clients. You have to treat them like equals."

"Rory," Dalton said through gritted teeth, "please sit down."

Rory glared at Dalton. "Man, I'm tired." But he must have seen something on Dalton's face because he dropped onto the edge of the couch. "What?"

"Dennis Moore crashed today at turn one. It was ugly. The car caught fire." Dalton gripped the arms of his chair. "He's dead."

Rory's mouth gaped open. He stared at Dalton. "What? How? How could that be possible?"

Dalton shook his head. "The cops are still figuring it out. Detective Haas, he's in charge of the investigation, thinks Moore had a heart attack."

“A heart attack? Really?” Rory frowned. Then his eyes narrowed. “But that’s not what you think happened.”

“Rory, there’s more to the story.”

“Like what?”

He considered telling his brother, but Rory had been through enough in general, and today had been a tough one. The lines around his eyes were deep, and his shoulders were sagging. “We can discuss this in the morning if you want. I know today sucked. It’s late, and you drove about ten hours on top of having to tell me bad news.”

“I’m not a delicate flower. Tell me what the hell is going on,” Rory demanded. “My client is dead. I deserve to know the truth.”

Dalton held up his hands to placate Rory. “You’re right.” He took a deep breath and then blew it out through pursed lips. Then he said as calmly as he could, “I think someone murdered him.”

Rory’s mouth popped open again, but then he snapped it closed. “Explain.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A sharp knock on the door interrupted them. Dalton walked over to the door and pulled it open to admit his little sister. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Jordana said as she walked in and went over to the couch. She sat down next to Rory and put her head on his shoulder. “Rough day?” she asked him.

“Yeah. I hear yours wasn’t so great either,” he said.

Dalton opened the mini-bar and pulled out a can of soda. He wanted a stiffer drink, but he wouldn’t do that in front of Rory. His brother would say it was fine, and it probably was, but Rory didn’t need any temptation. “You guys want anything?”

“No, thanks,” Rory said.

Jordana sighed. “Nah, I’m going to have some tea in my room in a bit.”

As he walked back to the seating area, Dalton’s chest tightened. He envied Rory and Jordana’s closeness. Dalton was the oldest and Jordana was the youngest. Rory was smack in the middle but he and Jordana had always been close. Dalton had tried, but he could never seem to master whatever it was that made Jordana so relaxed around Rory. She’d never

put her head on Dalton's shoulder. He admired his little sister more than she knew. She was, in fact, the one that he was most proud of. She was more like their mom. Had their mother's strength and sunny disposition. Jordana was an all-around good person. At least that made one of them in the family.

"Dalton just told me he thinks Dennis Moore was murdered."

Jordana's green eyes got big. "You didn't tell me that."

"Didn't have a chance," Dalton said as he sat back down and took a swig of soda.

"Fill me in," she requested.

"The long and the short of it is the *polizei* think he had a heart attack, and that's what caused his accident. He didn't die as a result of the fire. As a matter of fact, the marshals had that out pretty quickly."

"But you don't think that's what happened," Jordana prodded.

"No. I was behind him. We were running the last lap of the first practice session," he added for Rory, who was clueless about the whole event. "I saw his wing flex. It was oscillating. He had a total loss of downforce as he came up the hill into turn one. He lost control, hit the curbing, bounced off, hit the wall, and rolled the car. It burst into flames."

"But the wings don't flex, like ever," Jordana pointed out.

"Exactly."

"Are you sure?" Rory asked.

Dalton nodded. "Yeah. I thought I saw it moving, but wasn't sure, and then Moore said there was something wrong with the car. I was telling him to slow down when he lost

control. I went back and watched the video. The wing was definitely moving.”

“Shit,” Rory breathed.

Jordana sat up straighter. “And...what? Do you think one of our guys screwed up?”

“No, but I’m afraid we’ll get blamed. There’s no way James wouldn’t have noticed if the wing was loose. He would have felt it flex in his hands while opening and closing the engine cover when he was making adjustments to the setup. I don’t think it was loose in the garage.” He paused. Saying it out loud would make it real but it was something that he knew in his gut. He took a deep breath. “I think someone loosened it. Maybe gave the screws a half turn, and then let nature take its course.”

The room was silent as his siblings stared at him. Rory let out a low whistle. “The vibration.... That’s what you mean, isn’t it?” Rory asked. “You think someone turned the screws just enough to loosen them slightly and then with all the driving on the track and hitting the curbs and riding rough, the screws loosened over time until the wing started oscillating.”

“Yes, that’s what I think,” Dalton agreed. “But the problem is why? So he lost downforce. The accident and fire were a fluke. He might have noticed and pulled off, or he might have crashed but, what would that outcome bring anyone? We would’ve given him one of the coaches’ cars. It’s not like he would miss the race. There was no way to predict the accident would kill him. No one has died in racing in years. So what was the end game? Was it murder or was the intention something else?”

“And you’re sure it couldn’t have been James? Maybe he just didn’t notice that the screws were loose?” Rory asked.

“He *didn't* notice the screws were loose, obviously, but what caused them to be loose? It wasn't just one screw. It had to be all of them. That means someone had to do it on purpose. No way did they *all* suddenly come loose. No way in hell.”

Rory stared at the wall. “You're right. There's no logic to it. It had to be someone interfering with the car. But why?”

“I know. It's baffling. And what's worse, it might cost us the team. We need to fill Moore's seat to survive, and if rumors start running rampant that we killed him through negligence, then we're dead in the water. His wife and son have already threatened to sue.” Dalton took another swig of soda and again wished for something much stronger. He set the can aside and continued, “I have to tell you I spoke to a lot of people today and told them it was a heart attack, but I asked lots of questions and maybe...”

“Maybe what?” Jordana asked.

Dalton shrugged. “Maybe I struck a nerve.”

“What do you mean,” Rory demanded.

He grimaced. “Someone tried to run me off the road tonight on the way back here.”

“What?” Both Jordana and Rory sat up straight on the couch.

“Are you okay?” Jordana asked.

“Yeah, fine. A bruise or two but nothing serious. The airbags deployed so my SUV is undrivable. I called Mario to give me a lift back here and the guys towed the SUV to the track. They're gonna take a look at it tomorrow and see if there's anything they can do to fix it.” Dalton leaned back in the chair. “I think my questions might have ticked someone off and now they want me to shut up.”

“Dalton, promise me you’ll be careful.” Rory’s face was ashen.

It hit Dalton at that moment how much of a risk he’d been taking. His family, such as it was, needed him. He hadn’t thought about the risks before this. Just the need to find the murderer and keep his team afloat. Maybe he’d made an error in judgment.

“I promise,” he said gravely. And he meant it.

“But the incident does prove your theory,” Jordana pointed out as she leaned back on the couch once again. “Dennis Moore was murdered, intentional or otherwise. So, what are we going to do about it?”

Dalton smiled slightly. Straight to the point. Jordana didn’t miss anything.

“We tell the police,” Rory said. “That’s the only thing to do.”

Jordana’s gaze met Dalton’s and for the first time he felt like they were on the same wavelength and Rory was not. She placed a hand on Rory’s thigh. “We can’t do that, Ror.”

He stared at her. “What do you mean?” he demanded.

She squeezed his leg. “If we tell the cops then the blame will more than likely fall on us. Austria has very few murders a year. It’s not like these cops have a ton of experience at it. If we say the wing was moving and caused the accident, they are going to say it was negligence. Hughes Racing will be done if that gets out.”

“She’s right,” Dalton agreed. “I already showed them the video and they took no notice of the wing. Haas was more interested in how upset Moore seemed to be. As far as they’re

concerned, he had a heart attack and that's the end of the story."

"But we can't let a murderer get away with it," Rory insisted.

"No, which is why I was asking questions in the first place." Dalton sighed. "It's a delicate balance. We need help with this investigation but bringing the cops in, even if we can convince them of what we know, will not guarantee the person will be caught, but it will definitely hurt Hughes Racing."

Rory flopped back on the couch next to Jordana. "So, what do you suggest?"

Dalton shrugged one more time. "I have no idea. I need to think about it, I guess. Maybe something will come to me. I can't even give you a list of suspects or anything. I spoke to everyone today. You know what the paddock is like. The whole world wants to gossip, so I chatted with them giving them something to gossip about in hopes someone saw something or knew something or told me something helpful. I got nothing."

"Well, maybe this will help," Jordana said. "I just spent some more time with Claire, Joe, and Brian. I sat with them for dinner. Turns out Claire just wants all this to be over so she can go home. She didn't want to come in the first place. She and Dennis were in a bit of a rough patch. Joe, Claire's brother, was stoned and he can't wait to go home either. He's not even trying to really support his sister, not that she seems to need it. Brian is making lots of noise about suing, but he's all bluster. The heart attack angle has taken the wind out of his sales."

Dalton cocked his head. "That's interesting about Claire and Dennis having troubles. I'm surprised then that she

brought Joe with them or made Dennis bring him. That can't be fun for either of them. He stuck out like a sore thumb. He was also as high as a kite earlier when I spoke to him."

Rory snorted. "The entourage. I'd forgotten about them. About his son, though... I can tell you Dennis hasn't been happy with Brian for a while. I did some lessons with Dennis on the simulator to prepare for the race, and he was always yelling at Brian in the background. He told me he didn't think his son had what it takes to be successful. He thought Brian was a bit of an idiot. Said he was weak like his mother and often had lame ideas that he was always trying to get Dennis to invest in."

"Wonderful. So now we're in the middle of family drama." Jordana pushed a stray hair behind her ear. "I went to Race Control and hung out a bit. The *polizei* believe Moore had a heart attack. Everyone is sympathetic to our situation for the time being, but Claasen is spreading rumors that we're going under. That's making Juan Carlos a bit nervous. Any hint of a slipup on our part, and I think he'll kick us out of the league. After what happened last year with his daughter and handing out the win to Claasen, he doesn't want any whiff of impropriety. She's still sleeping with Claasen on and off, by the way. It's worth noting since Juan Carlos doesn't know, but everyone else does. There's a rumor she screwed up the data from the last race on purpose."

"Well, shit, isn't that wonderful? Claasen is such a pain in the ass. And now we have to worry about Race Control." Rory snorted. "You know why he's trying to bring us down, right? Claasen, that is."

"He wants to win and take the purse," Dalton commented. "We all do."

Rory shook his head. “No, Claasen lost his shirt in the Carrera Cup debacle. His driver in that series claimed the mechanics screwed up and sent him out without enough tire pressure. He says that’s why he hit the wall and took two other drivers out with him. He could be heard screaming at Claasen all the way down the paddock. Claasen lost two other drivers after that.

“So he needs the money to stay afloat, too. He had a couple of big-time drivers interested in joining his team for the European Cup, the Landon family for one, but after the team’s performance during the Carrera Cup, they’ve all backed off. Too many complaints about the mechanics and engineers. He needs the win to get backers for next year. And if we win this year, Landon will go with us because we’ve got the reputation for being the best. We’re the team to launch any driver from amateur to pro.”

“Interesting that we’re not the only one in financial difficulties,” Dalton noted.

“Not even close to alone in that. There are a lot of teams that are struggling this year,” Jordana added. “But I’m not sure they’re in the same situation as we are, and now with Moore gone, we’re in real trouble. Plus, we can’t take the bad publicity. We’ll lose Michael Landon paying for his kid for next year and any other serious drivers if people think we had anything to do with Moore’s death. We’re going to have to fill the seat for this season somehow. And we’re going to have to win.”

“The whole Bianchi thing... This just couldn’t have happened at a worse time.” Rory lost the bit of color in his cheeks. “Shit, I mean, I’m truly sorry Dennis is dead. That’s

horrible. I didn't mean it wasn't a tragedy. God, I sound so callous. Really—”

Dalton waved him off. “We're all sorry Dennis is dead. It is a tragedy, but we have to deal with reality. Just don't say anything like that outside of these walls.”

“What Bianchi thing?” Jordana asked.

“What?” Rory said.

“You said the ‘Bianchi thing’. What are you talking about?”

Rory glanced at Dalton, and he gave his brother a small nod. No point in hiding it. She would find out sooner or later. After Rory filled her in, Jordana sat silent for a few minutes. “Well, that puts a new spin on things.”

Dalton had to laugh. “That's one way of putting it.” He glanced at his sister. “Do you know who Lorenzo Bianchi is? The name seems familiar somehow, but I don't think I've met him. Did Dad ever talk about him to you?”

She met Dalton's gaze and licked her lips. “Um, no, Dad never mentioned him, and I've never met him.”

“But?” Dalton prodded.

“It's got to be a popular name, right? I mean, there has to be more than one Lorenzo Bianchi, right?”

“Why? What do you know?” Rory demanded.

Jordana swallowed and her eyes darted around the room. She let out a long breath. “The only Lorenzo Bianchi I know of lives in Tuscany. He used to date a famous actress. That's how I know him. He was all over the Internet when they were dating.”

“What aren’t you telling us?” Dalton asked. His sister was holding something back. Something big. His gut knotted.

“Lorenzo Bianchi is the first-born son of Danillo Bianchi, head of the Fabrizi crime family. He’s one of the biggest mobsters in Europe.”



After dropping her bombshell, Jordana left with Rory. Rory was going to sleep in her room tonight, for which Dalton was thankful. It had been a bitch of a day for everyone, and Rory might need a bit of help getting through.

Dalton lay in bed and stared at the ceiling. His body hurt a bit in places from the accident. *Accident*. Not an accident. From the intentional hit to push him off the road. But that was a good thing, right? Didn’t that mean he was correct and someone did loosen the screws that led to Moore’s accident? It had seemed like a good idea at the time to talk to the world about his suspicions, but now he was having serious doubts.

And then there was the will. He’d told his siblings there was no way it could be the same Lorenzo Bianchi since it was probably a popular name in Italy. Besides, he’d reasoned, when would their father have met Bianchi, the well-known mobster?

But deep in his heart, he knew it was all a lie. Lorenzo Bianchi was now fifty-one percent owner of Hughes Racing. He had no idea why his father wanted to screw his kids so badly but he knew—like fundamentally knew—that Connor Hughes had done this knowing full well what it would mean for his children.

Dalton spent the rest of the night trying to find a solution, a way for him and his siblings to get something out of the company before it all went to hell, but there was no way out. They were already in Hell. The most important thing they could do now was keep moving, and maybe they could find a way out on the other side.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Greer allowed herself to linger in bed a little longer. Normally, she was up at six. Today, it was already after seven, and she had no intention of getting out of bed until eight. Most of the drivers would be done with breakfast and at the track by that time. She wanted to eat her breakfast in peace before going to Red Bull Ring and informing Dalton Hughes she was there to investigate Dennis Moore's death.

Her news would certainly lead to an argument. He did not want her there, but her job was to investigate before her company paid out on the claim. That's how this business worked. However, the idea of facing Dalton made her heart pound and her stomach roll. What she did to him all those years ago had been so unfair. It had been harsh, and maybe even mean, but it was what she needed to do at the time.

Still, it must have hurt him. *She* hurt him, and he wasn't going to just forgive her. In the end, she didn't need his forgiveness. She just needed him to let her get on with her job and stay out of her way. *Fat chance*. Dalton wasn't the type of guy to do either of those things. He had to be involved in everything.

She rolled over and faced the window. She'd wait a little longer. Just because she had to face him didn't mean she had

to do it first thing. If memory served, and the sudden stutter of her heart last night proved that it did serve, Dalton Hughes was not a morning person. She'd let him have his coffee and get to the track. Once he got settled and into the day, then she'd approach him.

Dalton had been royally pissed last night in the hallway. Enough anger had radiated off him to overheat an engine. A new will might do that to a person, never mind the day he'd already had. Her breath caught when she thought about how awful he must feel. Connor Hughes was not the nicest man. She and Dalton had had that in common—fathers who were assholes.

Sighing, she stretched and pushed up into a seated position. She missed racing. A lot. The thought of being at the track and not being able to get into a racecar was painful. It was a sort of punishment. She'd vowed to herself she would never race again after what her father had done. She hadn't spoken to him in almost seven years. Being at the track brought it all back, the good and the bad.

The sooner she got this over with, the sooner she could put it all back in its place she reminded herself. With that thought, she dragged herself out of bed and got into the shower.

Twenty minutes later, Greer rolled into the dining room and came to an abrupt halt. The room was full of drivers. Apparently, the practice sessions didn't start as early as she thought. *Shit*. Picking her way through the crowd, she found a seat in the corner and ordered coffee from the waiter.

She went across the hallway into the room where a buffet had been set up and filled her plate. She had just sat back down and was all set to dig in when Gus walked up to her table.

“Hey, sunshine,” he greeted her.

“Morning. How are you today?” she asked.

“I just wanted to let you know I spoke to your dad last night.” He immediately held up his hands. “Don’t give me that look. I just wanted him to know you’re doin’ all right and lookin’ good. As a father, if something happened between me and my kids, I would want to know how they were doing.”

“Gus,” she snarled, “it wasn’t your place to do that.”

“That’s probably true, but he was excited to know how you’re doing. He misses you. He’d love it if you went home to see him.”

I’ll just bet he would. Wants to know if I’m over what he did. Too fucking bad. I’ll never be ‘over’ it. “Well, that’s not going to happen but thanks for letting me know.”

Gus just stood there, as if he wanted to say something more. Finally, he shrugged. “Life is short, Greer. People do stupid things. Learning to forgive is important.”

She stared up at him. There were so many things she wanted to say in reply, but mostly they started with *fuck you*, so she kept her mouth shut.

“It’s good to see you, kiddo,” Gus said and then gave her a wink before he strolled off.

She stared down at her plate, her appetite all but gone. Gus meant well but, honestly, thoughts of her father were enough to turn her off eating. She took a sip of her coffee and tried to regroup.

Her cell rang, and she answered. “Hey, Frank. What’s up?”

“Got confirmation Dennis Moore died of a heart attack. Not as a result of the crash.”

“That was quick.” She glanced at her watch. It was just gone eight-thirty. “What time does the medical examiner start?”

“Apparently, a racing death is such a rarity that the medical examiner was excited to get it done. He didn’t have any other bodies to work on,” he said with a chuckle.

She bit her lip. Her boss might have found that amusing, but to her, it rang alarm bells. It was likely the examiner didn’t get to perform many autopsies, which meant the chance of missing something was greater. “A heart attack? Really?”

“Yeah. I guess it can happen.”

“So that’s it? Global Insurance is happy?”

“Happy? No. They don’t want to pay out that much, but with a heart attack, they don’t have much choice unless you know something different?”

“Me? I haven’t even started yet.”

“Well, keep your eyes open. You need to interview all the parties involved, of course, just to dot the I’s and cross the T’s, but it’s a formality at this point. Unless you find something. The track insurance company is satisfied it wasn’t a problem with the track. Hughes Racing has its own insurance for the car. We’re only responsible for paying out in the case of accidental death. They insure all their drivers. So, as soon as the paperwork is done, if you don’t find anything, we’ll have to cut them a check.”

“Wonderful.” She should feel elated. She was going to be out of here quick-time, but she was torn. Now that she was here, she wanted to poke around the paddock a bit. She’d cut racing off cold turkey, but now she was jonesing for a little track time.

“Did the medical examiner say why he had a heart attack?”

“What do you mean ‘why’?”

“Well,” she said, “did he have heart disease? Did he have an abnormality? Was there an undiagnosed problem, or even a diagnosed one? There has to be a reason he had a heart attack. Did anyone find out if he was taking any meds? How about a toxicology screening? It would be nice to know what was in his system at the time of his death.”

Her boss sighed. “I thought you’d be overjoyed to be out of there.”

“I am, but...I want to get the answers.” She couldn’t help it. She hated leaving things undone.

“Fine, I will see if I can get answers on the toxicology, meds, and any underlying condition, but if you don’t think you’re going to find any mitigating circumstances, then I really do want you to clear this up quickly and get back here. A valuable piece of jewelry was stolen, and I need my best investigator on it.” With that statement, he hung up.

Stolen jewelry. That was definitely up her alley. She should be overjoyed, but intuitively, she knew there was something going on here.

A sudden commotion in the room drew her attention. The drivers were all getting up from their tables. It was time to go to the track. Her heart started galloping again. She remembered that excitement, the joy she’d always felt heading to the track.

She took a sip of coffee and picked at the bacon on her plate. Missing jewelry. That was the kind of case she usually loved. She let out a breath. She’d be okay. She asked the waiter for more coffee and continued to pick at her breakfast

for another few minutes before finally giving up any pretense of eating and leaving the dining room. She wasn't sure if the nerves jumping under her skin came from the idea of getting answers and closing the case, or because of her impending trip back to a world she'd loved.



She parked her car and walked over to the paddock. The whine of engines greeted her like a long-lost friend as the cars screamed around the track. The smell of gas and food made her smile. She'd spent so many mornings scarfing down breakfast as she stood discussing a race with her engineer or mechanic. They were good times. For the most part.

She made her way to paddock sixteen. The trucks parked out front were new and looked state-of-the-art. She recalled the rumors she'd overheard last night that Hughes Racing was out of money. No wonder, if these were anything to go by. Trailers like these only came after some serious outlay of cash.

“Get me a coffee while you're at it, please” a voice called. She looked up to see Rory calling to a young woman. He looked tired but good. He was happier since he'd quit racing, at least that's what he'd said. They'd run into each other in L.A. She'd been home for a visit, and he'd just gotten out of rehab. He'd said if she ever decided to go back to racing, she should call him.

“Greer!” he said as he pulled her in for a hug. “What are you doing here? You aren't here about racing, are you?” A look of concern went across his face. “This is not the best time. Dalton isn't in a great mood.”

She shrugged slightly. "I heard."

"Right, the hallway." He ran a hand through his hair. The gesture reminded her of Dalton in tense situations, and they'd had a few. His older brother did the same thing when he was stressed.

"How are you?" she asked.

He met her gaze. "I'm hanging in there. I went to a meeting this morning. This is...a lot, but I'm doing the work and determined to make it stick."

She smiled. "I'm glad you're doing okay." She'd kept up with Rory in passing and knew about his addiction and recovery. Mostly, it was a line to knowing how Dalton was.

"Listen, if you're really here to talk to Dalton, I would advise against it. He's super stressed."

"Moore's death was shocking. I'm sure he's upset."

"Yeah," Rory agreed, "but there's more to it. I can't get into it, but between that and the new will, which you heard about last night, well, Dalton is hanging on by a thread, you know? Wait, how did you hear about Moore? Were you at the track yesterday? I know how gossip is in the paddock."

She put a hand on Rory's arm. "It's okay, Rory. I'm here on business. He has to see me."

"Business? What kind of business?" Rory stared at her.

"It might be better to explain it to both of you at once." She was taking the wimpy way out. If Rory was in the room maybe Dalton would actually listen and not yell at her.

Rory gave her a look but then nodded. "Come on then, follow me. He's in the trailer." As he went up the stairs on the side of the truck, she followed more slowly. Her body's

response to seeing the man was like being on a roller coaster. Sickening and thrilling at the same time.

She stepped inside the trailer. It was empty except for her former lover. He was sitting at the table, staring at a laptop screen.

“Hey, Dalton. Someone here to see you,” Rory said and then stepped out of the way.

Dalton looked up and frowned at Greer. “No.” He shook his head. “No way.” He glanced at Rory. “I don’t know what the hell this is about, but I don’t need it now.”

Rory shrugged. “I know, but just hear her out. She says she’s here on business.” Just then Rory’s radio squawked with a request for him to go to the garage. He nodded at Greer and then stepped past her. “Good luck,” he whispered on his way out the door.

Dalton glared after his brother and then shifted his gaze to her. His eyes were the color of storm clouds. “What do you want, Greer? I have enough shit on my plate without having to deal with...” he waved his hand in a circle.

Her voice caught in her throat, and she emitted a squeak. *Great. Well done, Greer.* She cleared her throat and tried again. “I’m sorry about what happened yesterday. That was a tough break.”

“What the fuck do you want, Greer?” he demanded again.

“I represent Global.”

He arched a brow. “Who?”

“Your insurance company.”

His brows lowered. “We don’t have insurance, and if we did, we wouldn’t use the company you work for.”

The meaning was clear. It stung, but she couldn't hold his justifiable anger against him. She'd hurt him, and he wasn't about to be nice to her because of it. But this was business. "You do have insurance. Your father took out a policy several years ago and paid it in full for a term of five years. You're in year three." She opened her shoulder bag and pulled out a copy of the paperwork. "We received this paperwork with your driver's names for this season." She offered it to him.

He blinked and stared down at the paperwork in his hand. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Connor originally took out the policy the year Dan Pariso was driving with you guys. It was the last year you were racing. Pariso was a danger to himself and others on the track. Your father thought the policy was a good idea just in case." She hadn't known any of this until she'd read through the file her boss had handed her.

"I— Seriously? My father wasn't one for thinking ahead or doing something smart."

She shrugged. "I'm just telling you what was in the paperwork, but if I had to guess? Pariso scared your dad a bit. He was a real cowboy, but he spent a lot of money on racing, most of which would've gone to your dad."

"That sounds more like it. So instead of kicking a dangerous driver off the team, he took out insurance. Wonderful. Would've been nice to know."

"Someone in your office knows it because this year's drivers were listed on the policy."

He still stared at the paperwork in his hand. Then he looked up at her. "What happened to Pariso?"

“He died in a skydiving accident over the Mohave desert. Your father never bothered to cancel the policy.”

He was silent. “Wait, how much is the policy for?”

She named an amount, but he just stared at her, no reaction. It was a hefty policy, and they’d get a big cheque in the next week or so. “So, I just need to ask you some questions and go over what happened. Once I complete my interviews, I’ll file a report with my company, and you should get your money.”

His brows furrowed. “Can you explain exactly what this is? There’s some sort of insurance policy on the drivers?”

She nodded. If she didn’t know Dalton, at this point she would think he was as dumb as a box of rocks. She was going to chalk it up to shock. “If any injury or loss of life happens to the drivers, you receive compensation because they can no longer race and that causes you to lose money. It’s a standard umbrella policy. So, if any major catastrophe happens, like losing a driver, or if your garage in Mullenbach burned down, or something of that nature, then you’re insured to help offset the loss.”

Dalton relaxed back into his chair. “I see.” He was just staring blankly at the paperwork in his hand. “And how much is the payout again?”

“In this case?” She leaned over the table and pointed to a number on the page in front of him. “Like I said, I just need to ask a few questions and then speak with a few other people. My understanding is that the autopsy revealed Mr. Moore had a heart attack, although they may be waiting on further information.” She added that last bit in hopes the police were doing a little bit more than saying the guy died of a heart attack. Unless there was a ton of heart disease or a defect,

there had to be a reason why Moore died of a cardiac arrest. She needed that reason. She wanted to pay out the policy to ease the pressure on Dalton, but she wasn't just going to give it to him because she knew him. It had to be the correct thing to do. Or so she told herself.

“That’s what I was told as well,” he confirmed.

“Okay.” She stared at him, but he seemed to be completely lost in thought. “Do you mind if I sit?”

“What?” He frowned. Then seeing her gesture at the chair, he grunted, “Fine.”

She pulled out a chair and sat down at the table. Grabbing her notebook from her bag, she asked, “Did you know Mr. Moore well? Had he raced with you before?”

Dalton sighed. “Do we have to do this?”

“Do you want the money?” she countered. She was trying to do her job, and he was being an ass. This was work, not personal. He needed to pull on his big boy pants.

He sighed. “I didn’t know Moore well,” he said through clenched teeth. “He’d done some racing in the US and then participated in some track days here in Europe, but he hadn’t raced with our team in the past. Rory knew him best.”

“I’ll speak with Rory after this then.” She continued, “Was there anything unusual about yesterday morning?”

A look passed over his face. She wasn’t quite sure what it meant, but he was holding something back. Her mouth went dry.

“Not really. Rory was called away rather unexpectedly, and there was a miscommunication between us, so Moore was left

at his hotel. The other coach, Timo Korhonen, had to pick him up. I think that upset him.”

She made a note of what he said. There was more, though. She could feel it. “Was that it? Nothing else out of the ordinary?”

“It was a normal first session of the season. The drivers were excited to get on the track, and we were just as excited to see them race.”

A bullshit line, one she was sure worked on many people. “Walk me through what happened.”

Dalton paused. She could practically hear his teeth gnashing together. *Too bad*. He gave her the bullet points of the morning while she took notes. This would all end up in the file, and since they knew it was a heart attack, she didn’t need a ton of detail so she didn’t ask too many questions, but she wasn’t doing her due diligence if she didn’t at least ask a few.

“So, everyone got into their cars and headed out to pit lane, then stayed out for the whole session?”

He hesitated again. “Moore was late getting into his car. He was on the phone. I understand he was arguing with someone, but I have no idea who or what it was about.”

“I see,” she said as she made a note of it. “Nothing else?”

“Nope. Then he was out, and it was a regular session until the last lap.”

“Can you tell me what happened exactly?”

Dalton took her step by step through the last lap. She made notes, but her gut tensed. Witnessing that kind of accident was beyond upsetting. It was normally devastating but having it happen to a client, someone you were out there working with,

training, that had to be just beyond awful. “I’m so sorry. That must have been difficult.”

Dalton looked like he was going to say something, but then he just nodded. “Is there anything else?”

She bit back a sigh. He wasn’t making this easy. “Not at the moment. I will need to speak to a few of your team and then to the race officials. I should be able to be out of your hair by the end of the day.”

“Great,” he snarled.

Okay then. She stood. “Thank you for your time,” she said stiffly.

She wanted to tell him how sorry she was about the whole thing. Not just Moore, but also for what had happened between them, but he was too interested in being an ass, and she was all out of fucks to give.

She started out of the trailer. Her instincts were telling her he truly hadn’t known about the policy, but they were also screaming at her that he did know something important. Something he didn’t want her to know. Her stomach knotted. In any other circumstances, this wouldn’t bother her—in fact, she’d look at it as a challenge—but here with Dalton and his team, this had all the makings of a major disaster just waiting to happen.

Above everything else, one impulse was greater than all the rest. *Run.*

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Greta entered the trailer. “You wanted to see me?”

Dalton was sitting at the table along with Rory and Jordana. “Yeah.” He handed her a piece of paper. “Do you know anything about this?”

She glanced at it with a quizzical expression. “It’s the insurance forms for the drivers. Your father took out a policy years ago, and every time we get new drivers, I have to fill out the form.”

“You didn’t think to mention it?” Dalton asked. Every muscle strained with the urge to yell. Why would Greta not inform him about this? For now, he squashed the urge to lash out.

“I...” her gaze darted around the room. “I thought you knew. It was a paid policy, so there was no expense. I didn’t... I’m so sorry, Dalton. If I’d known you weren’t aware of it, of course I would’ve told you.”

Rory said. “It was just a surprise is all. Dad never mentioned it.”

“Oh,” Greta said, then bit her lip.

“It’s fine, Greta,” Dalton added, trying to take a step back from his ire. It wasn’t her fault. She hadn’t known they were in

the dark. “Is there anything else like this you think we might need to know about? Anything at all.”

She frowned. “I don’t think so, but I’ll think about it and review my notes. We can certainly sit down and go over everything.”

She didn’t say *like I’ve asked you to do a million times*, but she could’ve. Dalton had been avoiding doing just that for a long time. Reviewing the company’s financial position was too damn depressing. Or, at least, he thought it would’ve been. Had he known about this policy, things might have been different.

“That’s a good idea. We’ll set it up as soon as we get back to the office in Germany.” Dalton smiled reassuringly.

Her phone dinged, and she glanced at the screen. “I’m going to go help Kendra with a few things, and then the insurance investigator wants to talk to me. So cool that Greer Styger is here. I mean, I get she’s in insurance now, but still. I was a big fan back when she was racing.”

“Okay, don’t worry. Just be straight with her. The sooner we get this solved the sooner we can move on.”

“Will do, boss,” Greta said. “Let me know if you need anything else.” With that, she trotted out of the trailer.

Dalton combed a hand through his hair. *Greer*. She was going to be a big problem. Having her around would be an endless distraction. No use denying that he needed the money from the policy, and the only way to get it was through her. That galled him. Of all the people he thought he’d have to ask for help, Greer didn’t even come close to the top one hundred. She’d burned him hard seven years ago. A nearly mortal emotional injury that had taken him ages to get over. Her

presence now was rubbing salt in the wound that hadn't healed, despite how hard he tried to ignore it. Just another thing to thank his father for. *Asshole*.

"Would've been nice to know about the policy sooner. We could've used the cash." Dalton rubbed his face again.

Rory frowned. "I don't follow."

Jordana glanced at Dalton. "I think what Dalton's saying is that if he knew about it before, he could've cashed in the insurance policy and taken the money to pay off some of the debts. It would've given us breathing room. As it is, we may not get the money."

"Why not?" Rory asked.

Dalton let out a long sigh. "Because of the video."

"But the *polizei* saw the video, and they still say it's a heart attack," Rory pointed out.

"For now. Who knows what the autopsy will turn up?" Not to mention Greer's insurance review.

Jordana cocked her head. "I thought they finished that this morning and said it was a heart attack."

"They did," Dalton agreed, "but Greer said they were doing further tests. God knows what they'll find. Between that and the wing, well, I just want to be as prepared as possible."

"So that's it?" Jordana asked. "That's the team for this year?"

Dalton grunted. He knew Jordana wanted to race, but he wasn't sure they could afford it. No, he *was* sure they couldn't afford it. None of this made him feel any better. He needed money. They were desperate for cash. If Greer hadn't come along with the policy, they would have been dead in the water.

He hated that she could be the one to save their asses. And if little miss sunshine and roses didn't give them the money, they were screwed. That was what Greer smelled like to him. Sunshine and some kind of flower. When he'd caught a hint of the indelible scent last night at the bar, memories had almost crippled him.

Greer's green eyes had haunted him for years. They exuded intelligence and spirit in their depths. She had a competitive streak that was downright sexy. Just how that played out in the insurance investigation world, he had no idea, but his gut said it wasn't going to work in his favor.

Dalton avoided Jordana's question. "We're telling the world that Greer's here to investigate for the insurance company. The cause of death is officially a heart attack. Any thought that something else might have caused Moore's death is totally wrong. That's the message we have to send out."

"But what about investigating? We can't let a murderer go free," she countered.

"I know," Dalton agreed.

"I still think the cops are the best idea," Rory stated as he crossed his arms over his chest.

Dalton shook his head. "I'm going to continue to poke around." He held up his hands to ward off the arguments he knew were coming. "I will be very careful."

"Fine," Rory growled. "But if anything happens to you, I'm going to kill you myself."

Dalton nodded. "I hear you, Rory. I'll be extra careful." He'd play along for now, but he wasn't giving up. He felt as unbalanced as if he was driving with a flat. If Greer saw the video, she wouldn't pay. The racing professional in her would

recognize the vibration in the wing, and that certainly didn't play in his favor. With luck, she'd listen to the rumors and gossip and recognize them for what they were. Either way, it was too late to worry about it now. He had other fish to fry. "Rory, do me a favor and see what Hank knows about this Bianchi guy. Find out if Bianchi knows yet that he's inherited part of the team."

"I'll try."

"Call the other lawyer, Otto, and ask him. He should be able to tell you," Jordana said.

Rory nodded and went over to the corner to make the call.

His sister was studying him. "What are you going to do?"

He shrugged. "I'm going to do what I normally do and keep the drivers and the team going. What else can I do?"

"Maybe Greer can help with the investigation. She *is* an investigator."

Was she serious? In an ideal world, Jordana would be as far away from all this as possible. "I'm going to poke around, as you say, but I don't want you anywhere near this. If this blows up in our faces, I want you and Rory to be able to walk away unscathed."

Dalton squeezed his sister's shoulder as he left the trailer. He walked over to the garage where Greer was still talking to Felix Weber, the guy who took care of the tires and drove one of the trailers to all the races. Why she'd want to talk to Felix was beyond him, but he supposed she had to speak to everyone.

He sauntered up to Mario and spoke in a quiet voice, "Tell everyone the woman, Greer Styger, is an insurance

investigator. They need to answer her questions but ask them to tell me about anything that worries them.”

Mario nodded. “Will do.”

Dalton walked over to the coffee station. “Hey, Kendra, how’s it going?”

“Great,” she said with a smile. “Today is going to be a better day.”

He nodded. *It could hardly be worse.* “Hope the rain holds off.”

“You are hoping in vain, my friend,” Jack Roundtree quipped as he entered the garage along with his brother-in-law, Clyde. They were both wearing their fire suits but with the top half tied around their waists.

He nodded to the two of them.

“I wanted to offer my condolences for yesterday,” Clyde said. “That was a tough one.”

“Thanks.” Dalton hit the button on the machine to start his coffee. “Why aren’t you two out on the track? The session is still going on for another few minutes.”

Clyde shrugged. “Doing some work on the cars. They need some adjustments.”

“What’s the scuttlebutt around the track?” Dalton asked. Might as well come out with it and face it head on.

Clyde glanced at Jack. “Rumor has it you guys are having some difficulties. Karl—”

“Claasen is spreading rumors to take the pressure off his own team,” Dalton interrupted. “Don’t believe what you hear.”

Jack dropped his voice. "I heard his Carrera Cup screwup was bad."

Dalton didn't offer an opinion. Gossiping about other drivers wouldn't help. He just wanted to know what was going on. "What about you guys? How's this season looking for you?"

"Good." Clyde's smile was broad. "With the field the way it is, we're hoping to end up in the top three." He went on to discuss the other teams' chances in detail. Dalton nodded and made noncommittal sounds at all the right intervals, but really he was watching Greer. She'd finished with Felix and had moved on to Kendra.

"Well, hopefully, it will be a good season after such a rough start," Dalton offered.

"Who's the bird? She looks familiar," Jack asked.

Dalton gritted his teeth. He'd been a fool to think he could hide Greer's presence at all. "Insurance investigator."

Clyde stopped with his coffee cup halfway to his mouth. "You have insurance?"

Dalton nodded.

"Huh. The payout must be big."

He wasn't going to confirm or deny that one.

Jack stared at Greer. "But who is she? She looks so familiar."

Just then she turned and looked at his group. "Holy shit, that's Greer Styger!" Jack exclaimed. "Insurance investigator, my arse. She was the top driver in her class several years ago. There were rumors she was going to be the first female driver in Formula One."

Dalton's stomach knotted, and his breath hitched. Jack was right. Greer wasn't just an insurance investigator, no matter how much he wanted to pretend that was her sole role. She was, in fact, a former driver and a good one. She'd raced in the Carrera Cup in the U.S. for her father's team. They finished first and second the year they'd both driven for Styger Racing. Then she quit. No one said why. She never told him, just that it was over. Not just for racing, but for them as a couple. It still stung. He had been a fool to think he could manage this.

"Greer," Jack called as he walked toward her. She looked up, and her eyes widened. She licked her lips and then looked around the garage as if looking for a way to escape. Jack reached her.

"Hi, Jack. How are you?" Her voice shook slightly. She was uncomfortable. Dalton would stake his life on it. What the hell did she have to be worried about? He was the one with everything riding on this investigation. His shoulders tightened. The coffee that had tasted so good a short time ago soured in his gut. What the hell was he going to do?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Jack Rountree. She'd been foolish to hope she could get through this without people recognizing her. She should have known better. She didn't want to answer a ton of questions as to why she quit racing and how she ended up in insurance. Her hopes vanished like fog on a sunny morning because Jack Roundtree had a big mouth.

Jack had been in the U.S. racing in the Carrera Cup at the same time as she and her dad. He used to come by and chat up her father all the time. Jack was always in need of sponsorship. He tried to run his own team but never quite managed to pull it together. The money always seemed to fall through. And he'd talk everyone's ear off about everything. It got so she'd purposely avoid him.

"I'm doing well, Jack. How are you?" *Please go away.* She didn't want to have any conversation with him or anyone for that matter. It always went the same way.

"I'm great. Doing the European Cup now. Much better than the U.S. Carrera Cup."

"Nice." She wanted to talk to him like she wanted a hole in the head because she knew what was coming. The two worst questions on earth.

"How's your dad?" Imagine that...he led with number one.

“He’s doing well. You should talk to Gus.” She gestured at Gus, who was working on Tatum’s car. The session had just ended. “He just spoke with my dad. He’d have the latest. How’s your wife?” she asked, trying to divert the conversation away from her father and Styger Racing.

“She’s good. She’s good.” He nodded. “My brother-in-law is right there.” He pointed at the man who was still standing by Dalton. “I race with him now. Clyde Johnson, of Team Johnson Wright.”

“Nice. Well, tell her I said hello.” She turned back to Kendra, who was frowning. She had to be trying to figure out why Jack had come over to talk to her. “So, you were saying—”

“Dalton said you were an insurance investigator now,” Jack interrupted. “Is that true?” How come you gave up racing?”

And there it was, question number two. *Because I felt like it, asshole.* She tried to smile, but her lips were frozen. Her gaze met Dalton’s across the garage, and she shivered. Those gray eyes were pure steel at the moment, and she was sure he’d like nothing more than to pulverize her. “I work for Global Insurance as an investigator.” She hoped he didn’t notice she hadn’t answered his other question.

Her stomach had gone into free fall. It was one thing to tell the team she was an insurance investigator, but telling Jack was like announcing it over the loudspeaker on race day. The world would know in less time than it took to make a lap on the track.

Not that she was ashamed of it, but she’d spent all those years racing and then simply walked away. To the racers she knew, being an insurance investigator must seem lackluster

next to her previous career. Having to talk about racing and why she'd made the switch gagged her. It was no one's business but hers, and yet everyone always wanted an explanation. Maybe they felt like they deserved one. It was weird.

“Why'd you leave racing?” Jack asked again. *So much for hopes and prayers.*

The man just stood there, making her nervous. It wasn't like she'd thought no one would recognize her, but she hoped she would have a bit more time before someone came over and said something. She was proud of the fact she had done well in racing, but she was less proud of why she walked away. More accurate to say she was mortified about it. She squeezed her fingers into a fist. “It was just time.” That was her stock answer, and it was all Jack Roundtree was getting.

“Ms. Styger?” A man had come to stand beside them. He was tall and tanned, wearing a cashmere designer sweater and a pair of jeans with loafers, no socks. He had to be one of Moore's friends who had traveled with him to Austria. There was no way this man had anything to do with racing. She recognized him as the man at the bar with the bad wine.

“Yes?”

“I'm Philip Lyle. You had asked to speak to us?” He pointed to a group of men now standing next to Dalton.

“Right. Give me a few minutes, and then I'd be happy to sit down and chat with all of you.”

He nodded and headed back over to the group.

She turned to Jack. “I'm sorry, Jack, but I have an investigation to complete.”

“So, you are investigating that driver's death?”

“Yes,” she agreed. “And I need to get back to it. I’m sure I’ll see you around.” She offered him a dismissive smile and turned back to Kendra. “Sorry for all of the interruptions.”

Kendra nodded. “No problem. Are you... Did you used to race?”

Greer gave a small shrug. “A long time ago.”

“Oh.”

“Anyway, you were saying about Mr. Moore?” Greer prompted.

“Right. So, I brought over his water bottle to the mechanic while Mr. Moore was outside of his car, arguing on the phone.”

“Did he sound upset?”

Kendra nodded. “I’d say he was angry. He was pacing back and forth and yelling at whoever was on the phone. I couldn’t hear what he was saying, but I got the impression someone did something he didn’t like.”

“But he was definitely agitated,” Greer confirmed.

“Yes, but I’ve heard he was that way a lot. He seemed upset the entire time he was here.”

“That’s all the questions I’ve got for now. Thanks for speaking with me.” She made a couple of notes in her book and then started across the garage. She stood in front of the screens for a moment and listened to all the activity around her. She’d missed this more than she’d realized. She ran her hand over the hood of the Cup car. It had been such a major part of her existence and she’d given it up so suddenly that she’d never really given herself a chance to mourn it. It had been too painful.

And now here she was again. It was time to face the music. Seeing Jack Roundtree had driven the point home. She could no longer hide from her past. She had to embrace it. Come to terms with it and move on. That meant facing up to all of it. Including Dalton. She let out a sigh and walked over to stand beside the men seated near the coffee machine.

Dalton glared at her. She had no idea why he was upset now. She hadn't done anything but her job. He could like it or lump it. It didn't matter to her. *Much*. She decided to ignore him and keep going.

She spoke to Philip Lyle. "I just have a few questions if now is an okay time."

Philip nodded and then made room for her on the bench. Three other men were there, drinking coffee. Two appeared about the same age as Phillip, but one was younger. The picnic table where they were seated was covered with a black cloth. As she sat down, Dalton walked away. She stared out at the rain that had started falling a few minutes ago. It looked like it was picking up. She was glad she'd worn her navy cashmere sweater and jeans. She pulled her black jacket tighter around her shoulders. Spring was definitely not warm in Austria this year.

She heard muffled voices behind her. Dalton was speaking to someone, but she didn't dare turn and look. She wasn't prepared to engage with him at this point. Not in front of anyone. Unfortunately, he was standing in front of the coffee machine. She would kill for a shot of caffeine right now.

She cleared her throat and began, "I wanted to speak to you about your friend." She licked her suddenly dry lips.

"My father," said the man sitting diagonally from her. He was wearing a forest green rain jacket over a black collared

shirt. His hair was thinning, and his eyes looked pale. She'd seen pictures of Dennis Moore, and this man was a washed-out version.

"You're Brian. I'm so sorry for your loss." And she was. Losing someone on a racetrack had to be so devastating. She wished she knew more about why Dalton thought there was something off with Moore's death before she had to interview these people. She wasn't sure what she should be asking, and poking around in the dark was not necessarily helpful. But she gave up hope that Dalton would tell her, leaving her no choice. Whatever he was hiding would come out eventually.

It always did.

"Thank you," Brian responded.

"I didn't realize you would be here today." She glanced at the men at the table. "When I called the hotel and left the message, I thought I would be seeing you all there."

"I didn't feel like staying at the hotel. Philip and Don have known my father since before I was born, and Richard has been a close family friend forever. It feels good to be with people who knew him well."

Phillip exchanged a look with the two other older men but said nothing.

Greer wanted to ask about Moore's wife, but by the sounds of things, that might be a sore spot. Claire Moore looked to be younger than Brian if pictures were anything to go by. Was that why he wasn't at the hotel with her?

"Well, thank you for being here." She opened a new page in her notebook as the rain picked up, coming down in sheets now. The open garage door made it chilly, and the dampness brought goosebumps out on her skin. She suppressed a shiver.

“Can any of you tell me how Mr. Moore was feeling before he arrived here?” She’d collect background first before moving to tougher questions.

Brian took a sip from the coffee cup in front of him and then spoke. “Dad was excited about racing. He’d done some other racing back in the States, but he was totally into driving Porsche Cup cars in the European Cup.”

She glanced around the table and caught a look pass between Bainbridge and Lyle yet again. Goodman avoided everyone’s gaze. Something there. Maybe it was better to question Brian now and the others separately. “I’m glad he was excited. Did he seem nervous or upset at all?”

Brian shook his head. “My father didn’t get nervous. He was impatient to get on the track.”

“Was he upset at all? Leading up to the first practice session?” she asked. The other occupants of the table sat mute, letting Brian do the talking.

“No more than usual. He was sorting out some business things back home, but that was about it. He had to hop on a call or two, I think, but certainly nothing out of the ordinary.”

She made a few notes but knew they would be useless. Instincts learned on the track and honed as an investigation warned her that she wasn’t getting the truth out of Brian. Perhaps he didn’t want to paint his father in a negative light. People often didn’t want to speak ill of the dead. That didn’t help her investigation any.

“I understand that the authorities think your father had a heart attack. Did he have any history of heart trouble?”

Again, Brian shook his head. “Not that I know of.”

Goodman cleared his throat. “He’d just had his physical, and his cholesterol was up, as was his blood pressure.”

Brian frowned. “Well, yeah, but it wasn’t serious.”

Greer made a note.

“But it wasn’t serious,” Brian repeated. “He was fine.”

She glanced over at Goodman and then back at Brian. “I’ll need a copy of those medical records.” That was pushing it, but she might as well give it a shot.

Brian shook his head. “My father’s medical records are private.”

Greer wasn’t going to argue with him. “Mr. Goodman, if you would go on the record to say what exactly Mr. Moore said to you, that would be very helpful.”

Goodman’s face lost a bit of color. “Er, well, I’m not sure I could tell you verbatim or anything. I mean, it was just a conversation.”

“Any little bit helps.” Greer made another note. They were going to have to get a copy of Moore’s medical records at some point. She’d ask Claire, Moore’s wife, for permission. She would be the next of kin. None of the stuff she was writing down was helpful, but she needed to go through the motions. Plus, she found her note-taking often bothered people, and they revealed things they didn’t mean to when they got agitated.

“You said he was concerned enough to work on his will with you,” Lyle countered.

Goodman’s face paled considerably. Greer perked up but fought to hide her reaction. *Finally, something of interest.*

Brian whipped around and faced Goodman. “You didn’t tell me that. He changed his will?”

“Er, now isn’t the best time to discuss this, Brian. Maybe we could talk about it later.”

“What did he change?” Brian demanded.

“I really can’t discuss it with you at this moment.” Goodman glanced around the table. Bainbridge’s eyebrows had lifted toward his hairline, but Lyle just shrugged slightly.

“Yes, you can. You can tell me exactly what’s going on.” Brian’s face was getting red.

Goodman frowned. “Brian—”

“Don’t bother trying to fob me off. You need to tell me now!”

Hunching his shoulders, Goodman finally said, “Why don’t we go to the hospitality tent and get something to eat? We can discuss it there. This really isn’t the place.”

Brian was on his feet in an instant and stomped out into the rain. Goodman murmured his apologies and went after the other man.

That was informative. Greer made a note about what happened, but it wasn’t like she was going to forget. It was the most important piece of information she’d uncovered so far. Brian hadn’t known there had been a will change, and Goodman was exceedingly uncomfortable about going on the record about anything. She wasn’t sure what it meant yet, but it was significant for sure.

The wind whipped through the garage, and she shuddered. As she looked up, a cup of coffee appeared at her elbow. She caught Dalton moving back out of the corner of her eye.

Saying thanks would be considerate, but she immediately understood he was there to hear what was going on. If she said anything, it would draw attention to that fact. If she knew Dalton at all she knew he'd be next to her on every step of the investigation. He wasn't likely to let her do it on her own because he didn't trust her. A sharp pain nagged her sternum. Yeah, his lack of trust hurt, but she was pretty sure there was something he didn't want her to find out. He was just an angry presence behind her at this point.

None of this was working out the way she'd hoped. She'd thought maybe just maybe she could wrap this up quickly, get Dalton a big cheque and then he'd be happy. That had been more of a pipe dream than she'd anticipated.

"Mr. Bainbridge, I got the impression you didn't necessarily agree with everything Brian said."

Donald Bainbridge snorted. "I didn't agree with any of it. And call me Don. We came to the track to get away from Brian. He's very whiny. I know his father just died but this goes beyond that. Dennis had a bit of a rough relationship with Brian. They weren't that close. Brian was..."

"A fuck up," Lyle supplied.

"I wasn't going to put it quite like that," Don said, "but, yeah. Brian didn't live up to expectations. He has anxiety, which makes things difficult for him. Dennis wasn't the most sympathetic of fathers either. But Brian has a habit of coming up with stupid schemes to get his father to invest in, and Dennis just wasn't having it."

"They fought?" she asked.

"All the time," Bainbridge said.

"Don, could you elaborate?"

“The latest one is about some kind of real estate deal. Brian found out somehow one of the luxury hotel chains was going to put up a new resort outside of Las Vegas. He wanted Dennis to help him buy the land around it.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Greer said. “But Mr. Moore didn’t agree?”

Bainbridge snorted. “At first, Dennis said the deal sounded good. Then I guess he did some more research and pulled out of the project. Told Brian it was a non-starter. The resort was never going to get off the ground. Apparently, there were issues with water rights. Dennis figured that by the time the resort chain got it sorted, it would cost them billions, and they would kill the deal. Brian went ballistic and said his father never supported him and always tried to undercut any idea he had. Anyway, that was just the latest scheme. There were millions more. Brian just doesn’t have a head for business.”

“Was Mr. Moore upset before he came here?”

“Yes,” Lyle confirmed. “The deal falling through made Brian very upset. He’d pinned his hopes on it. Dennis and Brian had a huge fight just before they got on the plane. Dennis has his own jet, and he and Brian got out of the back of the SUV and had a screaming match about this whole thing. We were all just standing there on the tarmac, waiting to get on the jet.

“Brian claimed that Dennis killed the deal on purpose, which I wouldn’t necessarily put past Dennis, to be fair.”

Bainbridge frowned. “You don’t think Dennis killed the deal on purpose, do you?”

Lyle shrugged. “The water issue was awfully convenient. There were ways around it, but Dennis wouldn’t hear any of

them. He could be quite stubborn. He said he knew better since he'd been in business for over forty years and had made hundreds of millions of dollars.

“Brian thought Dennis reached out to the resort chain and told them what they wanted to do would be impossible, and he'd know because he knew all the right people. He said they decided to kill the deal and build elsewhere after that. Brian yelled that Dennis did it on purpose to wreck any chances Brian had of being successful.

“Claire just stood by the SUV looking bored, and her brother Joe clearly wanted to be anywhere else but there. The tension was so thick on the plane on the way over that Joe went into the bathroom and got stoned.”

“It was ugly,” Bainbridge agreed.

“Was Mr. Moore angry the morning before coming to the track?”

Bainbridge nodded. “He was still pissed off, and then the mix-up with his coach not picking him up didn't help any. He spent a lot of time on the phone during breakfast. He stood outside the restaurant, talking with someone, while the rest of us sat there and waited. Brian said Dennis was calling the bank.”

“Was racing something Mr. Moore was looking forward to like Brian said?”

Lyle grunted. “Not so much. I mean, he liked racing, but both Don and I were really surprised he agreed to do a whole season. We thought he would end up doing a race or two, and that would be it.”

Don nodded. “I think he did it because he was always telling Brian he had to learn to follow through on things, and

Brian called him out on it. So, he chose racing to prove his point.”

Greer wrote some notes and then took a sip of coffee and savored it on her tongue. It tasted like heaven. “Was that the only thing that surprised you about Mr. Moore’s behavior lately?”

Bainbridge and Lyle exchanged a look.

“No,” Lyle said. “We were both shocked when he married Claire.”

“I still have no idea why he did it,” Bainbridge added. “I mean, he liked Claire, but I never thought he was mad about her or anything. She was just another in a long line of temporary girlfriends.”

Lyle confessed, “I often wondered if she didn’t have something on him. It was the only thing I could think of that would make him marry her.”

Greer was going to have to speak with Mrs. Moore for sure now. “Any idea about the health issues? I get the impression that was a surprise.”

“A complete surprise. We didn’t know a thing about it,” Lyle confirmed. “And that wasn’t like Dennis. He always told us stuff. Except lately. We have no idea what changed.”

“Did you know about the new will?”

Bainbridge shook his head. “No idea.”

Lyle shrugged again. “You just never knew what was going on with Dennis these days.”

Bainbridge glanced at his friend but said nothing.

The sound of air guns pierced the air. The garage was alive with movement and sound. The smell of grease with an undertone of coffee filled her nostrils. It was hard to be here and not be distracted.

She glanced down at her notes. “I think that’s it for the moment, gentlemen. If I have any more questions, I’ll reach out. If you can think of anything else that might help, please contact me.” She handed them each a business card and silently prayed they didn’t use them.

The men tucked the cards in their pockets, stood up, and pulled their coats around them before heading out into the rain.

“I don’t like this.” Dalton’s voice carried over the sounds of the air guns.

She braced herself as she swung one leg until she was straddling the bench and turned to face him. “It’s not about what you like,” she pointed out. She didn’t want to discuss this with him here.

Hard gray eyes coldly held her gaze. He’d crossed his arms over his chest, drawing his sweater tight over his biceps. It was inconvenient how she noticed details like that when she should be paying attention to what he was saying.

She let out a long sigh and sipped her coffee. “I know this is...weird, but this is the way it works. I have to investigate, and then I can file a report and you get your money. I know you would prefer someone else, but there is no one else in my office that can do it.”

“This is a bad idea,” he repeated. “I need you to go. Tell them to send someone from some other office.”

“No,” she said, surprising herself. He was right—this was a bad idea—but she wasn’t leaving. She had a job to do, and

she was going to do it. “I’m staying. Get used to it. Hopefully, I won’t be here long. I need to finish speaking to people, and then I’m gone. The sooner I get it done, the sooner I can leave.”

Dalton dropped his arms in defeat and turned to the counter. “This—just—isn’t—” He hit the button on the coffee maker again. Over his shoulder, he fixed her with a stare.

“Just isn’t what?” she demanded. “Easy? No shit. But I seem to recall someone telling me the best things in life rarely are.” She glared back at him. He used to tell her that all the time when she’d had a bad day at the track.

He grabbed his coffee and cursed. Then he sat down opposite her, straddling the bench as she was. “I’ll make you a deal.”

She cocked an eyebrow. “What kind of deal?” His scent swirled around her as he leaned forward. How could she still be so aware of this man after everything that had happened? She had an intense longing to hug him. To be crushed against his chest like he used to do when she was upset. His close proximity was messing with her, mentally and physically. She needed distance so she could focus, but somehow she couldn’t bring herself to move.

“I’ll help you interview everyone so you can leave by the end of the day. If you need anything else, you can do it over the phone.”

She shook her head. “That’s not how this works. I need to complete my investigation my way, or I can’t file the report.” That wasn’t strictly true, but she wasn’t giving in on this one. She needed to be here, to face up to her past, and he was just going to have to suck it up.

He swore again and stared at her. There was more he wanted to say—she could sense it—but he clamped his lips together. Finally, he said, “Greer, this is stupid. You need... I’d like you to go.”

“No,” she said again through gritted teeth. She’d had enough. The stress of the situation was bad enough, but him behaving like an idiot wasn’t helping. Her senses were in overdrive, and it had set her nerves jangling. “It’s not stupid. If you want the money, this is what has to happen. What’s stupid is your behavior. Get over yourself. It was seven years ago. You have to be over me by now. Surely your ego isn’t that fragile.”

His face went blank and his eyes turned the color of gun metal. She’d gone too far. Said too much. Challenged him, his manhood, and he didn’t like that. Not. One. Bit. *Well, tough shit.*

“What’s really going on here?” she demanded. “Everyone is saying heart attack, yet you’re pushing like there’s more to the story. It’s not a secret that you don’t want me here. Why? Anyone else would be thrilled I was here. You’re going to get a big cheque. I just have to ask a few questions. What’s really going on, Dalton?”

“A man died on my watch. I want the truth to come out.” He scrubbed a hand over his face. “You used to know the importance of the truth. I wonder what changed.”

That one hit its mark, and she found herself breathless with pain. She closed her eyes briefly and reopened them. Maybe he was right. All they were doing was hurting each other. Maybe she should tell Frank about her past with these people. Maybe then he could find someone else to send to investigate. But then she’d have to tell him the whole story.

With a slight shake of her head, she decided not to make that call. One more day. She could do this. She *would* do this. She needed this. Owning her past was the only way to move forward. Even if it killed her.

“I think there’s more to Moore’s death, but you’re not being honest with me. I’m going to stay and find the truth, and then I’ll be gone. That’s it. That’s all. Accept it, and we can move on.

“So, it is true,” Karl Claasen said as he came bursting into the garage. “It is you!”

They both turned in time to see him wipe the water out of his eyes.

“I was a big fan of yours, Ms. Styger. I know your father. We all met him when we were in Las Vegas for the big Car Classic.” He glanced at Dalton as if to say, *aren’t you going to introduce me?*

“Karl Claasen, Claasen Racing, Greer Styger.”

“Hello,” Greer said as she grabbed her coffee with her right hand so she wouldn’t have to shake his. Petty? Maybe. But she had no interest in chatting with anyone who led with the fact they knew her father.

“You didn’t go to the Car Classic, Dalton, but we were there along with Jack and Clyde and a few of the other teams. Your father was there,” he said to Greer, “with several of his classic race cars. Dennis Moore and his wife and Brian were there, too, along with his friends. Dennis chatted with your father. He was trying to buy a car off him.”

“I see.” The fact the dead man knew her father seemed weird, but irrelevant. Everyone knew her father.

“Are you here for a visit? Are you thinking of racing in the European Cup? I would like a chance to speak with you if you are interested. My team—”

“Let me stop you right there Mr. Claasen—”

“Karl, please.”

“I’m here on business. I’ve been out of racing for quite a few years now, but I thank you for the offer.”

Claasen frowned. “Business you say? What are you here for? Jack had said you were an insurance investigator, but I just can’t imagine.”

She shot him a look. “Well, it’s true.”

“Insurance,” he mumbled. “Dalton, you have insurance on your drivers?”

Dalton didn’t say anything, but Claasen took the silence as affirmative.

Claasen’s lips turned into a flat line, and his face lost all expression. “I see. That’s a surprise.” And, from his expression, not a welcome one. “Well, nice to meet you.” With that, he turned on his heel and went back out into the rain.

“What the hell was that about?” Greer asked, looking back at Dalton.

“He’s not my biggest fan because we’re his biggest competition. He wants to see us fail. You know how rumors spread. Everyone is whispering that he needs to do very well to keep his team going. Anything that might help Hughes Racing is a major problem for him.”

“Huh,” she said and then took a final swig of her coffee. Swallowing, she stood up and put her cup in the recycling bin. “I have to interview the rest of your team. Do you want to help

me, or are you content to let me interview them and I'll tell you what I find?"

He stared at her. Then he cocked his head and said, "Let me show you something first." He stood and went out into the rain, not even looking over his shoulder to see if she was following.

That had not been what she'd expected. Whatever he wanted to show her must be significant. But how? With a jerky start, she hustled after him. This whole trip was shaping up to become catastrophic in so many ways. She needed to pull the plug. Self-preservation should be kicking in, but as she stepped out into the rain, she knew she'd follow Dalton Hughes anywhere he wanted to lead. And that was the scariest thought ever.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Dalton entered the crowded trailer with Greer on his heels. Everyone was in there going over data from the morning sessions.

Mario stood. “We’re all going to lunch. You want to join us?”

Dalton shook his head. “We’ll be over in a bit.” He turned to his drivers. “Tatum, Hans, how was the morning session?”

“Lots to learn,” Tatum said, “but it was fun.”

“I’m rusty,” Hans added, “but Tatum is right. It’s fun.” The two men grinned like kids on Christmas morning.

Rory said, “We were just discussing going out in the rain this afternoon. The guys were wondering if it’s a good idea.”

Dalton pulled out the last empty chair at the far end of the table. “Going out in the rain today may not help necessarily with the race on Sunday since it looks like there’s only a twenty percent chance of rain for race day, but it’s always good to get some rain driving in.

“To be honest, if we were in the last part of the season, I would tell you not to bother, but guys, we’re on day two of the runup to the first race. Time in the car won’t hurt. Just take it easy.” He pointed to Timo and Rory. “They will do some lead

and follow with you so you can get a feel for driving in the rain and get some pointers as it's happening. Timo, Rory," Dalton directed his gaze at them. "If it really starts to come down, bring them in."

Both coaches nodded, and all four men headed out of the trailer, followed by Mario and the rest of the engineers.

Jordana came into the trailer. "Greer! It's so good to see you!" The two women hugged.

Dalton let out a sigh. He'd forgotten Greer had been friendly with Jordana when they'd been dating. Jordana was about five years younger than Greer and had looked up to the woman. She'd been crushed when Greer had walked away so abruptly. Almost as much as he had.

"How's your father? I heard he's doing charity events now and again. He's had a hell of a career," Jordana said. A look of annoyance quickly flitted across Greer's face but she smoothed out her features. Greer might be a lot of things but she wouldn't be mean to Jordana. It just wasn't her style even if she didn't seem to want to talk about her father.

"Yes," Greer agreed, but Dalton was pretty sure she was speaking through clenched teeth. There was something there that she wasn't saying. Greer had a rough relationship with her father like he'd had with his, but there was something else going on. He pushed the unwelcome concern away. None of his business anymore. He couldn't allow himself to think about it. Greer had always been able to get under his skin. If he didn't keep her at a distance, he'd be screwed.

Gus walked into the trailer. "Greer, good to see you back at the track." He gave her shoulder a squeeze. She nodded at him but a hardness in her expression made the greeting seem cool. She'd always liked Gus, so the coldness was out of place.

“It’s nice to be here,” she commented.

Dalton made a mental note. Jordana and Gus had both mentioned her father, which had instantly iced her eyes. The old man must have done something major. Gus might know. *Stop. Just stop. Not his business.* God, he needed her to leave before he got sucked back without knowing what hit him.

“Dalton,” Gus said, “have you got a minute?”

“Sure.” He followed Gus through the rear exit of the trailer. “What’s up?”

“Greer getting back into racing?”

Dalton took a deep breath. “She is here as an insurance investigator. I have no idea if she’s getting back into racing.” Dalton did his best to keep his composure in front of the other man, but he wanted to shake his mechanic until the man’s teeth rattled. He did not want to have this conversation right now, or anytime really. “Was there something else you needed?” he asked. Now he was the one talking through clenched teeth. He tried to loosen his jaw.

“Yeah. I’m missing some tools.”

“What?”

“I know it sounds stupid, but I’m missing my favorite screwdriver. It’s not anywhere in the garage.”

Dalton just stared at the man. His whole world was falling apart, and Gus was worried about a screwdriver.

“Look, I know it sounds crazy, and it shouldn’t matter or anything, but you know I look after my tools. I’m superstitious about them. My screwdriver has gone missing. It’s a really bad sign.”

Dalton rubbed his face. He couldn't take much more. "Okay, Gus. I'll keep an eye out for it. Ask the guys in the garage if they've seen it, and I guess borrow another mechanic's screwdriver if you need one."

He turned and went back up the steps into the trailer. Jordana and Greer were gathered around Mario's laptop, watching a video. It was the one from Moore's car, and it ended when he rolled over.

"I'd like to see the one from your car," Greer said, meeting Dalton's gaze.

"Fine," he said and gave a brief nod to Jordana, who loaded the next video.

His shoulders tightened but didn't keep his stomach from hitting the floor. Greer was smart, one of the things that had drawn him to her. There was no way a seasoned driver like her would miss the oscillation on the wing. Holding his breath, he waited and watched the screen. Moore's car sped around the last turn and accelerated down the straight and then he went up the incline and hit the turn totally out of control. Dalton watched the whole thing play out again with growing nausea. The likelihood of Hughes Racing surviving this was just about nil, but mostly his sick feeling was because a man was dying in front of them. He felt just as helpless now as he had when it happened.

The video stopped. No one said a word. Dalton risked a glance at Greer, but her face was blank. She seemed to be steeling herself for something. His knees went weak, and he reached out for the back of the chair in front of him.

"Who was the mechanic?" she asked.

"James Macht."

She seemed to relax slightly. “Did you talk to him? It’s obvious there was a problem with the wing.” No one said anything. She continued. “It definitely added to the situation and may have caused the crash.” She met Dalton’s gaze.

“Moore lost control of the car and crashed. Somewhere in there he had a heart attack. No one can prove exactly when that happened. Maybe the wing had an effect or maybe he was already having a heart attack when he went into the corner.” He drew a deep breath. “All we know for sure is that Dennis Moore had a heart attack. That was not caused by a wing issue.”

He had said everything in an even tone, trying to mask the horror that he was even arguing about this. What she said was true but he couldn’t fault his team. Every single person affiliated with Hughes Racing was safety conscious. His knuckles were white on the back of the chair, which seemed like the only thing holding him upright at the moment. He wanted to puke. Instead, he just held Greer’s gaze, clamping his teeth together and gripping the chair for dear life.

She swallowed. “That’s what you were so worried about; the wing.”

He said nothing. There was nothing to say.

“Do you think James screwed up?”

Dalton shook his head. “No. He would’ve noticed the wing was loose when he closed the engine cover. I don’t think he screwed up. I think there was no way he could have known the wing was loose because it wasn’t. I think someone turned all six screws along the wing a tiny bit before Moore went out, and as he drove, the vibration loosened them more and more until he crashed.”

Greer glanced at Jordana and then back at Dalton. She sat down hard in a chair. “You think someone did this on purpose? You think Moore was murdered?”

Dalton stared at her. It was a wild conclusion to jump to, but he had no other explanation. His team was beyond reproach. This had to be someone else’s tampering. He finally nodded. “Yes, I do. I just... I can’t figure out why or if it was done on purpose.”

“The murder?” Greer frowned. “I’m not following.”

Jordana cleared her throat. “Dalton means, did they just want Moore to crash for some reason, but he ended up having a heart attack and dying by coincidence? Or is there more to it and they really wanted him dead?”

Dalton tried to think once more of how anyone could guarantee Moore would die from this, and he came up empty. “It just doesn’t add up.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Greer agreed, “but I see why you didn’t want to tell me. The wing is a mitigating circumstance. My company won’t pay.”

Dalton glared at her. “Why am I not surprised? That’s it then, right? You’re done? Well, don’t let the door hit you in the ass on the way out.”

He’d known that there was no way the insurance company would pay once Greer saw the video, and she was always going to have to see the video. He just chose to show it to her now to end his misery. He couldn’t take being next to Greer. Too many memories. Too hard to keep her at a distance. It was self-preservation. This morning he’d had no idea his father had purchased an insurance policy. Now that lifeline was a moot

point. He hadn't lost anything. It was never his to begin with. Neither the money nor Greer.

Greer's eyes were big, and her cheeks had paled. "Dalton, I still have to complete my investigation."

"No, you don't. You just said the key phrase 'mitigating circumstances.' Your people won't pay. No need to go any further."

Greer squeezed her forehead with one hand "The thing you're forgetting is that I don't need your permission. I'm duty-bound to carry out this investigation with or without your help. That's how it works. And if you're smart, you'll help me."

"How is helping you smart?" Dalton demanded. "You're not giving me the money, so why the fuck should I care what you do?"

He knew he was hurting her. Her skin was chalk white, and she couldn't conceal the tremor in her hands. He was deliberately being a bastard to her, and he hated himself for it. But if his behavior got her gone, so be it. This had to be business no matter what he thought or felt about her. She'd dumped him and then ghosted him. And it had crushed him for the longest time. He'd thought he'd managed to put it all behind him, but he'd been lying to himself. The stinging hurt remained just underneath the surface, even after all these years. He needed her as far away as possible if he was going to survive this mess and save the racing team.

"You say your guy, James, didn't do this. If he wasn't negligent, you need to let me find out who was. There could still be an avenue where you get paid if Moore's death isn't on you."

“But how likely is that?” he snarled.

She gripped the back of the chair, her knuckles turning white. “I...I’m not sure.”

“Yes, you are. You know the chances are slim. Just go, Greer.”

“No,” she said in a quiet voice. Then in a louder one, “I’m not leaving. I have a job to do, and I’m going to do it with or without your help like you said. But if you help, you get to spin the narrative a lot more than if I do it on my own. You know what the paddock is like. Gossip flies faster than the cars. If you help me, we can find out Moore’s death had nothing to do with Hughes Racing. You don’t help, and people will be left to their own suspicions. Seems to me you already have a lot of people looking for your downfall. This would put another nail in the coffin.”

“She’s right,” Jordana said. “We need to protect the team. Look at the situation Claasen is in with his team screwup in Carrera. We’re already on the edge. If it gets out that it was our fault, we’ll be done for. Hughes Racing will cease to exist.”

Dalton closed his eyes. He should’ve just deleted the video. Not shown it to anyone. Said there was a technical error and let it go. But then a killer would go free, and he couldn’t live with that. Now, the killer still might walk, and his family legacy would go down in flames. He hadn’t improved the situation at all. “It’s over. We need to face it,” he said.

“Bullshit,” Rory exploded.

Dalton stared at his brother. He hadn’t even heard him come back into the trailer.

Rory continued, “You’re giving up because you’re tired. I get it. We all get it, but Greer is offering us a way out. Maybe it’s a slim chance, but it’s better than giving up.”

“Is it?” Dalton asked. “Is it really better than packing it in? I’m not so sure. We don’t even own the majority stake anymore, so what the fuck are we fighting so hard for?”

“It’s our company,” Rory countered. “Dad built it, but you’ve kept it alive. Hughes Racing *is* us. You can’t give up on us.” He sat down hard. “I know. I know you gave up your career because you found out Dad was about to lose the whole business, which meant my career and Jordana’s would be over as well. You didn’t hesitate. Yeah, Dad was sick but you gave up everything for the business. For Jordana and me. I know you paid his bills with money from your race wins and you kept Dad afloat for at least six months before you came back.”

Dalton’s heart sank. He’d never wanted anyone to know that.

“What?” Jordana mumbled. “What do you mean?”

“Dalton knew Dad was falling apart before any of us knew he was sick. He paid all the bills from what he made racing so that you and I could keep going. So that Dad could save face. Then he gave up his entire career to take over.”

“Is that true, Dalton?”

He stayed silent. Rory needed to stop talking. This information wasn’t going to help anyone, and Greer certainly didn’t need to know it.

“He also paid for your college and your early racing days. Dad didn’t pay for anything. Dalton paid for all of us. Whatever we needed.”

“Rory—” Dalton warned.

Jordana said, “Is it true?”

Her eyes looked so sad it made his heart hurt. “It’s not important.”

“Yes, it is,” she said, her eyes filling with tears.

“Jorry,” he said, using the nickname they’d used when she was a little girl, “I left all of you guys with him, and I shouldn’t have. He wasn’t good at being a dad. So I helped out when I could. That’s it.” He’d felt so guilty when he’d discovered their father had no money to help Jordana with school. He’d realized then that his leaving had cost all his siblings big time. He had always been the one to hold their father’s feet to the fire. He made him do the right things when it came to the family, but he’d been younger than Jordana was now. Being the responsible one all the time had been too much, and he needed to get out. To be his own person. It had taken years before he realized how his actions had affected the rest.

“He saved the house and kept us all in food and clothing. Sorry to tell you, Jorry, but it’s time you learned the truth. Dalton kept us going. Not Dad. Never Dad.

“If I did such a great thing,” Dalton asked Rory, “then why did three of you fall apart? Where are Niall and Cormac? They should be here, and they aren’t. I didn’t save anyone. I just prolonged the agony. Maybe now it should be over. Then we can all move on.”

“I don’t want to move on,” Jordana said bluntly. “I want to race for Hughes Racing. It’s been my dream since childhood. I’m not giving up on it. I know I don’t have the right to ask anything else from you, Dalton, but please don’t give up.”

The crushing weight he'd been silently carrying for years had just become public and had tripled in size. He couldn't turn her down. She was his baby sister. He dropped his head back and stared at the ceiling of the fancy trailer they couldn't really afford. But again...Dad.

He mouthed an obscenity at the world in general, but mostly for this messed up situation, and finally gave in. "I don't know how long we can function, but you'll race this season or for as long as I can float it."

Jordana threw her arms around his neck and gave him a big hug. "I owe you, big brother."

He hugged her back. "No, you don't. Just go out and have fun. Rory will coach you, and if you don't mind, I might stick my nose in now and again."

She stepped back. "I'd like that." Turning, she grabbed Rory's hand. "Come on, we have to discuss strategy, and I want to talk to Mario about car setup. Let's grab Gus, too," she said as she pulled him out of the trailer into the rain.

He turned to Greer. "You still need—"

"I need to stay. Jordana is right. If we can prove someone else sabotaged the wing, there's a chance you can still get paid." She held up her hand, warding off his protest. She clarified, "It's a slim chance, but it exists. I still have to investigate whether you like it or not. Wouldn't it be better if you helped me rather than work against me?"

He crossed his arms over his chest. She was right, as much as he hated to admit it. "Murder is a whole different level of investigation."

"Yes, it is, but I'm not investigating a murder. I'm looking for a saboteur. I'm just an insurance investigator doing my

thing. That's all people will see. That's all they need to know."

He frowned. She looked so good it was killing him. Best to remember she'd dumped him, crushed him. And yet, here he was thinking about how good it would feel to pull her into his arms. Maybe Rory wasn't the only Hughes with an addiction.

"By the way, I think you're wrong," Greer commented as she brushed some stray hairs out of her face. "There's no way they could've planned Moore's death. Someone wanted him to crash. I agree with that part. The whole wing was moving, so you're right, it wasn't just one screw. But there's no way they could have counted on a major accident. He might have come in early or had a small mishap and sat out the rest of the session. It's not murder. It's manslaughter or wrongful death at best."

"It doesn't matter what you want to call it, it's still murder in my book. My driver lost his life. We need to find out who loosened the screws so we can't be blamed for it and the right person goes to jail." He'd just used "we." There was no point in denying that Greer was staying, but he needed to lay out some ground rules.

"You can stay, but with stipulations. First, I need to be with you during your investigation. I don't want you talking to anyone on your own." He wasn't going to share about his adventure when someone tried to run him off the road. Surely, someone wasn't stupid enough to try to hurt Greer. She'd been telling everyone Moore had died from a heart attack, so she was probably safe. But he'd stay glued to her side just to be sure.

"Fine, but I do the talking," she said as she plopped her hands on her hips.

"Agreed." *To a point.* No need to share that thought.

“Second, the moment you know for sure there’s no hope for us to get paid, you’re gone.”

“Okay, but my investigation might take a while. Can you guarantee you won’t change your mind or complain before that?”

He grudgingly agreed to that one as well.

“And three,” she said this time. “When we’re finished talking to everyone, we will talk to the cops and tell them what we know. Moore deserves that. If someone deliberately tried to take him out, or even if they just wanted to cause an accident, they had a hand in his death and they should be punished.”

She was right. “Fine,” he said. “I’ll tell them if we find something to tell.”

When she cocked her head, he thought she might argue with him, but she just gave him a single nod. “I’m going to use the restroom.” She glanced at her watch. “It’s getting late. We should grab something to eat in the hospitality tent or there won’t be anything left.”

The idea of eating next to Greer, of making small talk and appearing normal was too much. “I’m good. You go ahead.”

“But you said you wanted to be with me for the whole investigation. I might get the chance to question someone. Don’t you want to be there for that?”

The sound of someone entering the trailer halted their conversation abruptly. Timo came through the door. “We’re getting ready for the next session. The guys are putting on their suits. Do you want to come to the monitors? I think Tatum and Hans could use the support.”

“On the way,” Dalton said to Timo. “Jordana is going to go out as well. I want to see her on the track.” To Greer, he told

her, “You go ahead, and I’ll be over in a bit.”

“Do you mind if I watch Jordana?” Greer asked.

“Suit yourself,” he said and then followed Timo out of the trailer and into the rain. He needed to develop a thicker skin if he was going to have Greer around. Not having lunch with her because he didn’t think he could handle being close to her was stupid, and worse, juvenile. He had to toughen up.

He entered the garage and chatted with the crew until Tatum, Hans, and Jordana arrived. He watched each driver get into their car and gave them a thumbs up. Jordana’s grin stretched ear to ear. He was thrilled she was so happy. At least he could get her a race or two before everything went to hell.

Out on the track, there was a bit of traffic. Dalton stood at the screens with his headphones covering one ear, watching his drivers. Gus came up beside him. “I think Tatum is a little nervous,” the older man said.

Dalton nodded. “I know. We need them to build their confidence and not do anything stupid.”

Gus shrugged. “It’s supposed to really pour here in a bit.”

“I told Timo and Rory to bring them in if the rain gets too hard.” They watched in silence for a while. Rory and Timo’s voices came through the headsets as they gave instructions to their students. The car in front of Tatum spun off into the gravel, narrowly missing him.

Rory praised the man’s maneuver to get out of the way. “Good job, Tatum.”

“That was close,” Tatum said.

Gus touched Dalton’s arm. “Good idea sending them out there. I think it’s going to rain on race day.”

Dalton looked at the mechanic. “It doesn’t call for rain. Says it will be cloudy. Maybe a slight chance. Rain is supposed to happen on Monday.”

“Maybe, but my bones tell me it will rain on race day. Always better to be prepared.”

Dalton just stared at his mechanic and shook his head. The old man was getting more superstitious by the day. Rain and his screwdriver. What the hell was he going to say next?

“You sent your guys out?” Clyde asked as he, Jack, and Karl cut through the garage. “We’re heading back to the hotel. Supposed to pour for the rest of the day. Springtime in the Alps.” He chuckled harshly. “There’s only one more session after this one, and that’s after dark. Not doing it on rain tires if we don’t have to.”

Dalton just nodded at them. There was no point in discussing his reasoning. Everyone had a different strategy.

“I hope none of your drivers crash. It’s a mess out there,” Karl said as he took a bag of chips and some cookies from the coffee stand. He waved and followed the other two out.

“Why do you put up with those guys taking our stuff?” Gus asked.

“Because my old man boasted about it being open to everyone. He was a jackass, but now I’m stuck with it. It doesn’t look good or help our reputation if I tell them our stuff is off limits.”

“Still,” Gus grumbled as they watched a car in front of Hans spin and shoot across the track and hit the wall.

A virtual safety car was given so everyone on track had to drop their speed to eighty kph. No passing was allowed so the

drivers started weaving back and forth across the track to keep their tires warm at the lower rate of speed.

He reminded Tatum and Hans of what that meant and then asked Mario, “How much longer is the session?”

“Another ten minutes.”

Dalton squinted toward pit lane. Visibility was bad, and the rain was coming down in sheets. He turned back to Mario. “Bring ’em in.”

Mario nodded and immediately got on the radio.

“Did you patch things up with Greer? You were shooting daggers at her earlier,” Gus asked as they watched Tatum and Hans make their way to pit lane.

“What do you mean ‘patch things up’? She is the one who ended things.”

“Yes, but she had her reasons. Cut her some slack.”

Dalton’s shoulders tightened. He didn’t want to cut her any slack. He wanted her gone, but he didn’t have that luxury. He had to man up. “Where is she?” he asked.

“She was watching Jordana’s screen but headed to the hospitality tent when you called an end to the session. You guys missed lunch. It’s starting to get dark. She went to see if there was any food left.”

He glanced at his watch, surprised to find it was after four. He’d lost track of time in the garage. Happened a lot. He would go find Greer and see if she learned anything else.

He took off his headphones and handed them to Kendra as he walked out of the garage. He pulled up his collar to keep the cold rain from running down his neck. Walking ahead of

him was Greer. Her hood was up and her head down as she rounded the front of the truck and was lost from view.

Dalton quickened his pace to catch up with her. He came around the front of the truck and saw her about fifty feet ahead walking along the makeshift road created by the trailers lining the path to the hospitality tent. She was moving quickly. The sound of an engine rose above the noise of the rain, and he glanced back. A car was coming fast, too fast. The bright headlights were blinding. He couldn't see who it was.

He faced forward again. "Greer," he yelled, but she didn't turn around. The rain was pounding down and bouncing off the asphalt. The sky was dark and getting darker. "Greer," he shouted again, but she couldn't hear him. He glanced back again. The car was still coming, only now it was veering toward them.

Dalton took off at a dead run and tackled Greer when he reached her. He felt the waft of the air from the car against them as he jumped. They spun in the air, and he landed on his back with Greer on top of him. Stars exploded in his vision when his head hit the pavement. "Oof!"

The car took off.

Her hood had come off and she was staring down at him, her eyes wide and her mouth formed in a perfect O of surprise. He was on his back on the ground, the rain drenching them both. His lungs finally inflated again after the hit had knocked all the air out of them. "Are you okay?" he rasped.

"I think so? I... What the hell just happened?" she finally sputtered, staring at him. Her eyebrows lowered, and a frown marred her forehead. "I mean, what the actual hell?" she yelled.

“A car was close to hitting you. I yelled but with the rain...” His voice died out. She looked so angry and yet so damned cute. His arms were still firmly clasped around her, and he was crushing her to his chest.

“I’m not yelling at you. I felt the whoosh of the car and saw it in my peripheral vision. I’m yelling at them. Whoever was in the car.”

“Well, they’re gone, so maybe don’t yell so loudly.” He had a bit of a headache where his head had hit the ground. It hadn’t been a major hit, but still. Not yelling would be helpful. He rested his head on the ground.

“Ohmygod, are you okay? Did you hit your head? I’ll get help.” She tried to scramble up, but he still held her in place.

Having her against his chest provoked memories better left buried. The way her body still fit perfectly to his left him dizzy, a lethargic feeling that weakened his resolve to keep his distance from this woman. Maybe they could just stay this way for a while. It wouldn’t be so bad. The rain sucked, and he was pretty sure he was lying in a huge puddle since his entire back was soaked, but somehow holding onto her seemed more important than the weather, or his head, or the state of his body.

He stared up at her and then smiled before closing his eyes and passing out.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

“Dalton.” The voice said again, “Dalton!”

His eyelids felt heavy. He was tired, and he had a headache, not to mention his entire body hurt as well. Must have been a hell of an accident. Usually, they didn’t hurt so much. *Wait. What was he driving? Nothing. He hadn’t raced in years.*

“Dalton, open your eyes,” the voice demanded. Rory’s voice. *Shit. He was probably late for something.*

He opened his eyes and stared at his brother. Concern was written all over Rory’s face. He glanced over his brother’s shoulder to see a crowd had gathered. Someone was holding an umbrella over them to keep the rain off his face. Didn’t matter, he was soaked to the bone, and shivering. Jordana squatted beside him.

“The ambulance is coming from the medical center,” she said. Just then, the emergency vehicle, lights flashing, arrived in the lane in front of the trucks. He slammed his lids shut to block out the sickening strobes. The crowd made room for the EMTs.

“I don’t need an ambulance. I’m fine,” he protested and then tried to get up, but Rory wouldn’t let him.

His head hurt. And his back. And... “Fine.”

The EMTs checked him over and put him on a gurney. He started to relax when it all came back to him in a rush. “Where’s Greer? Is she okay?” His heart pounded, and his ears rang in rhythm with the glaring ambulance lights. She had to be okay. The image of her in front of him and the car coming made his stomach revolt. He barely refrained from retching.

“I’m here.” Greer came out from behind an umbrella.

He stared at her, his eyes roaming over her entire body, making sure she was fine. “Are you okay?” he asked as they started wheeling him away. “Stop,” he snarled.

She nodded. “I’m okay,” she said but then someone jostled her, and she winced.

“Bring her, too,” Dalton demanded. “She’s hurt.” It was bad enough what happened to Moore, but there was no way in hell he would let anything happen to Greer. Not on his watch. He could not be responsible for that. It would kill him.

The EMT glanced at her and then nodded. They put him into the back of the ambulance and Greer climbed inside as well. The ride to the medical center took less than three minutes. They pulled the gurney with him on it out, and Greer walked after it.

The overhead lights glared into his eyes as they wheeled him into an area just behind the front desk. Once they moved him from the gurney to a bed someone pulled a curtain all the way around the exam space so he lost sight of Greer. The doctor, a tall balding man with a fringe of white hair, the same man who’d dealt with Moore’s death, shone a light in his eyes as he asked him. “How is your vision?”

“Can’t see anything but spots since you put the light in my eyes,” he grouched.

“No double vision?” the doctor asked.

“No.”

“Do you feel nauseous?”

Dalton paused, assessing the state of his gut. “No. My head aches and my body hurts where I hit the ground and Greer landed on me but I don’t have a concussion.”

“I see. Perhaps, Dr. Hughes, you could leave the diagnosis to me,” the doctor said as he continued to prod and poke the back of Dalton’s head. A nurse bustled in wearing a set of blue scrubs with a jacket over them and a harried expression on her face. Her dark hair looked windblown, and she frowned as she took his blood pressure. “Heart rate, sixty-six. Blood pressure, ninety over sixty,” she said. “Should I start an IV?”

The doctor nodded but Dalton said, “No” and wrestled his arm away from her. “That’s my normal blood pressure. I don’t need fluids.”

She glanced at the doctor who now had Dalton’s shirt up and was palpating his stomach. “Doctor?” she asked.

“It’s fine.” He pulled down the t-shirt. “I don’t feel anything abnormal.”

“I’m fine,” Dalton said yet again. He’d been in enough accidents that he knew his body well. He had a headache, and he was bruised, but otherwise okay. The doctor helped him to a sitting position and pressed a stethoscope to his back. Dalton hissed in a breath as the cold metal hit his skin.

Might as well take advantage of the situation and ask some questions. The doctor pushed him back and his head gave a

thump. He just had to manage the headache.

“Hey, Doc, I have a couple questions about Moore’s death. He was my driver.”

“Mr. Hughes, I am not at liberty to discuss the situation. Now, follow my finger.” He held up his forefinger and moved it back and forth. Dalton tracked it with his gaze. The doctor ran him through a few more tests and then asked again if he was nauseous.

“I’m fine. I know the drill. About Moore—”

“As I said, I’m not able to speak about the situation. How is your back?”

“It hurts.”

“Describe for me, please, what happened.”

“There was a speeding car in the lane. Maybe the driver didn’t see us in the rain, and it was getting dark out. But it was coming fast, and right at Greer, so I ran and grabbed her, jumping out of the way of the car. I twisted in the air, and she landed on top of me.”

“I see. Does your neck hurt?” The nurse was taking his blood pressure again.

“No, my neck is fine.”

The doctor poked and prodded his neck and moved his head around. “I think your neck is okay.”

Dalton wanted to yell *no shit*, but he held his tongue. That wouldn’t help.

“You should go to the hospital for some tests,” the doctor said then turned to the nurse. “Call another ambulance. They can take him.”

“Do not call anyone.” Dalton had had enough. He swung his knees over the side of the bed, letting out a curse as the room swam a bit but then righted itself. “I’m fine. Give me a couple of aspirin, and I’ll be fine.”

The doctor threw up his hands. “Race drivers.” He mumbled some choice words under his breath. “You need to sign some forms. Stay here until they are ready.”

He left and the metal pulley on the curtain rattled as he pulled it closed. Then it sounded like he walked across the hallway. Another scratching of curtains along the rail.

“How are you feeling?” he asked the patient over there.

“Fine. A little shaken up is all.” Greer’s voice floated over to him. “I had a softer landing.”

Dalton leaned back on the bed and listened intently, breathing evenly to calm the pain in his head.

“Her blood pressure is one-twenty over eighty and her heart rate is seventy-two,” the nurse said.

“Good,” the doctor replied.

There were a few moments of silence, then Greer said, “I’m actually an insurance investigator and I’m here in regards to Mr. Moore’s death. The *polizei* indicated Moore died of a heart attack. Can I ask what made you think he died of a heart attack when you saw him? I mean, he’d just been in a car crash and the car had been on fire.”

Dalton grinned. *Go, Greer.* This was great. She had a thin veneer of authority, and he was going to get to hear the answers. He shifted on the bed to get closer and quickly winced. *Note to self: don’t get too excited.*

There was a pause. “I would need to see some identification,” the doctor said.

“Of course. Oh, shoot. My bag is back in the garage. If you would like I will give you my office phone number and you can call and ask to speak to my boss. It’s almost closing time, but he typically works late, so he should still be there. He will confirm my identity.” She said the name and the number. The sound of hurried footsteps met Dalton’s ears and then a low voice. A minute or so later, the hurried footsteps came back.

“It is confirmed,” the nurse said.

“Okay, then,” the doctor said, “the fire was put out fairly quickly so there was no smoke inhalation. He was wearing his helmet and full gear. I checked, but there was no issue with his neck or his head. No bumps, lumps, or lacerations. He had no outward signs of physical harm. He was a man in his later years who was overweight. Heart attack seemed like the most logical choice.”

“I see. There was nothing irregular about Mr. Moore’s body?” she persisted.

“No. Nothing. He died of a heart attack.” The doctor must have moved Greer because she let out a gasp. Dalton was immediately on alert. Was Greer hurt worse than he thought? Maybe he should check on her. He started to get up off the bed when the doctor said, “You have pain when I press?”

“Um, a little bit, yes,” Greer acknowledged.

“Slightly bruised ribs. You will be fine in a few days.”

Dalton relaxed a bit. Bruised ribs would suck with her every movement, but her injuries weren’t fatal.

Greer asked, “Is there any way to tell when Moore had the heart attack?”

“The exact moment? No. Presumably when he lost control of the car.”

“Right,” she said. “Thanks, Doctor.”

“The nurse will get you some pain medication for the ribs, and then you may be on your way. Take it easy for the next few days.”

“Thanks,” Greer said again.

The sound of footsteps approaching gave Dalton scant warning before the nurse pulled the curtain back. She offered him some paperwork on a clipboard. He signed it.

“You are free to go,” she said. “But if any of your symptoms get worse, please go to the hospital.”

He stood up slowly. Greer came to stand beside the nurse, and the woman asked, “Keep an eye on him, yes?”

Greer nodded. The nurse handed her more paperwork, which she signed. They walked out to the waiting area where Jordana and Rory were sitting in identical chairs along the back wall.

“You two okay?” Jordana asked as she leaped from her chair.

“Fine,” Dalton grunted. Greer just nodded.

“Okay,” Rory said, “let’s get you back to the hotel. I’ll get the car.”

Jordana nodded. “I’ll get your backpack, Dalton. Greer, do you need me to get your bag or anything?”

“Please,” she said. “I left it with Gus. He said he’d take care of it.”

“Okay, I’ll find him. It’s still raining, so you two wait here. We’ll be back shortly.” She and Rory went out through the doors and into the rain.

Dalton watched them go.

“I’d forgotten how nice your family is,” Greer said, her voice slightly wistful.

He glanced at her. There was nothing he could say to that. Dark circles created shadows under her eyes, and her hair was a mess. She was wet and strain had etched her features. Well, she’d almost been hit by a car.

He couldn’t do this. “Greer, I think you need to stop investigating.”

She glanced at him. “We just started. We agreed.”

“I know, but that was before...”

Scaring Greer wasn’t the best option, but he was pretty sure what happened had been deliberate. There had to be a way to tell her that so she would stop investigating. He needed the money desperately, but he wasn’t willing to risk her safety over it. His head pounded as he watched the rain in silence for another minute or so.

Greer said, “Did you happen to see what kind of car it was?”

It was the question he’d been asking himself since he woke up. “It was a nondescript dark-colored sedan. I assume it was a rental. Anyone who lives in Europe and drives here brings a truck or a flash car to show off to other car fans.”

“I was thinking the same thing.” She turned to look up at him. “Do you think it was on purpose? Do you think they were trying to hit me or us?”

Us. He hadn't thought of that. Killing two birds with one stone? In that moment, he made up his mind that he wasn't going to leave her alone. His family had inadvertently brought her into this mess, and someone now wanted her out of the picture. Wanted them both out of the way. His conscience wouldn't let that happen. He'd do what was necessary to keep her safe.

"I think it's a possibility." He wasn't going to lie completely, but he wasn't going to declare it either. "It could have been the rain."

"But you're not sure," she confirmed.

He bit back a sigh. "I'm not sure." The fact that someone had tried to force him off the road pretty much made it highly likely they were trying to hurt Greer, and possibly him at the same time.

A car pulled up to the medical center doors, and Rory jumped out. Dalton and Greer walked through the sliding doors of the clinic and got into the back seat of the car. Rory closed the door behind them. The drive to the hotel was silent. Dalton's head was banging, but it was also running a mile a minute. How the hell was he going to keep Greer safe on top of everything else?

Rory pulled up next to the courtyard between the two buildings. "You guys get out. I'll park and then come up to your room, okay, Dalton?"

He nodded and immediately regretted it. "Sure. That's fine." He got out of the car along with Greer and Jordana. They went into the building and were waiting for the elevator when Rory entered.

“How were the guys after the session?” Dalton asked. He asked it as much to break the silence as to hear the answer.

“You were right. They both had close calls, but they gained some confidence from it. They are hot to get back at it for the last session, but I told them the track was going to be crazy wet. They decided to review the data with Mario and Timo. I’ll head back to the track once you’re settled so I can work with them.”

“Jordana, how was it for you?” he asked.

She turned and grinned at him. “It was awesome. The setup needs some work. I’m going to look at the data with Mario later and get Gus to make some changes, but it felt damn good to be back behind the wheel. Thanks again.”

Dalton closed his eyes and rested his head on the wall. Jordana had raced as a junior but hadn’t done anything serious since before university. When she’d graduated, their father had been sick, and everything had been put on the back burner. It was good to see her smile.

The elevator dinged, and they all moved inside. During the short ride Dalton was acutely aware of Greer standing just in front of him. The heat from her body swathed his chest in warmth, and it brought back the memory of how well she fit there.

They all piled out of the elevator, and Jordana asked, “Greer, where’s your room?”

“Next to Dalton’s.”

“Great.” Jordana walked to number twelve and helped Greer inside.

Dalton opened his door, and Rory followed him in, closing the door behind him. “You gave me a scare, brother.”

He turned and looked at Rory. “I’m sorry. No worrying about me, though. I’m fine. Honest. My head is pretty damn hard.” He knocked his knuckles on his skull, and then immediately regretted doing so.

Rory came over and gave him a hug, which was totally unexpected and caused him to grunt.

“Did I hurt you?” Rory pulled back.

“Nah. It’s fine.” He squeezed his brother’s shoulder. “I really am fine, Rory. Don’t worry about me.”

“It’s just that Chris from the Piston Gulf team said it looked like that car swerved to hit you and Greer on purpose.” Rory’s blue eyes stared at him questioningly.

“It was raining pretty damn hard. Visibility was very poor. Chris must have been over at the hospitality tent. From that angle, it would look weird no matter what. It was an accident.” He hated lying to his brother, but he didn’t want him to take on any other burden. His recovery was the most important thing.

“You’re not fooling anyone,” Rory said. “First someone tried to run you off the road, and now this. You’ve been targeted, for whatever reason. You and Greer need to be safe. I didn’t want to say anything in front of Jordana—she’s so happy—but I’m coming around to your point of view. Maybe we should shut everything down.” His phone rang just then, and he answered it. “Yeah, Timo. I’m on my way.” He glanced at Dalton, “You good?”

Dalton nodded. “We’ll talk later.”

Rory gave him a thumbs up and headed out the door.

Dalton kicked off his shoes and slowly made his way up the stairs to the bedroom area and the bathroom. He was

desperate for a shower. Two minutes later, the hot spray stung his torso.

His body hurt in ways he hadn't imagined. It was like being tackled while playing football but without the padding. Greer flitted through his mind. He hoped she wasn't in as much pain as he was. Damn if she hadn't scared the hell out of him. She'd looked so damn fine in her jeans and those damn boots she always wore. She was tiny without them and he'd loved it. With them she wasn't much taller but they'd always made him think of sex. She'd been damned lucky she hadn't broken her ankle when he'd knocked her off her feet. Jesus, he needed to switch the spray to something more frigid.

Ten minutes later, after putting all thoughts of Greer and her sexy boots out of his head, and finally getting the dirt and grit out of his hair, he emerged from the shower to the sound of his cell ringing. He didn't recognize the number. He was tempted to ignore it, but finally, he picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Hey. I was starting to worry about you." It was Greer.

"Sorry. I was in the shower. What's up?"

There was a bit of silence. "Um, I was thinking we never got to have lunch. I don't know about you, but I'm starving. Interested in eating?"

He patted his abdomen, soothing a sudden rumble. "Yeah. That would be great." When he reached for a towel, he bit back a pained groan. "Do you think maybe we could get room service? I'm not sure I want to sit in one of those wooden chairs."

"Sure. How about I go order the food from the dining room, and then I'll come to your room."

“Works for me. Get me whatever you’re having. I’m not fussy.”

“Okay. See ya in a few,” she said and then hung up.

Dalton put his phone back down on the counter and dried himself off slowly. This new détente between them was... weird. He was too sore to be angry, and too scared. He was going to have to tell Greer the truth about the car. She would argue with him, but maybe if he was calm and rational, he could convince her to stop. Getting hurt over this wasn’t worth it.

He turned and looked over his shoulder into the mirror. His back was turning into an interesting patchwork of black and blue. Big, dark marks were forming on his shoulder blades and hips. It was only going to get worse. He picked up his phone and texted Rory, asking him to bring lots of Advil with him when he returned to the hotel. He put the phone down and got dressed again in fresh faded jeans and a black sweater.

He went downstairs and peered through the sliding glass doors at the monotonous falling rain, deep in thought.

Did whoever tried to hit them want them dead or just out of the way? If it was the same person who had loosened the screws, then maybe they weren’t trying to kill him and Greer. Maybe they just wanted them to stop investigating. That made a lot of sense. Dalton knew he was going to have to stick closer to Greer until he could convince her to stop the investigation. She wasn’t getting hurt on his watch. Not if he could help it. And heaven help the person who tried.

CHAPTER TWENTY

“I know the kitchen isn’t open, but I was hoping you’d help us out.” She offered a big smile to the man who happened to be standing behind the bar. It was just gone six p.m., and the place was empty still. “My friend was injured at the track, and we missed lunch. We can’t go out because he’s in pain, and we can’t order in since everyone is closed. We’ll take whatever you can throw together.”

The barman sighed. “The kitchen is closed, but I will go speak to someone.” He turned and left the room. Greer plopped down on a barstool and prepared to wait. She took a deep breath and immediately regretted it. Her chest ached. Nothing compared to what Dalton must be feeling, she guessed, but it still hurt.

Seeing Dalton pass out had panicked her. She’d screamed like a crazy person until someone had come. Thank God Rory and Jordana had arrived to take over. She’d backed out of the crowd and leaned against the side of the truck to catch her breath. She’d been kidding herself to think she’d gotten over him. Seeing him out cold and lying lifeless in that puddle had made her attraction to him rush back. She’d been kidding herself thinking this, them working together, was going to be okay, that she could be next to Dalton and not be affected by

him. She'd been madly in love with him. It was only reasonable to still have some feelings, right?

She stared out the window. All that rain. Everyone had assumed that the car careening toward them had been an accident. The crowd had asked what happened, and a driver from some other team had said someone had driven by them, going too fast for conditions.

Maybe that was the truth. She desperately wanted to believe that's all it was. But it seemed incredibly unlikely to her. Too coincidental. She'd spent the day poking around and asking questions about Moore's death, announcing up and down the paddock that she was an insurance investigator, and suddenly someone aimed at her with a car? Yeah, the chances of that being coincidental were less than zip.

Given everything, she was increasingly convinced Moore's death was not just a heart attack. But how the hell was she supposed to prove that? An image of Dalton lying passed out in the rain came to mind. And did she want to prove it? Maybe all they needed to do was wait it out until the police officially declared it a heart attack. She could keep her mouth shut about the wing and it would be over. Dalton would get the cheque.

But then someone would get away with causing Moore's death. The idea was abhorrent, and she knew Dalton would never go for it. He might be fighting for his family's company, but in the end, he'd never let the company's continuation overshadow the truth. He always did what was right. It's why he'd quit racing. Because looking after his family was more important than his racing career.

She let out a sigh. She quit racing because of her family but for totally opposite reasons. Rubbing her eyes with her

knuckles, she swallowed another sigh. She was exhausted, and this just wasn't going according to plan.

Her cell phone rang. The word Mom appeared on the screen. She thought about ignoring the call, but her mother would just continue to try if she did that. "Mom," she answered.

"Greer, your sister is very upset you're not coming home for the bridal shower."

"I already told you, I'm working. I can't come home."

"Yes, well, she's still upset." Her mother's voice was off somehow. She was the one who sounded upset.

"What's really wrong, Mom?" Greer asked gently.

"Your father called."

Greer frowned. Why in the hell would he do that? She didn't want to know the answer, but she didn't think she could get away with not asking. "What did he want?"

"Are you at a track? He said you're getting back into racing. Is that true? I thought you were done with all that nonsense. I thought you'd finally outgrown it and decided to have a normal life and be an adult. I'm very disappointed in you."

Greer closed her eyes and cursed her meddling father in her head. Her mother could be such a bitch. Always wielding the "I'm disappointed in you," line. Of course, she only did it to Greer. Never her precious sister Lyric.

"Mom, I'm at the track for work. I am investigating a claim. I'm not going back into racing, but even if I was, I am an adult and I will do what makes me happy. Remember when you asked me why I had to leave California? Why did I have

to go to Europe? Well, Mom, it's to get the hell away from my family. You have never supported me. The rest of them"—she laughed bitterly—"I always knew didn't care about me but I thought you would at least try. You never have. You made your choice. Lyric is the daughter you wanted. I am not. You, your current husband, and my father have made that abundantly clear. None of you want to support me in any way shape or form. So, I'm done. Take care, Mom." She disconnected the call and dropped her phone facedown onto the bar.

She thought she would be more upset. She'd been thinking of doing this, cutting her mom and other family out, for a long time. Shouldn't she be far more upset about giving in to that urge? Maybe later guilt or remorse might kick in. But now? All she felt was numbness and an enormous amount of relief. What did that say about things?

"This is the best I could do." The barman's re-entrance interrupted her rambling thoughts. He set a charcuterie plate and a basket of bread and crackers in front of her.

"Perfect." She smiled. "Any chance I could get a couple of beers as well?" She sure needed one.

"That is easy," he said with a smile. He poured her two of the local beers and then walked with her back to room eleven. She knocked on the door, and Dalton opened it. The bartender helped her bring everything over to the coffee table, and then Dalton tipped the guy on the way out and closed the door behind him.

"Sorry it's not more, but the kitchen is closed."

"Not a problem," he said as he came over and gestured at the couch. She sat at one end, and he sat down at the opposite end. "It's one of the hardest things to adjust to about Europe is

that hard stop after lunch and don't open until seven-thirty for dinner. If you miss out, you starve. I lost ten pounds in the first couple weeks I was here. Never could remember to eat at the right time."

She laughed. "I can see the problem." She picked up her beer and clicked the rim against his glass. "Here's to being dry." Then she froze. "Wait, you shouldn't be drinking beer. God, I'm so sorry." She shot to her feet with a wince. "I'll go get you something else. Do you want coffee or soda? Wait, you probably shouldn't have caffeine, either."

"Greer, it's okay. Sit down." He gestured to the sofa. "I'm not going to drink ten of them. I'm probably not going to drink the whole thing. If anything, it's just a mild concussion. I've had a few and this doesn't feel like what I've experienced before. I promise you I'm fine."

She sat back down as he took a small sip and then put the beer down. He reached out for a piece of cheese, and Greer felt rather than heard the groan. He was in pain for sure, and she was the cause. That thought kind of killed her appetite.

"Dalton, I think we have to face the fact that someone tried to hit me on purpose."

"Agreed."

She swallowed and met his gaze. "It's scary to think someone wants to hurt me. I mean, I suppose it could have been an accident, but we were at a racetrack with a bunch of diehard drivers and crew. People like that are trained to notice obstacles when they drive. I guess it could've been someone's guest but, seriously, what do you think the chances of that are? Not to mention how fast they disappeared."

"You've put a lot of thought into it," he commented.

“I’ve thought of nothing else since it happened.” Other than him. She’d thought a lot about him as well. He’d scared the hell out of her passing out like that. She was worried about him. Really worried. Like *oh-my-god-nothing-bad-can-happen-to-you-because-I-can’t-take-it* worried.

“Let’s consider all the options. Do you have any enemies? What about in your past? Your racing days?” He was grasping at straws.

Greer shook her head. “No. I mean I had rivalries on the track, but nothing that carried over to real life.”

Except her father. He was the only one who took what happened on the track out on her off the track. He was a vengeful asshole. Tearing down anyone he thought might be better, or those he even just perceived as better than him, was his favorite sport, and he reveled in it. Did he try to have her killed?

She coughed on a cracker, and Dalton thumped her back. “Are you okay? He asked.

“Um, yeah,” she croaked, then sipped her beer.

The shock that gripped her was not because she had wondered if her father would hire someone to hurt her but because she wouldn’t be at all surprised if he did. And wasn’t that the saddest thing? Maybe no sadder than her half-sister wanting her at the bachelorette so she could pay for everything or flying all that way so she would be at the bridal shower. Her mother did care about her, but the rest of her family, not so much. And not once in all these years had her mother taken her side.

“Are you okay?” Dalton asked again. “You look...sad.”

“Sorry.” She gave herself a mental shake. That had devolved quickly into a pity party. “I was thinking about my racing days. I don’t think anyone still has a grudge against me except maybe my dad.”

Dalton ate another piece of cracker with pepperoni. “Not so easy being a part of a racing legacy.”

“No, it’s not.” She cleared her throat. “But that doesn’t help me in terms of knowing who would want to take me out of the picture.”

“It wasn’t just you.”

“What do you mean?” she asked. “You think they were aiming at you, too?”

Looking incredibly guilty, he dropped his glance to his lap. “I should’ve told you before. Someone tried to run me off the road the other night. I thought since you’d told everyone Moore died of a heart attack, you would be safe.” He lifted his eyes, deep sincere apology resting in them. “I spent the day before going around telling everyone I thought there was more to it. I figured I could see if whoever was behind this would want to shut me up, which they did. But you, I thought you were in the clear. I’m sorry.”

She pointed her finger at his chest. “Not *your* fault. You couldn’t have known. Your reasoning makes sense. The truth is someone is getting desperate. I mean, how would they get away with killing us? It would just bring more attention to Moore’s death.” She took another sip of her beer.

“Maybe they didn’t want to kill us. Just distract us. Make us stop looking into things.” He froze. “What if... What if the heart attack really was a coincidence? I mean, what if someone

just wanted to scare Moore so he wouldn't race? Having a major accident might do that."

Lyle and Bainbridge had said something yesterday. They'd told her they were surprised Moore was doing the whole season, and he rarely committed to anything long-term. They were shocked he'd gotten married as well. What if someone had just wanted Moore to stop racing?"

Greer cocked her head and tapped her fingernails on the table. "I see what you mean. But what does stopping Moore from racing get someone? What's the benefit?"

"Lyle and Bainbridge said Moore was only doing the season to prove a point to Brian about sticking with things. Maybe Brian wanted him to quit to make his own point?"

"Weak," Greer said. Dalton had a point, but this was not the reason.

"You're right. Too flimsy. Maybe someone was worried Moore would be too distracted by racing and wouldn't pay enough attention to his business?" Dalton chewed a cracker thoughtfully before frowning. "No, too weak as well."

"Maybe," Greer said, "this isn't about Moore at all. Maybe it's about you." Her heart rate ticked up as her next thought crowned in her brain. "If Moore stopped racing, you would lose a lot of money. Everyone seems to know you're in, uh... financial trouble. Maybe someone stopped Moore so you would have to pack up and leave. Puts you out of the running for the European Cup."

Dalton sat back on the couch. "Now that's a scary thought. That makes more sense than any of the other scenarios."

They both sat silently for a moment.

Dalton continued, “Still, that’s a lot to go through just to get us to pull out of the Cup. Why not go after one of us directly?”

That was a good question. Why not? She knew the answer immediately. “Well, they did once Moore’s dying didn’t work. But probably initially because none of you would give up. If one of you got hurt, the rest would carry on. It’s only if you can’t afford to keep going, that you would actually stop. Maybe they were hoping after Moore’s death and your accident you would finally see reason and quit.”

“Shit. You’re saying Moore’s death is on me.”

Shit. “That wasn’t what I meant at all. It’s on whoever loosened those screws. But I think it could be the motivation behind the whole mess.” She didn’t want to upset him. This tentative truce was making life so much easier, but she needed him to see the possibility of what she was saying.

“It’s a thought. A damn scary one, but a solid theory. I do think this means we need to stop asking questions. It’s not worth someone else getting hurt.”

He hadn’t said *her* getting hurt, just someone else. A small burst of disappointment filled her chest. “But if we don’t investigate, what happens?”

“The *polizei* will continue, I guess, although they’re stuck on the heart attack theory.”

“Which means the person who did this will likely get away with it.”

“Yes,” he agreed, “but some things are more important than playing at solving crimes.”

Their gazes locked, and a small burst of electricity danced across her skin.

Greer severed the connection and took another sip of beer, then put the glass back down. “I do want to thank you, though. If you hadn’t grabbed me, I would have gotten hit, whether it was on purpose or not. I owe you one.”

He gave her a wolfish grin. “I’m gonna hold you to that.”

A not-so-small zing of excitement sent a burst of warmth through her. His smile was killer when he used it. He could look at her with those stormy gray eyes and make her feel like she was the only woman in the world. And in the next instant look at her like she was a flea on a donkey’s butt, she reminded herself. *Don’t go all soft on Dalton Hughes*. It would not end well for either of them.

She focused on the food in front of her. “I still have to interview the widow. Do you want to come with me? I think she’s here at the hotel. I mean, that can’t hurt, can it?”

Dalton cocked an eyebrow at her. “I thought we just agreed it was too dangerous to continue.”

“We did, but...” She didn’t want it to end. She wanted to spend time like this with Dalton, and if they stopped the investigation, that would end. “It’s the widow. We might as well talk to her. She’s the last one left, I think.”

“Fine. I’ll go with you, but after this, we stop, agreed?”

Greer nodded with a smile. She needed him to trust her again, to like her, or at least see her as human. Not as the woman who destroyed everything. Letting him sit in on the interview would help build that trust. Just like making sure he could hear her question the doctor at the medical center. Now, if she could just convince herself that regaining his trust was the only reason she was doing these things.

“Let me call down and see if they’ll connect me to her.” She started to get up.

“No need.” Dalton picked up his phone and sent a text. “I’ll get Jordana to ask her. She was with her when she found out Moore died. They have a bond of sorts. It might be better coming from her.”

Greer tipped up her chin. “Just remember that I’m the investigator. Don’t start asking her a ton of questions. It won’t look good.”

“I hear you. You’re telling me to be seen and not heard.” He grinned.

“Exactly.”

“Fair enough.” His phone pinged. “The widow, Mrs. Moore, will be happy to speak with us now if we’re available. She is in her room. Number one.”

“You ready?” she asked.

He nodded. They stood and went to the door. He grabbed his key, and they left.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Greer was glad she'd pulled on a wine-colored cashmere sweater over her dark jeans. It wasn't the most professional of outfits, but it was a hell of a lot better than the sweats she'd almost worn. She'd also put on a bit of makeup and left her hair down around her shoulders. She'd spent a bit of time making sure she didn't look like death warmed over since she was going to see Dalton. But there was no need to admit that, was there?

They walked down the open hallway, passed the elevator, and turned a corner. She hadn't been here before. The hallway had rooms on either side, and it ended at the door marked with the number one. She knocked.

The door opened to reveal the woman who had almost been pushed down the stairs. Greer had forgotten all about the incident until just that minute.

"You," Mrs. Moore said.

"Um, yes. I'm so sorry. I didn't realize... Allow me to introduce myself. Greer Styger. I am so very sorry for your loss."

"Claire." The widow pointed to herself. "Come in, both of you." She turned and walked away from the door.

Claire's suite was worthy of a feature in some hoity-toity lifestyle magazine. Once they went through a short hallway, the room opened up. The opposite wall was made up of windows that gave an expansive view of the mountains. Flames danced in a stone-bound gas fireplace, throwing out heat. There was a cream-colored sofa in front of it and a matching overstuffed chair sat at the end to square off the coffee table.

A massive dining table that seated eight dominated the other end of the room, with another wall of windows behind it facing the trees. Beyond that was a set of stairs, presumably leading to the bedroom and a half bath off the hallway. This must be the best suite in the entire hotel.

Claire took a seat on the end of the sofa and curled her legs underneath her. She had a glass of white wine in front of her. Greer sat down on the other end of the sofa, and Dalton took the chair.

"I just had a few questions," Greer began but then stopped. "How are you feeling?"

Claire stared at her.

"I'm sure you're devastated by the loss of your husband. I was referring to the incident on the stairs last night. Are you okay?"

She shrank back into the sofa at the mention of the incident. "Yes, I'm fine. It was just so...shocking. Thank you again for saving me. It could have been a nasty spill."

Greer gave the woman a tight smile. It wouldn't have been a spill. She would've been dead or close to it. The staircase was long and quite steep. "Glad to hear that you suffered no lasting effects." Dalton shot her a look, but she ignored it.

She'd fill him in later. "Can you give me some insight into your husband's demeanor and state of mind on the days leading up to coming here?"

Claire grabbed her glass of wine and took a healthy swig. "He was as he usually was, argumentative and stressed out." She looked over the rim of the glass at Greer. "I know that doesn't sound particularly nice, but it was true, and any of his friends would tell you as much. Dennis was a very driven man. He liked to be on top, which was what drove him to achieve the success he had, but it also was...unrelenting. He was driven in all areas of his life and expected those around him to be the same. It could be very tiring."

Greer paused as she pondered how to phrase this next bit. "Did you notice any major changes in his behavior leading up to the trip?"

"No. He was his usual self." She took another sip of wine.

"Did he tell you anything about his health?" Greer asked. She didn't know if the *polizei* had already told her about the heart attack or not.

"He was as healthy as a horse. He ate stress for breakfast. Drank coffee, ate what he wanted, and spent half the day on the treadmill during his calls," Claire said, waving her arm. "He was going to live forever."

Dalton spoke in a quiet voice. "Richard said that Dennis told him his cholesterol was up and so was his blood pressure. Did he mention any of that to you?"

When Claire snorted, Greer realized the widow was not exactly sober.

"Richard," Claire scoffed. "He would be the last person Dennis would tell. Dennis was about to fire him. He was

royally pissed off with Richard. I have no idea what the project was, but Richard lost a ton of Dennis's money, and Dennis was through with the man. He wanted Richard gone." She hiccupped. "Told Richard he had to the end of the month to get the money back and kill the deal or Dennis was going to go to the cops."

"He thought Richard did something illegal?" Greer asked.

She emptied her glass and held it out toward Dalton, who immediately got up—not without a pained wince, Greer noticed—and took the glass.

"It's over there," Claire said and pointed over her shoulder. Then she looked back at Greer. "What was the question? Oh, right. Illegal. Well, Dennis was super pissed. He told me he was sure that Richard had forged his signature on something. Normally, he didn't give me details about his business dealings, but he was irate and yelling into the phone when I came into the bedroom. He hung up and threw it across the room. I asked what was wrong, and that's when he told me."

Dalton returned to the seating group and handed her the wine glass. She gave him an assessing look and then smiled her thanks, making sure to touch his hand. She also shifted so he could see down her top. Dalton smiled back as he went over to his seat. Greer wanted to roll her eyes but kept a serene expression on her face. It wasn't her business. If he thought this hard-looking woman was attractive, what was it to her? She took a breath.

"I'm sorry. I didn't offer you two anything." Claire looked directly at Dalton. "Can I get you anything?"

It was a loaded question if Greer ever heard one. She gritted her teeth.

“No, I’m good thanks,” Dalton said with another smile.

“Getting back to Richard,” Greer prompted. “If Dennis was so angry with him, why did he bring him on this trip?”

She gulped her wine. “To keep an eye on him. Dennis knew if Richard was here, he would have a harder time stealing any more money.”

Dalton leaned forward. “Do you know anything about a new will? Richard mentioned today there might be recent changes to Dennis’s will.”

Claire froze. Her eyes narrowed. “Richard said that? There were no changes. Dennis would have told me if he changed his will.” She stared at Greer as if she were willing Greer to believe her. “He hated Richard. He wouldn’t tell that man anything.” Her tone had been so confident before, but now there was a detectable hint of doubt.

Greer had to change topics fast. “How did Dennis get along with Brian?”

Claire rolled her eyes. “Brian was a serious disappointment to Dennis. He needled Brian relentlessly.” She dropped her voice like a man’s, presumably to mimic Dennis Moore. “By the time I was your age, I’d already made my first hundred million.” She shook her head and took a sip of wine. “I used to feel bad for Brian.”

“Used to?” Dalton asked.

“In the end, Brian was just too damn whiny. It was hard to feel much sympathy lately. He needs to grow a backbone. Dennis yelled at him endlessly, and all he did was snivel and whine. Not the most attractive quality in a man.” She eyed Dalton once more.

“Do you know what they were fighting about on the tarmac before you all got on the jet to come here?” Dalton asked.

Greer shot him a look. He needed to back off. This was her investigation.

Claire waved a hand. “Some investment that Brian had wanted Dennis to help him with. Dennis told him initially that it looked good and then later told him it was a serious dud. Brian disagreed. He accused his father of sabotaging the deal just to make him fail.” She stopped and then tilted her head. “I think Brian really thought this one might be the one to work. He was livid with his father killing the deal, and he pouted the whole way across the Atlantic.”

Greer took the lead once more. “Are you aware that the *polizei* think Dennis had a heart attack?”

“Yes.”

“But you think he was healthy.”

“Yes,” she said and gave a little shrug. “I can’t explain it, but I know Dennis was in great shape. He was always exercising. In and out of the bedroom.” She shot Dalton a smile. “I can only assume it had something to do with the race.”

“May I ask how you and Dennis met?” Greer smiled at Claire, hoping it sounded like an innocuous question.

“Las Vegas. He came to a conference I was running. I used to run large functions for an event company. We started talking. He was fun then. Less work and more play. I didn’t see the super serious side of him until after we were married. He would come to Vegas and we would have fun, and then he would go back to L.A. and work.”

“How long did you date?” she asked.

“Six months. Then during a trip to Vegas for a car thing—I can’t remember which one—but all his friends were there, even Brian. Some of the people I saw at the track as well, so maybe a Porsche event? Anyway, someone made a comment how Dennis couldn’t focus for very long on any one thing. He was always getting distracted by the next thing to come along, including women. I was slightly insulted but, honestly, it was true. I knew my time with Dennis was limited, or at least I thought so. He proposed on that trip.

“I think that comment did it. Like he wanted to prove them wrong. Anyway, we just went to one of the wedding chapels that night and got married. To be honest, I think he regretted it the next day, but he stayed true to me until he died. I won’t say we were a match made in heaven, but we rubbed along okay together. Dennis just didn’t like to think he had any weaknesses. Brian has ADHD, and Dennis was always yelling at him about his lack of focus. I think it horrified him to think that he was the same way. Though, where the hell did he think Brian got it from?”

The sound of the door opening and closing reached them, and Joe emerged from the hallway. He looked like a deer in the headlights. He glanced at his sister and then back at them.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

Claire immediately rolled her eyes. “It’s okay, brother dear.”

Greer frowned. He seemed comfortable here. Had he moved in with his sister after Moore died? She was sure he wouldn’t have been staying in the suite when Moore was alive. She glanced at Claire, who looked at her brother and let out a

long sigh. Maybe Claire moved him in here to keep an eye on him.

Greer cleared her throat and directed at Joe, “As I spoke to the others earlier, I had to do the same with your sister.” She rose and addressed Claire, “It was kind of you to answer my questions. Again, I am very sorry for your loss.”

Dalton got up as well.

Claire shot him a smile. “Thank you for coming,” she said, not taking her eyes off him. He nodded and then gestured for Greer to walk ahead of him out of the suite.

“See you at the track tomorrow, Joe?” Dalton asked.

“Don’t know. Maybe.” He reached for the bottle of wine on the bar and stumbled.

A bottle of pills fell out of his pocket and rolled toward Dalton’s feet. He bent, picked it up, and handed it back to Joe. Then he just nodded to the other man and followed Greer out of the suite. Neither of them said a word until they got back to Dalton’s room.

“What the hell was that?” Greer asked. “Why does Joe Plover have a key to the suite? Do you think she moved him in to keep an eye on him? Doesn’t seem like she needs much comforting over Moore’s death.”

Dalton shrugged and then immediately made a face. His back must be stiffening up. “No, she doesn’t seem to be particularly upset about her husband’s death. Moore’s friends weren’t sure why he married her. Said maybe she had something on him, but I think her version of events rings truer. Maybe she moved Joe in to watch him, but if that’s the case, she’s doing a horrible job since she’s drunk and Joe was

clearly stoned. Both of them seem to have some issues by the looks of things.”

“Did you see what the pills were?” she asked.

“Adderall. ADHD meds. Or, at least, that’s what they’re supposed to be used for.” He walked over to the corner and hit the button on the coffee maker. “I’m more interested in knowing about the incident on the stairs. What the hell is that about?”

“Oh, God, yeah. I’d forgotten about that until I saw Claire. It happened last night before I knew who she was.”

“What happened?” Dalton asked and then raised a coffee mug in a silent ask.

Greer shook her head no to coffee. It was early evening and if she drank it now she wouldn’t sleep, but she leaned against the counter as she waited for Dalton to make his own.

“I was coming out of my room last night on the way to the bar,” she said but didn’t add *where I met you*. “I saw Claire at the top of the stairs. She was talking on her cell phone, which now that I think about it is very interesting. The way she was speaking...I assumed the person on the other end was her boyfriend or husband or whatever. It was way too over the top to be anything else.” Greer rolled her eyes. “She was making kissy noises.”

Dalton grinned as he placed a K-cup into the coffee machine. “Kissy noises, huh? I don’t recall you ever making kissy noises to me.”

“No. Absolutely not. Just take me out back and shoot me if I ever start to do that.”

“I’ll remember that.” Dalton winked. “You just never know. You might change your mind.”

Greer played it off, but this turn in the conversation had her stomach tied up in knots. Way too close to home for her. She didn't want to discuss their past relationship. "Anyway, as I approached, someone in a hoodie came flying around the corner and shoved Claire. I dove for her and grabbed the back of her coat with one hand and the railing with the other. It stopped her from falling headlong down the stairs. The hoodie guy bolted."

All the humor left Dalton's face. He grabbed the full coffee mug and gestured for her to follow him to the couch. "Do you think it was on purpose? Or just someone being negligent?"

Greer shrugged, then sat down at one end. Her ribs ached as she tucked her legs and wrapped her arms around them, settling back into the cushion. "At first, Claire thought so. She was sure of it, but when I said we should call the *polizei*, she backed off and said it must have been someone in a rush and she just got in the way."

Dalton sat on the couch, too, this time a little bit closer to the middle, closer to her. "What do you think? Was it someone in a rush?"

"She was pushed." It came out of her mouth before she thought about it, but she knew it was the truth. "Someone wanted her dead or, at the very least, injured."

Dalton's eyebrows jacked up to his hairline. "You didn't mention this earlier. Someone ended up killing Moore, and then someone tried to harm Claire. Someone tried to run me off the road and then hit you and me today. Jesus, what the hell is going on?"

She frowned. "I didn't even know she was Moore's wife when I saw her yesterday. But Claire, you, and I have nothing

in common. Why would the same someone want to harm the three of us? Kind of blows our theory out of the water.”

“Maybe we’re looking at this all wrong. Maybe the whole reason that someone tried to harm you today—going with the idea they did it on purpose—was because you saw them attempt to hurt Claire. Maybe it isn’t about Moore’s investigation at all, at least not directly.”

Greer’s heart gave a thump against her ribcage. “I hadn’t thought of that. It didn’t seem that important at the time. I didn’t know who she was, thought she was just another hotel guest. It never occurred to me that she was Moore’s wife with the age difference. But that wouldn’t explain why someone tried to run you off the road.”

“No, but I think we need to consider all the options anyway. I’m not loving the idea that someone is trying to hurt you.”

“Ditto,” she scoffed. “Do you really think it’s about Claire? Do you think Moore’s death has something to do with Claire?” It was a possibility.

Dalton’s room phone rang. He walked over and picked it up. “Hello?” He stood silently for a moment. “I’ll come down,” was all he said and then he hung up. Turning to face her, Dalton said, “I have to go meet someone downstairs. Do me a favor, go back to your room and stay there. I don’t want you wandering around here on your own until we have a better idea of what’s going on.”

She wanted to argue with him. Who was he to tell her what to do? But after putting together what happened with Claire and the car almost hitting her today, she had no intention of leaving her room by herself.

“Sure, I’ll go back to my room. I have to start writing up the report anyway. At this point, the police are still saying Dennis Moore had a heart attack, so that’s what I will put in my preliminary report.”

She turned and headed toward the door. “I’ll text you later if I hear anything,” she said over her shoulder. He nodded, and she walked out.

Once in her room, she sat down heavily on the sofa. What she hadn’t said to Dalton was she knew her boss wouldn’t let this go. All these events meant there were mitigating circumstances, and they wouldn’t pay out unless they absolutely had to. She just had to determine how to make that happen. She shuddered at the thought. They were going to have to keep investigating. It was the only hope to get Dalton the money.

But did she know what to look for? She was an investigator, but not for murder. On the other hand, she knew about cars and racing. Maybe that was enough. Either way, she was going to have to figure something out. There was no way she was leaving now. Not with so many unanswered questions. She was determined to get to the bottom of things.

Why? That voice in the back of her mind was asking her. Why did she feel the need to help Dalton so much? Was it because she still cared? Maybe. But that wasn’t all of it. A small kernel of an idea was lurking. One she wasn’t even ready to voice yet but it was there, and its presence was a driving force. That coupled with her feelings for Dalton, and her need to fix the past. Everything culminated in solving Moore’s death and getting Dalton that money. She was going to do it even if it meant risking her life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

“Mr. Hughes,” Detective Haas said as Dalton walked into the bar area. It was empty save for the detective and the same uniformed officer that had accompanied him yesterday. They were seated at a table in the far corner of the room. “Please join us.”

Dalton didn’t have a choice, but he immediately wanted to turn tail and run. His back was on fire and his head was pounding. He wasn’t up for a sparring match with Detective Haas. He needed to be on his game with the other man, and he just didn’t have it in him at the moment.

Biting back a sigh, he sat in the proffered chair. Part of him wondered if this conversation would be better conducted in his room further away from prying eyes.

He was about to suggest it when Detective Haas said, “I don’t wish to disturb you. I understand you had an incident of some kind earlier today and were hurt, but I’m here to see the widow, and before I do, I have a couple more questions for you.”

Good luck with that. Claire was probably passed out by now. “What can I do for you?”

“We received the autopsy results for Mr. Moore. He did, indeed, die of a heart attack.”

Dalton didn't move. He'd been suckered into relaxing at this news before. He wouldn't make the same mistake twice. "I see." He'd heard that earlier today, but now it was official.

"We are waiting for toxicology results," Detective Haas continued. "It appears Mr. Moore was quite healthy, so the heart attack is a bit of a mystery."

Dalton wasn't sure how to react to the speculative nature of the detective's statement, so he remained silent.

"Do you remember anything else that might be significant about the morning before Moore's death?"

Officer Moser had his pen poised above the blank notebook page in front of him.

Dalton shrugged and then gritted his teeth. A little Advil would go a long way right now. "No, nothing else comes to mind. I told you everything yesterday." God, was it only yesterday? He felt like he'd aged forty years overnight.

"We noticed in the video you provided that the wing of Mr. Moore's car appeared loose. I was told this is not the norm. That, in fact, it is exceedingly dangerous to have this happen. It is possible that the loose wing caused the accident, which caused Mr. Moore's heart attack."

There it was. The truth of the matter. That's why they were back to talk to him. They found out about the wing.

Dalton immediately went on the defensive. "When the car was in the garage, it wasn't loose. I guarantee it."

Haas stared at him. "So... you contend that the wing came loose on its own?"

"No. I *contend* that someone loosened the screws on the wing before Moore's car left the garage and they got looser

and looser as the session went on.”

“I see. This leaves us with a problem. There’s no way to know what came first. Did Mr. Moore lose control and that caused him to have a heart attack? Or did he have a heart attack and lose control?” Detective Haas said. “It is a conundrum. One that will be hard, if not impossible, to solve. The issue then becomes... How did the wing get loose? Was it negligence on the part of your mechanic or was it just a fluke? Again, hard to prove.” He studied Dalton intently. “But not impossible.”

Dalton’s heart dropped to his knees. Detective Haas was going after him. After his team. His reputation would be shot for sure. This would be the end of Hughes Racing.

“Your mechanic, James Macht. I will need to speak to him again.”

“James did not make a mistake. He is an excellent mechanic.”

Detective Haas leaned back in his chair. “You seem very sure of this.”

“I am,” Dalton agreed.

“And yet the wing was...oscillating, I believe is the racing term. How do you explain that?”

“I don’t. That’s your job.” He’d had enough. He wasn’t putting up with this innuendo. This type of shit could and would kill his chances of keeping Hughes Racing alive. If Detective Haas wanted to do this, then he was going to make him work for every little bit of it.

Detective Haas’s mouth went flat. “I believe your insurance investigator is also asking questions. What has she

found out? Did she know about the wing? I would think that would disqualify any kind of payout.”

Regret smashed into his chest like his head had smashed onto the pavement. He never should've agreed to let Greer stay. He should've been stronger and just said no. Now she was on Detective Haas's radar. Where the hell was he going with this? “Not sure how that might be relevant to you.”

“If she noticed the wing issue, then she might not pay on your claim. That would make you quite upset since you've paid money for the policy. My understanding is you're in dire need of some money, no?”

“What are you suggesting?” he demanded.

“I understand Ms. Styger was almost hit by a car this afternoon. Perhaps you had something to do with that?”

“What? Are you crazy? I pulled her out of the way. Why would I want to hurt Greer?”

“She could say no to your claim, and you'd lose the money. It's my understanding you used to date. Perhaps there are bad feelings as well. Two birds with one stone, as they say.”

Dalton stared at Detective Haas. Who the hell had he been talking to that was filling his head with this shit? Claasen? He wanted to punch the detective's face just for hinting that he would physically hurt Greer. He balled his hands into fists. “I did not try to hurt Greer. I was not driving the car.”

“Maybe you asked a friend to drive the car. Perhaps you thought if you saved Ms. Styger, she would be grateful and pay on the insurance claim anyway, overlooking the wing issue.”

Dalton wanted to throttle the man across from him. Haas was talking madness; blaming him for what happened and using the insurance money as a motive. “You are way out of line, Haas.” He jumped to his feet, ignoring the stabbing pain the motion caused. “I did not try to hurt Greer. James did not make a mistake with Moore’s car. If you’re trying to blame Moore’s death on someone, then you’d better start looking elsewhere because you’re screwing up your investigation.” He turned on his heel and strode out of the restaurant.

The sound of retreating footsteps on the stairs to his left made him look up. He missed whoever was there, but they’d been moving at a fast clip, almost at a run. He shook his head. He’d like to run. Pack up the cars and just go back to his office in Germany. He was done with this. Letting Greer get dragged into this was a new low. His desperation was so intense he’d let it blind him to what he should’ve done. He needed to come clean to everyone, tell the whole team about the wing and let the chips fall where they may. Greer had almost been hurt, or worse because he involved her in this mess.



“I involved myself,” Greer said twenty minutes later when they were standing in her hotel room. “It’s my job, and I’m staying to do it. I’ll go talk to Detective Haas and set him straight.”

“Don’t bother. He won’t listen at this point. He’ll just twist what you’re saying around. Greer, reach out to your boss and tell him everything. They’ll deny payment, and you can get out of here. I can’t stand to see you in danger. I couldn’t live with it if something happened to you.”

There, he'd said it out loud. He probably shouldn't have, and he might be able to blame it on the knock to the head later if he needed to, but it was the truth.

She turned and walked to the sliding glass doors. Dalton walked up behind her. Darkness had settled in, and the mountains were no longer visible. Her reflection in the glass made his heart lurch in his chest. She was biting her lip, and her eyes looked sad.

“What is it, Greer?” he asked.

“Being back here, in the midst of this world again, is hard. It makes me realize how much I miss racing. Miss this excitement and energy. For all of the ups and downs, racing always brought me joy. Watching Jordana today, I was envious. I wanted to be out on the track. I have never fit in with the mundane nine-to-five world and not with my family. My sister is a nightmare, and my stepdad is only pleased with my ability to support my sister. My mother isn't strong enough to stand up to either of them. I'm tired of dealing with their drama. I moved to Europe last year to get away from them and they still pull me in every chance they get. I'm tired of that life. It makes me want my own life again. It makes me want to go back to racing.”

She was serious. He knew her well enough to know she truly meant what she said. “Why did you leave in the first place?” He wasn't talking about racing. It was time to ask the hard questions, the ones he'd avoided for seven long years. Why had she quit racing, but more importantly, why had she given up on him? On them?

He'd been doing a twenty-four-hour race in Bahrain when she'd called and told him it was over. He'd been too tired, too zoned out, to even take it in, let alone respond. So he hadn't.

He'd just said okay, and never spoke to her again. By the time he'd gotten back to his place in Germany, all her stuff was gone from his apartment and the key was on the counter. He'd had no contact with her again until yesterday at the hotel bar. Seven long years.

She let out a sigh and leaned against the glass. "It was the last race of the season at Circuit of the Americas in Austin, if you remember. I was up for the championship. My father was also racing that day. His season hadn't been quite as good as mine. He was behind me in points. Everyone knew it but him, knew he was past his prime. We were in the last lap. There'd been a safety car on the previous lap, so we were all bunched up again. Fighting for position. He was two cars behind me on the last corner. I was going to win. There was no question. I had interviews set up with a lot of big teams for after the race, and there was even some interest from a Formula 1 team."

She stopped talking. Reliving it, he figured.

Finally, she spoke again. "I was deep into the last corner and coming out when my father dove on me from two cars back and T-boned me. I went into the wall. He managed to pull out and finish the race." She met his gaze. "He'd hit me on purpose. He couldn't stand seeing me win. Seeing me be better than him. Not just that season but be a better driver in general. Everyone said so, quietly, of course, so they didn't offend him and set off his legendary temper. But he knew they were talking about me outshining him. And he hated it, so he made sure I lost."

Nausea rushed up Dalton's throat. He wanted to argue it couldn't possibly be true and she must be mistaken. But, he knew her father and she wasn't wrong about him. She wasn't wrong about any of it. She had been a better driver than her

father. She'd had serious skill and was learning how to hone it. There was no doubt she would have been the one to beat.

"I'm so sorry, Greer. So, so sorry." He hated the helpless feeling crawling under his skin. He wanted to hug her, but that was a dangerous path.

Instead, he just stayed silent.

"I somehow made it through the rest of the day, but I knew I would have to answer questions about that race for the rest of my life, and I just didn't think I could do it. I wanted to disappear. So...I did."

She stopped speaking then. The implication was clear. She'd disappeared from his world as well.

The wave of absolute anger was all-encompassing. He turned and headed for the door. Leaving was his only choice. If he stayed, he'd most certainly say something he would regret. He opened the door and closed it behind him and then went next door to his own room where he immediately braced himself against the wall and tried to breathe.

Everything hurt. His mind was on fire. Pain radiated along every limb and through his core. And his heart. He rubbed his chest. Maybe he was having a heart attack, he tried to reason, but he knew it wasn't true. She'd cut him off like she'd cut off everyone else. He'd meant no more to her than a bunch of strangers. He was just another voice in the crowd to her and one that she'd felt was necessary to isolate herself from.

The knock on the door startled him enough that he swore. He thought about ignoring it, but after everything that had gone on, he didn't think he had that luxury.

Opening the door, he discovered his brother. "What's up?"

“I brought the Advil,” Rory said as he walked into the room. He tossed the bottle at his brother and took a seat on the couch. “We have a bit of a problem.”

Rory had no idea. Problems were cropping up everywhere he turned. Dalton popped a couple of Advil in his mouth, went over to the mini-fridge in the corner, and selected a bottle of water. He didn’t want to hear about any more problems.

“What?” he snarled as he came across the room.

“Tatum.”

Dalton’s stomach knotted. “What about him?”

“He’s doing stupid shit on the track.”

“Is that all?” Dalton sat down heavily in the chair. “He’s new. He’ll learn. They all do stupid stuff when they start. It’s up to us to teach them the rules and how to behave as a driver. He’s just excited. He’ll do a few stupid things, and then he’ll learn not to do it again.”

Rory snorted. “Maybe. But I’ve got to tell you, I think he’s going to be a problem.”

Dalton put his head back on the chair. “We’ll figure it out.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Like shit, but I’m okay. Is everyone back from the track?”

Rory gave a nod.

“Okay, that’s good. I know we usually have dinner together with the drivers, but I’m just exhausted. Make my excuses for me, bro.”

“No problem. I don’t think anyone expects you at dinner.” Rory flopped back into the cushions and put his feet on the

coffee table. “Any news? Jordana said you went to talk to the Merry Widow.”

“Not sure we learned anything besides Dennis Moore didn’t marry for love. She was totally hammered, which made her pretty honest whether she meant to be or not. I don’t think she liked her husband much, and Greer is pretty sure she has a guy on the side.”

“Do you think she wanted Moore dead?”

Dalton blew out a long breath. “Truthfully? Even if she did, there’s no way she’d know what screws to loosen on the car to make that happen. And I just can’t picture her doing it. Besides, there are some extenuating circumstances.”

Rory frowned. “Which are?”

Dalton’s phone pinged. He glanced at the screen. It was an incoming text from James. He was still at the track. The cops wanted to talk to him. He was freaking out. James was the nicest of the nice, and talking to the cops would stress him out to no end.

Dalton sent him a text back that he was on the way and not to do anything until he got there. What he really needed was a lawyer, but he didn’t know any in Austria and certainly couldn’t get one now, even if he did. “The cops want to talk to James. He wants me there with him. He’s still at the garage.”

“Do you want me to come with you?” Rory asked. “Is this about the wing?”

Dalton nodded. “Detective Haas told me earlier they knew about the wing being loose and he wanted to question James. I thought he’d wait until tomorrow.” He grabbed his jacket off the chair and his room key. “No need for you to come.

Probably better if you don't. Too much show of force might work against us."

Rory ran a hand through his brown hair. As tired as Dalton was, Rory's gray eyes looked as weary. "Fine but keep me in the loop."

"Will do." He headed out the door, took the stairs, and was through the lobby and to the parking lot in minutes. He was climbing into his rental SUV when someone knocked on the passenger window startling him. He looked up to find Greer standing there. Lowering the window, he asked, "What do you need?"

He wasn't ready to speak to her after her revelation.

She'd lumped him in with her father as far as he could tell, and that sucked ass. He was nothing like her father, and he resented the hell out of her for thinking it.

"I just bumped into Rory in the hallway. He told me the cops want to question James. I want to be there."

"No."

"Why not? We're doing an investigation. It would look stupid if I wasn't there when the opportunity presented itself. No self-respecting investigator would miss this interview. Detective Haas will get suspicious if I don't show up."

"He's already suspicious. He thinks I tried to hurt you so I could save you and you would be so grateful to me that you would pay on the policy no matter what you find."

"That's stupid. Men. Like I would fall for that shit. I really need to go then and set him straight."

"Greer." He sighed then shook his head. "This mess is out of control. We agreed after talking to Claire you were done."

It's dangerous and stupid to involve you.”

She reached through the window and hit the unlock button, wrenching the door open before he had a chance to stop her. “James needs our help. We started down this path, and now we'll finish it. Moore was murdered, and we have to find out why. You know you won't be okay with it until you know all the details. And I...I owe you one. Let's go. You're wasting time.”

He wanted to argue more, but she was right. James was waiting. Dalton needed to support his team member. Once she was buckled up, he hit the button to close the window and headed out of the parking lot. He just hoped he wouldn't regret this decision as much as he thought he would.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Greer kept her mouth shut on the drive over to the track. It was only a ten-minute drive, but it was the longest ten minutes inside a car with the silent and broody Dalton Hughes. He was pissed at her. That was fair. She should've given him a reason when she broke things off. She should've told him the truth. Instead, she just made up an excuse and got off the phone in a hurry. She couldn't even remember exactly what she had said anymore.

What she did remember was that he didn't argue with her. He didn't tell her that he loved her, nor did he say she shouldn't break up with him. He just took it and let her go. It had killed her at the time. Looking back now, she knew just how much she'd needed him. Dalton was often pragmatic and always grounded. She could have used a bit of both. Instead, he let her essentially ghost him after the initial phone call. He didn't bother to reach out to her ever again and, after her father's betrayal, that had crushed what had been left of her soul.

They pulled into the race area and parked not far from the team paddock.

"I don't see James or Detective Haas anywhere," Dalton said. He got out of the SUV and started walking toward their

garage in the paddock.

Greer exited the vehicle and had to jog to catch up to him. When she reached him, she slowed to a walk and took a deep breath. She needed to put her game face on. Detective Haas would be asking her questions. She needed to make sure he would take her seriously.

Dalton unlocked the door and entered the first garage. They had two bays to work on all four cars. The two instructor cars were there, covered and waiting for the next day. “James?” he yelled.

No response. “Maybe he went to the restroom,” Greer suggested.

Dalton pointed to a door behind her. “That’s the closest restroom.”

The door was half open so there was no way he was inside using the bathroom. “Did you see Detective Haas’s car in the parking lot?” she asked.

Dalton cocked his head. “No, come to think of it, I didn’t.”

“Maybe Detective Haas called off the questioning until morning and James left.”

“But he didn’t text me about leaving.” Dalton sat on the front of the nearest car.

She shrugged. “Maybe he was just so relieved he forgot. Probably will send you a text once he gets back to the hotel. Ask Rory to check on him. If you’re still worried.”

“He and a lot of the crew are at a different hotel. There was no way we could afford to have everyone stay at ours. Gus is with us, but the rest are across town in a smaller, cheaper chain

hotel.” Dalton crossed his arms over his chest. “I’ll give him a few minutes to get back to me, and then I’ll track him down.”

Greer let her gaze wander around the garage. It was so good to be here. The familiar thread of joy filled her heart. This was where she belonged. In this world. She glanced at Dalton. The tension was so thick between them that she wanted to run away. To hide from it. From him. She bit her lip. It was time to face up to what she’d done and make it right if she could.

She moved over to stand directly in front of him. “Dalton, I broke it off with you because I was...mortified by what my father did. It made me feel...dirty and sad and broken, and I didn’t want any of that to rub off on you. You were doing so well, and the fact that we were together would have brought my shit to your door. You didn’t deserve that. I cared too much for you to put that stain—*my stain*—on your career.”

He stared at her, unblinking.

“I... I know this is years late, but I hope you can forgive me,” she finished lamely.

There were no more words. It was in the past. They needed to move beyond it. Surely, he didn’t care that much. He’d never even sent a follow-up email or text message. The pulse in his jaw jumped, and she was pretty sure she’d just heard him grind his teeth. Was he still angry? She’d apologized. Explained. She could only hope it made a difference.

When he still hadn’t replied, Greer offered, “You seem angry.”

He got to his feet and advanced on her until he had her backed up against the garage door. He put a hand on either side of her head. “You dumped me with some stupid excuse,

and then seven years later you tell me it was because you didn't think I could handle the stupid shit your father did? You and I both know that's just bullshit. You broke up with me because you panicked.

“Your father hit you and sent you out of the race, but you still came in second for the championship. You could've made up any kind of story to tell the press. Instead, you freaked out. Your father embarrassed you, and you panicked because you were going to have to stand up to him to keep going. You were worried he was right: That you weren't good enough. Instead of standing your ground, you let him chase you away from the sport you loved. You can yell and scream about him all you want, but the truth is you chickened out. You walked away from me because you knew I wouldn't let you quit, and I would push you to do better. You're a coward.”

Heat flew up her neck into her cheeks. How dare he call her a coward? “That's not true!” she yelled. “I was trying to protect you.”

“Save it. That's just an excuse. You were afraid to stand up to your father. Afraid he was right. You believed him instead of believing in yourself. Instead of listening to me. You wimped out.”

She narrowed her eyes at him. “You were halfway around the world. How would you know? You didn't even call me after that. Not once. Not to check up on me. Nothing. Not like you were Mr. Persistent or anything. You don't get to call me a coward. You let me go so fast I had whiplash.”

He glared at her, the pulse in his jaw bouncing. “You dumped me. What was I supposed to do?”

“Come after me, you idiot. If you cared, you would've at least called to see what the hell was going on. Instead, you

maintained radio silence for seven years. So don't start with me," she said, poking him in the chest. "It takes two, buddy," she snarled.

"You're incredible. You dumped me, and it's my fault?"

"Yes!" Throwing caution or common sense to the wind, she rose on her toes and kissed him hard on the mouth. It was his fault. He should have flown home to see how she was. She never should have broken up with him. It was all a mess, but it was in the past, and presently, she wanted nothing more than to forget it. No better place to do it than in his arms.

He broke off the kiss and glared at her.

Then he swooped down and claimed her lips again. This time he picked her up and put her down on the hood of the car. She sank her fingers into his hair. *This*. She had missed this more than she'd thought possible.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

He moved slowly back from the garage door. They were in there all right and arguing by the sounds of things. That was good news. It would be much better if she left. If Dalton hadn't been so damn fast on his feet, Greer would no longer be a problem. If Dalton hadn't been a good driver, he'd have been out of the picture, too.

His cell phone vibrated in his back pocket. "What?" he snarled in a voice barely above a whisper.

"Are they at the track?"

"Yes. They're here."

"Good."

He snarled, "Killing the kid wasn't part of the plan."

"Things change."

Bile rose in his throat. Hatred roared through his veins. This mess was not his fault. Why was he the one left cleaning it up? "I want more."

"What?" the other man barked.

"More money. You owe *me* now."

He snorted. "You were the one—"

“That was before. Things change. Now you owe me. I did what you asked, and now the risk is greater. I want more money. I want twice what you said you’d pay me. Killing wasn’t part of the plan. The fucking insurance investigator wasn’t part of the plan. You made me part of all this mess so you’re going to pay. If you don’t, then you’ll regret it. And if the cops figure it out, I won’t be going down alone. Send the money to my account, only make sure it’s twice the amount.” He clicked off the call.

Rain started to fall. God, he fucking hated the Alps in spring. Big, wet drops hit the pavement and splashed onto his shoes. They also landed on his head and when he lifted his face, the water struck him like an absolution. It was washing away his old life. He was experiencing a rebirth. Suddenly, he felt powerful. Strong again. *Enough of this fear and groveling.* Now, he was in charge. No one was going to have him under their thumb again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Everything in Dalton knew they'd end up here. Somehow, he had always known she'd step back into his life. There'd only ever been two obsessions in his life; cars and Greer. How appropriate that these two worlds collided in this combustible moment. She was built like the most amazing car he'd ever driven. All sinewy curves and danger around every turn.

As Greer went pliant in his arms, Dalton gently laid her back on the hood of the car. He had to get into those jeans five minutes ago. That was the problem with living your life at two hundred kph, no patience. And he was determined to be patient with this in case it was the last time he had her. He had no idea what possessed her to kiss him, but there was no going back now.

"You've got to slow down or this is going to be over way too quick," Dalton said.

"Quick is how we live," she breathed.

"Not this time," he stated.

"Well, since we're in the garage and on a car, I don't see rose petals and pillow talk in our future," she said with just the right amount of sass in her voice.

“You want rose petals and pillow talk, come home with me.”

“What I want is you, right now,” Greer said.

“I can manage that I think,” he said with a wink. Then he winced as he reached down and unzipped one of her boots and then the other. “Have I told you how sexy I think you look walking around on these stilts?”

“I learned a long time ago, to be taken seriously by men, you have to look them in the eye. If they have to look down to you, they tend to look down on you.”

“We’re pigs, I admit it,” Dalton said in between kisses on her soft lips.

“Enough. I don’t want to talk about differences. I want what we share, and that’s the heat between us,” she said.

With that, the talking stopped. Their breathing increased as they continued to kiss and grope. Pretty soon, he had them naked and writhing on the hood of a two hundred-thousand-dollar machine. And as good as he’d ever felt in that car, it felt much better to be surrounded by Greer. As he took one nipple in his mouth and rubbed at her most sensitive part, he knew she was at a flash point. With one quick love bite, he pushed her over the edge.

He took a moment to suit up, so to speak, and entered her in one quick thrust. Watching her eyes haze was almost as amazing as feeling her tighten around him. She was right; this was going to be quick.

Dalton continued slow, steady strokes, hoping to bring Greer to the peak again. Watching her writhe across his car was one of the hottest things he’d ever seen. He’d dreamed of

her for years and wondered if he had remembered their time together better in his mind than what had been reality.

He now knew the answer: No dream he had of her could ever live up to reality.

All too soon, he felt the tell-tale sign of her release pending. Two more quick thrusts and she broke in his arms. That sent him hurtling into the fastest straightaway he'd ever been on. Nothing had ever felt as right as being with Greer. And now that he'd had her again, how would he ever let her go?

Slowly they both started coming back to themselves. One thing about Greer he did remember was that she didn't have a shy bone in her body. She wasn't in any rush to cover herself and as he slowly lifted off her, he couldn't help but notice how unbelievably gorgeous her body was.

Getting involved with Greer again was stupid. Stupid with a capital S. But he hadn't felt so damn good in a long time. Years. He might regret this later, but it was hard to imagine that regret as he watched her pull on her sweater and slide into her jeans.

"What?" she asked as she pulled on her black leather boots.

"Nothing." He couldn't get the grin off his face. It was like being a teenager again. Suddenly, life didn't look so bad. Jesus, had it really been so long since he'd gotten laid? He thought back. No, not that long, but this was different. Greer was different.

She always had been.

He let out a long breath as he straightened, but then immediately regretted moving off the hood of the car. It was

all well and good when they were having sex, but now his entire body had seized up. Pain shot down his back until he pulsed with agony. *Shit. All good things come to an end.* That was what his bastard father used to say.

He tried to stay still as he searched for his phone.

“Here,” Greer said, handing it to him. It had been on the hood of the car. “Anything from James?”

He glanced at the screen. “No.” James was a responsible kid. He should’ve reached out by now. His stomach knotted. “And it’s not like him.”

“Call him,” Greer suggested as she fixed her hair back into a bun.

Dalton hit the button on his phone. It rang a few times, and just when he thought it was going to go to voicemail, someone answered, “Hello.”

“Hello?”

“Yes?”

Did he dial the wrong number? No that wasn’t possible. He had it programmed into the phone. “I’m looking for James.”

“Mr. Hughes,” the voice said.

He knew that voice. All the air rushed out of his lungs, and his knees gave way. He sat heavily on the hood of the car. “Detective Haas. What is it? Is James okay?” He already knew the answer, but he prayed he was wrong.

“Mr. Hughes, where are you?”

“At the track. What’s going on?”

Detective Haas cleared his throat. “Mr. Macht is dead. I will meet you back at your hotel.”

Dalton hung up the call and stared straight ahead.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” Greer asked.

“James is dead,” he said flatly. “This is all my fault.”

“Oh, God, Dalton. He was just a kid.” She collapsed next to him.

Resting his elbows on his knees, he dropped his head into his hands. His life and the lives of those he loved had taken a steep nose-dive in the last thirty-six hours. It was painful and unrelenting, and he wished he could just stop it all.

Greer draped an arm over his back in comfort and dipped her head to speak close to his ear. “It’s not your fault. Somewhere out there, someone is responsible for this mess, but it’s not you.”

Greer rose first, and tugging at his hand, pulled him upright. Without words, they made their way to the parking lot and headed back to the hotel. Dalton was rightfully upset, so Greer drove. When they got back to the hotel, Dalton waited with Greer in a lounge area off the main hallway. They hadn’t said much on the way over. There wasn’t much to say. Regret weighed so heavily on Dalton’s shoulders that he thought he might break. He should’ve kept his mouth shut. Just said, “Yup, it was a heart attack,” and then destroyed the video. The rest of this mess wouldn’t have happened. Whoever loosened those screws wouldn’t feel desperate and would stop trying to kill people. Every awful thing that had happened these few days was on him.

His gut was a giant void. Whoever was behind this was a madman, a desperate madman. Not someone to have as an

enemy, and not Dalton's choice. When someone screwed with Moore, they'd brought Dalton into it, but now one of his crew members was dead. Now, it was personal. All thoughts of backing off were gone. He was going to find the bastard that did this and make him pay.

Detective Haas walked in with Moser in tow. He took a seat across from Dalton. "Mr. Hughes, I am sorry for your loss." Dalton just nodded before Detective Haas continued, "I need to ask a few questions to both of you"—he gave a quick nod to Greer—"but I need to do so separately. Ms. Styger, if you could move to a different room, that would be most helpful."

Greer glanced at Dalton but stood up and left the room.

Detective Haas turned back to Dalton. "Now, Mr. Hughes, please go over the events of the evening. Why were you at the garage?"

"I got a text from James. He said you wanted to speak to him and he was freaking out. I said I'd come to the garage and be with him when he talked to you." Dalton swallowed but found it difficult to speak. His throat had closed over and the throb in his head had intensified in the last thirty minutes. He tried swallowing again, but he didn't seem to be able to make a sound.

Detective Haas must have realized his distress because he signaled Officer Moser, who immediately produced a steaming cup of black coffee.

Dalton blew on it before he sipped. It helped. He took a few more sips and then cleared his throat. "Thank you," he finally managed to croak out. "James is"—his voice hitched—"was...a great kid. I'm...a bit lost at his death. How was he killed?"

Detective Haas tilted his head and narrowed his eyes at Dalton. “You’re very upset. Understandable.”

“James was part of my crew, which makes him family.” Dalton had to fight to keep his voice even. God, he felt gut-punched. Maybe it was the cumulative effect of Moore and then James. Maybe it was because of all the emotions that had resurfaced with Greer being here. Mostly, he figured it was the anger he was trying to keep in check. He wanted to tear the room apart. Throw things, smash the mug in his hand, anything to let loose the white-hot rage that burned in his gut. Someone killed a kid, for no good reason, and that fucker was going to pay.

Detective Haas was staring at him. He must have spoken, but Dalton had missed it.

“What?”

Detective Haas waved away Officer Moser, who had been standing next to the couch. Without a word, the officer turned on his heel and made his way over to the door, where he stood. Detective Haas watched him go, and when he turned back, his expression was one of sadness.

“Mr. Hughes, I know you’re upset. I can see this has affected you greatly, and you’re struggling. The sudden death of someone you know, someone you work closely with, is devastating. You have been through a lot in recent days, not just at the track, but back at home with the recent death of your father. A word to the wise: Don’t do anything foolish, no matter how tempting it might be. It will not help.” Haas smiled tightly. “Take it from one who has been there.”

Detective Haas’s eyes looked tired, and there was a deep sadness there. He was serious. He was also offering sound advice, almost as if he was concerned. He gave Dalton one last

look and then waved Officer Moser back over. His sympathetic expression had disappeared as if it had never been there.

“What time did Mr. Macht text you?”

Dalton pulled out his phone and checked. “Just after seven.” He turned his phone so Detective Haas could see the texts. Officer Moser made a note of the time.

Detective Haas said, “You received the text message and then drove over. What time did you arrive?”

“Probably around seven twenty, seven twenty-five, somewhere in there.”

“And then what happened?”

Dalton rubbed his temples. “We couldn’t find James, so Greer and I were in the other garage, talking.” It suddenly occurred to him that if they ran forensics on the other cars, it could be bad. He should’ve wiped the hood down. No help for it now.

“For how long were you...talking?” Detective Haas asked.

“Er, maybe a half hour?” Dalton had no idea how long they’d been in there. He’d been way too distracted to pay attention to the time.

Detective Haas frowned. “Why didn’t you look for James immediately when you arrived?”

“We did. We went into the first garage bay, and he wasn’t there. I realized that his car wasn’t around, nor was your car, so I figured he’d gotten so thrown by the prospect of talking to you that he’d just forgotten to tell me and left. I thought I’d give him a bit to get back to his hotel and then see if he would send me a text or call.”

“So now it’s about eight o’clock, and you called his phone.”

Moser was scribbling away, and the scratch of the pen made Dalton nervous, which he suspected was exactly why the man did it.

“So going back to the text message. It said that I wanted to interview him and I would be coming tonight to the garage.”

“Yes,” Dalton agreed.

Detective Haas frowned. “And that was at just after seven?”

“As I’ve already said, yes.”

Detective Haas kept going over the details, but they weren’t going to change.

“Wait, what’s going on? How was James killed?”

Detective Haas sighed. “It appears Mr. Macht killed himself.”

A frigid wave of shock broke over Dalton’s whole body. That couldn’t be true. There was no way James would do that. “I...that...that’s not right. Why would James do that?”

“Why do you think he would do that?”

Blood roared in his ears as his lungs struggled to inflate. This was wrong. All wrong. “He wouldn’t. He wouldn’t do that. There was no reason to. I never told him about the wing. No one did. Only a few of us knew about it, and none of us would tell him. This doesn’t make sense.”

Detective Haas nodded. “Yes, I agree with you. It does not make sense. Mr. Macht was not a suspect in any way, nor do I

think it was negligence on his behalf that caused Moore's death."

Dalton paused. This was a switch. "What changed? You told me earlier you thought I was behind all this."

A small smile played at the corners of Detective Haas's mouth. "It is my job to...stir the pot, so to speak. I believe someone is behind Moore's death, but I don't think it is you or anyone from your garage."

Dalton's shoulders tensed. "You know something. What aren't you telling me?"

Moser closed his notebook and placed that and his pen in his pocket as Detective Haas rose. "Mr. Hughes, I am not obligated to tell you anything at all, but yes, I do have information that casts this apparent suicide in a new light."

"Can you please tell me?" Dalton hated to sound desperate, but the thought of James being killed but made to look like he'd committed suicide was gutting him.

Haas sat back down. "Moore's toxicology screening came back. He had a large quantity of Adderall in his system."

Dalton cocked his head. "The ADHD drug? What's that got to do with his death? I think someone said they thought... Claire said she thought Moore was ADHD."

Detective Haas sighed. "That is news to me. Unfortunately, Mrs. Moore was...unable to talk to us this evening."

"She was drunk off her ass when we saw her. Her brother was there with her, and he was stoned. He had Adderall with him. He tripped, and a bottle fell out of his pocket. I handed it back to him."

Detective Haas glanced at Officer Moser, who had pulled his notebook out once again and was furiously scribbling it all down.

“But I don’t get how Adderall changes anything?” Dalton asked.

“Adderall can cause a person’s heart rate to spike, especially if a lot is consumed.”

It was like a lightbulb went on over Dalton’s head. Suddenly, he understood where Detective Haas was going. “You think someone gave him a lot of Adderall and then made sure he would have a hard time on the track, making his adrenaline spike. The combination caused the heart attack.”

Detective Haas didn’t confirm or deny it verbally, but the look on his face was all the affirmation Dalton needed. “You cannot tell anyone this, Mr. Hughes. It’s still an ongoing investigation.”

“Right. But now you see what I’ve been saying all along, and now it makes sense that it could have been sabotage.”

“Yes,” Detective Haas agreed. “We need to know who had access to the car.”

Dalton’s stomach dropped. “The whole fucking world walked through the garage that morning, including all of Moore’s family and his entourage. Plus, quite a few of the other team’s drivers and crew. We have the best coffee and snacks so everyone stops by. It’s sort of like a family here. Everyone comes to say hello on the first day of the racing season.”

Detective Haas frowned. “I was afraid of this. Still, we will have to sit down with your crew again and see if we can make

a list of names. But first, I want to reconfirm with you the timing of the texts you received from Mr. Macht.

Dalton showed him the texts and the times they came in. “Why is this important?”

“We have the original texts on Mr. Macht’s phone to you, but I did not call him or text him to tell him I wanted to speak to him. There are no calls logged around that time on his phone.” Detective Haas held his gaze.

What the hell is the man trying to tell me with this look? Dalton thought about the whole turn of events, and then suddenly he got it. “If you didn’t reach out to him by phone or by text, how did he know you wanted to speak to him?” It crystalized right at that moment. “You think the person who killed James and made it look like suicide sent the texts. You think James was already dead when those texts went out.”

Detective Haas nodded. “It only makes sense. There was no way for him to know what we discussed earlier unless you had spoken to him or sent him a text. From your phone, I can see you did not.”

Dalton leaned back in the chair as the horror of what Detective Haas said sunk in. “There were footsteps on the stairs like someone was running away when I came out of the room after talking to you. If someone overheard us...”

Detective Haas grimaced. “That would be one explanation. Someone at your hotel heard us and set the plan in motion.”

Dalton hadn’t eaten much, but everything in him threatened to come right back up. His skin was clammy with the need to puke.

“I need to go.” He stumbled to his feet.

“This is hard, I know. Mr. Macht was family. We will find out what happened. For now, please keep all of this to yourself.”

Dalton nodded and shot out of the room. He headed out of the building into the rain and stood there letting the icy water wash over him. James was dead because some asshole overheard his conversation with Detective Haas. Because they thought they could make it look like James was responsible. Whoever this fucker was, his days were numbered. Dalton was going to find him and make sure he didn't live long enough to regret his actions.

There was no escape for this asshole. None whatsoever.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Greer knocked quietly on the door. She couldn't imagine what Dalton was thinking at the moment. The interview with Detective Haas had been a revelation. Her head was spinning.

The door opened, and Dalton waved her in. Jordana and Rory were sitting on the sofa. She walked over and sat down on the chair.

"Did you...?" She raised her chin at the two on the couch. Dalton nodded. He was standing, leaning against the wall. "Do you want to sit?" She started to get up, but he shook his head.

"My back is hurting along with most of the rest of me. Sitting makes me stiffer."

Jordana looked at Greer. "How are you feeling? You got tossed around pretty good this afternoon as well."

"I'm a bit sore but okay. Mostly, I'm just in shock. The whole Moore mess is just unbelievable."

Dalton swore. "Diabolical is the word you're looking for. Someone took the time to plan it all out. Moore's death would have been seen as a heart attack if it wasn't for the loose wing."

Greer leaned back in her chair. "Which begs the question of why loosen the wing when there are so many other ways to

make a car crash?”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” Jordana said, “and I think I know the reason. Whoever it was used the loosened wing for two reasons. One, it would be relatively easy to do without anyone noticing if the person didn’t have much time which is probably the case. And two, it would most likely be covered up by the accident. All kinds of stuff happens when a car hits a wall or another car or a tire barrier. It wouldn’t have necessarily stood out at all to investigators if it wasn’t for Dalton doing lead/follow training with Moore.”

“She’s right,” Rory agreed. “It wouldn’t take much to do it and it could have easily been seen as just part of the accident if Dalton hadn’t recorded it while Moore was driving.”

Dalton sighed. “But anyone who spends time at the track would have to assume we’d probably do some lead/follow laps. Why would they think it wouldn’t be noticed?”

“Two thoughts on that,” Greer said. “One, they aren’t from the racing world. Maybe they don’t know the setup of how things go for the first day on the track. Two, they are from the racing world, and maybe it was a calculated risk. They figured it might show up on video, but it just as easily could’ve happened earlier or later when Dalton wasn’t behind Moore. Also,” she said, warming to her theory, “everyone knows Hughes Racing has money trouble. What if the saboteur just assumed that even if Dalton did see the wing, he would keep his mouth shut because a revelation like that might bring down the team?”

“Then whoever it is doesn’t know Dalton,” Jordana said flatly.

“More likely they just figured he wasn’t above keeping his mouth shut.” Rory glanced at his brother. “It’s a definite

theory. What do you think?"

Dalton winced as he shifted his weight. "I did keep my mouth shut so I guess they were right."

"No, you didn't. You told us and Greer and then started your own investigation. That's why you two got hurt," Jordana said. "That's not keeping your mouth shut. That's being prudent about who you tell."

"Maybe," he allowed.

Greer wanted to go over and hug him, but to be fair, she had no idea where they were in the détente process at the moment. Having sex with her ex had been awesome, but the fact blurred the boundaries.

"I do think you all are right," Dalton said, "and it's a definite possibility. I'm sure whoever loosened the screws is from the racing world. No one else would grasp what would happen if the wing moved."

"Well, that eliminates the family then. None of them are really into racing," Greer pointed out.

"But Joe, Claire's brother, and quite possibly Brian both take Adderall," Dalton pointed out. "Not that I can see Joe doing anything. He seems to be a bit lost."

"Claire could have used his Adderall and given it to Moore," Jordana said. "I'm quite sure it wasn't a love match, and I'm guessing she has a boyfriend back in the US. There were a few suspicious calls when I was with her."

"We can confirm that," Greer agreed. "She was making kissy noises at someone."

"But she doesn't know a damn thing about cars, so doesn't that eliminate her?" Rory asked.

“I think,” Dalton started, “that we need to get some sleep. Or, at least, I need sleep. I can’t think about this anymore. I have to call James’s parents in the morning, and I just need some downtime.”

Jordana was on her feet in seconds. “I’m so sorry. You must be exhausted. Come on,” she said to Rory as she pulled him to his feet. “We’ll talk more about it tomorrow.”

Dalton straightened. “The team is very upset and rightly so. I told them James died, but I didn’t get into details. I asked them if they wanted to pack up and head back to Germany, but they all said they wanted to think about it. I did try to encourage them to take tomorrow off, but Mario called me back and said they all want to go to the track. Seems they think hanging out at the hotel will be worse.”

He turned to Jordana. “I know you wanted time in the car tomorrow, but I just think we need to take it easy. We all lost a friend in James, and the entire team needs a bit of a break. We’re also down a mechanic. We’ll see how everyone is doing before we start putting cars on the track.”

Jordana waved her brother off. “Don’t give it another thought. We’ll give them tonight to sit with it, and then Rory and I will go to the other hotel in the morning and talk to everyone. We’ll see how the crew is fairing, and we can judge from there if they want to stay and race or just pack up and go home.”

Go home? Those words hit Greer hard. She didn’t want this to end. Being here with these people felt so damn right. So comfortable. They were a family, one she could be a part of, a place where she fit in. One where she was a respected member and not just an ATM or a supporting cast member. And now

they were talking about going home. It was as if someone had doused her with ice-cold water.

“Greer, are you okay?” Jordana was staring at her.

“What? Sorry? Yeah, fine. Just a bit tired. It’s been quite a day.”

“For sure. Sleep well, and maybe we can catch up a bit tomorrow.” Jordana gave her brother a hug and then headed out with Rory in tow.

As the door closed, Greer stood. She’d been contemplating trying to spend the night with Dalton, but at this point, it didn’t seem like a good idea. She was still reeling from everything, and being with him wouldn’t clarify anything for her. “I guess I should go, too.”

“Stay,” he said as he came toward her. “Spend the night here. I... It would... I would like you with me.”

She met his gaze. Staying would be a mistake, and they both knew it. She’d let herself believe things were sorted out between them, but they really weren’t, and this would just cloud things more. But she wanted to stay so dang bad. To be with him. To pretend, even for a little while, that things were back to their normal from seven years ago. They were a couple, and life was good. She wanted that so badly she could taste it but she’d give him an out in case he really didn’t want her to stay. Like when they broke up. If he didn’t protest, he didn’t really want her to stay in the first place.

“I think you probably need a good night’s sleep. I know I do.” She didn’t head toward the door, desperately wanting him to ask her to stay one more time.

“Greer, I don’t know how to say this any other way. I’m worried about your safety. I don’t want you on your own

tonight. If you would prefer to stay with Jordana and Rory, I can arrange it, but I can't let you go back to your room on your own."

Heat rolled up her neck and into her cheeks. The whole time she'd been thinking he wanted her there for company because he wanted to be with her. Instead, he just didn't want anything to happen to her. His conscience probably wouldn't survive if anything happened to her on his watch, not after everything else. That's how he would see it, his watch.

He wasn't being romantic at all. He was being pragmatic. She wanted to yell at him and storm out, but that would only make things worse. Then he'd know for sure what she'd been thinking. He'd know how far off base she was.

"I hadn't thought of that, but I see your point. I do think I'll be okay, though. I will lock my door and put on the chain."

"Greer, you either sleep here or with my sister. You can't be alone." Dalton crossed his arms over his chest. "I won't be able to sleep if I know you're not safe."

So now it was all about him. Why wasn't she surprised? He had no faith she could look after herself. She opened her mouth to argue and then thought better of it. What was the point? He would get upset and then they'd fight and she'd be humiliated and he'd go silent. Better to skip to the end.

"Fine," she said. "I'll sleep down here on the sofa. You take the bed." He opened his mouth, most likely to protest, but she waved him off. "You're in pain. You need to take the bed. I'll be fine on the pull-out sofa. Please call down to the front desk to have them make it up. I'm going to zip to my room for a few things. Won't take more than a minute or two." With that, she walked out the door. She didn't pause until she was in her own room and leaning against the closed door.

Her cheeks were flaming, and she was gasping for breath. She'd been way off. Not even in the same ballpark as Dalton. That scene in the garage hadn't been about romance. It was about him being worried and needing a distraction.

Damn good thing she hadn't opened her mouth. That would have made things a hundred times worse. She swallowed and tried to crush her humiliation. What the hell had she been thinking? Having sex once doesn't make a relationship. Did she even want a relationship with him? Maybe not. Maybe she was just caught up in the excitement of being at the track again and being with Dalton was part of that. Yes. She was just being stupid.

She pulled her phone out of her back pocket and sent a text to Dalton, saying she was going to take a shower and she'd be over in a bit. That would buy her time to get over her humiliation and find some way to cobble together some dignity. What an idiot she'd been!

After heading upstairs, she spun the handle on the shower to full hot and then peeled off her clothing. Angry black and blue colored her ribs, but other than that, she looked okay. Her ego was the most damaged part of her at the moment. She got under the hot spray and let out a deep breath.

It was being here, she decided, being at the track around people in the racing world. Breathing it in, remembering the camaraderie and the joy. The thrill of being back was what had blinded her. She hadn't realized how much she'd craved that excitement. That feeling of belonging. Of being part of something bigger than herself where the whole team wanted her to do well and were sad when she didn't. Family. She missed it fiercely.

Her father's actions had humiliated her, and if she were being honest, Dalton was right, she'd turned tail and run. She'd been fighting with her dad subtly and not so subtly for years, but when he took her out of the race because she would have beaten him, the clouds obscuring her view of his behavior had parted and she'd finally seen him for who he really was. Sadly, he was a small man filled with ego and anger. She was running from that. From the knowledge that he wasn't the great man everyone said he was. He was just a mean, selfish man who was happy to make money off her until she upstaged him. She wasn't a coward, but she was sad and worried she was more like him than she could ever admit.

Being back at the track brought everything to the surface for sure. Maybe it was time to take the bull by the horns and deal with it instead of running.

She turned off the water and toweled herself dry. She brushed out her hair and wrapped herself in a fresh towel as she stepped out of the bathroom and walked directly into Dalton's arms.

“Took you long enough.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

“How did you get in?” she demanded.

By rights, Dalton should have been sheepish, but nope. His expression was defiant as if daring her to challenge him. “I asked Jordana to pretend to be you and get the front desk to open the door for her, and then I came in. I told you I didn’t want you to be alone, but then you decided to extend the amount of time we agreed to so you could take a shower. I wasn’t going to leave you on your own.”

“Overstep much?” she snarled. Where did he get off breaking into her room? “I said I would be over, and I would’ve come. Breaking in is way over the top.”

He glared down at her. “I’ve lost a driver and now a mechanic in less than forty-eight hours. Someone tried to push me off the road and someone—who knows, maybe the same asshole—tried to take both of us out with a car, so yeah, maybe I’m a wee bit sensitive. Live with it,” he snarled back.

“Back off. You’re not responsible for me. I can take care of myself.”

Dalton snorted. “Sure. Whatever.” He shook his head. “I’m exhausted. You ready to sleep or what?”

Reversing her earlier consideration, she said, “You can sleep on the sofa.” She pointed at the stairs.

He laughed. “Yeah, no. I’m sleeping in the bed. I’m too damn tired and in too much pain to sleep on a sofa.”

She put her hands on her hips. “Then go back to your own room,” she demanded.

He snagged her towel in one hand and yanked it off her. “Or I could stay here with you in the bed.”

Her mouth opened and closed again. She was speechless. How dare he? “Give me my towel.”

“No. Get in bed. I need sleep.”

“I don’t give a shit what you need. Give me my towel.”

He shook his head. She narrowed her eyes at him and then turned and went over to the closet. She pulled out a tank top and a pair of pajama bottoms and pulled them on. She wanted to yell at him, but what was the point? He wasn’t going to leave, and if she went downstairs, she’d have to sleep on the sofa. The old couch was lumpy to sit on; as a bed, it did not appeal at all.

“Turn off the lights,” she demanded as she crawled into bed. She turned on her side and faced the wall, her back to Dalton.

The lights went off, and then the sound of clothing hitting the floor reached her. She huffed out a breath and tried to relax. It was going to be a long night. She knew she was letting him get to her, and that would never do. Instead, she tried some breathing exercises and worked on trying to relax.

Dalton Hughes was an ass; there was no doubt. Still, he wasn’t wrong. It had been a weird few days and someone was

out there killing people. She rubbed her face. How the hell had it come to this?

“If you could stop breathing funny, it would help us both fall asleep.”

“Listen, you jerk. I’m trying breathing exercises so I don’t scream at you. Be thankful I’m not smothering you with a pillow right now.”

“Like to see you try,” he growled.

Grabbing her pillow, she whirled around and attempted to shove it over his face, but he gripped her wrists and held her back. They fought for a few seconds, but then she realized Dalton was shaking with laughter.

“It’s not funny, you big oaf.”

He laughed harder.

She let go of the pillow and pushed him in the chest, but then she started to laugh. This situation was ridiculous. She pulled her pillow out of his hands, put it back in place, and flopped back onto the bed.

Dalton rolled over and covered her with his body. “You done trying to smother me?”

“Yes, I’m on to planning your demise in other ways.”

“Good,” he said as he leaned down and kissed her neck. “You keep planning. I’ll just be here amusing myself.” When he kissed the hollow of her neck, she struggled not to arch into him. Damn him. It wasn’t fair.

She pushed against him, trying to break free. “Dalton, stop it. You’re distracting me from my plan.”

But he only chuckled and nibbled on her earlobe. She gasped, and he took the opportunity to capture her lips and then deepen the kiss. His tongue expertly explored her mouth and she moaned her pleasure.

Even if she didn't want it, his touch sent a thrill down her spine. She knew she shouldn't be doing this, but she couldn't resist him. His lips moved to her ear, breathing hot and heavy as he whispered something that made her heart race even faster.

He pressed her down onto the bed, his body on top of hers, every inch of him hot and hard. This was a mistake she was going to enjoy making.

Lips pressed against hers, he let his hands explore her body. Her nipples hardened under his touch and as his hands worked their way down to her hips, she arched into him. When he kneaded her flesh, she bit her lip to keep from crying out. It felt so good.

She wanted him. It was bad. He was okay with this being a one-time thing. Hadn't he said as much earlier? She, on the other hand, was a goner. She'd known it the moment she'd seen him. She shouldn't have given in before, in the garage. But now that she was here, she wanted him. She dug her nails into his back as he ran his hand over one breast, pinching her nipple. His lips nibbled on her earlobe as he ground his hips into hers.

"I've missed you, Greer," he said, his voice low in her ear. He took her hands and pinned them above her head, lacing their fingers together. "You have no idea."

"I missed you, too," she said breathlessly. The heat of his desire pressed into her. She wanted to feel that pulsing length deep inside her, taking her over completely.

When he let her hands go, she traced her fingertips over his back.

He tensed.

“Are you in pain?” she asked.

He grunted. “I’ll survive.”

“I could make it feel much better.”

“I like the sound of that,” he said as he kissed her neck again.

“Great. Let me get an ice pack, and you’ll be all set.” She started to get up, and he pushed her back down on the bed.

“Funny,” he said.

She laughed.

“Shut up and kiss me,” he ordered.

She obliged, letting her tongue dance with his. She pushed her body against his, wrapped one leg over his back, and then twisted until she was on top. She pushed him down onto the bed and straddled his body.

Giving him a wicked smile, she said, “I’ll tell you what; we can try something else to make you feel better.” She rained kisses over his chest.

“I like this plan so much better.”

His hands ran over the length of her body as they kissed, then he cupped her breasts in both palms. She groaned when he squeezed her nipples. His fingers dug into her skin, causing her to moan in pleasure.

Her body ached for him. She needed him.

“Greer,” he said in a low growl. “God, I need to be inside you.”

“Yes,” she breathed.

He rolled over, taking her with him so that he was on top. She wrapped her legs around him as she gave in to the sensation. She moaned needily as he entered her. He leaned down and kissed her, then whispered her name as he thrust over and over again.

“Yes, Dalton, just like that.” She gritted her teeth to keep from crying out.

“Oh, God.” Dalton’s voice was low and breathless.

Greer raised her hips, wanting him deeper inside her. She dug her nails into his back, causing him to moan. When he sucked on her neck, she shivered in response. Her body was on fire. She was so close. All the emotions of the past few days had built up inside her. She couldn’t hold it in anymore.

He thrust faster, and she cried out, clenching around him as she came. He followed, coming deep inside her.

They lay there, gasping for breath for a few moments. Greer didn’t want to move. She didn’t want it to end. Daylight would come too soon, and reality would intrude, but for right now she could pretend that everything was alright. That she was still racing, and they were still together.

It was a fantasy she was okay with acting out for as long as possible.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Dalton slipped out from under the blankets, careful not to wake Greer. His body still hurt, and he was in desperate need of a shower, but she needed sleep as well. If he woke her, it would end in a fight. It had been fun to revisit the past, and it made him realize just how much he missed her, but he had his troubles, and she had a boatload of her own. He wasn't prepared to take on any of her issues at the moment.

He pulled on his jeans and was gathering the rest of his clothes when she sat up. "Sneaking off?"

"Gotta grab a shower and get to the track. The team decided the best way to deal with James's death is to keep working. Detective Haas is still investigating, so it's not like James' family can hold a funeral or anything just yet."

She eyed him. "But that's not why you were sneaking out."

He let out a loud sigh. *Here it comes.* "No, that's not why I was leaving."

She sat up and leaned against the headboard pulling the sheet over her chest. "Why are you leaving? I thought we were in this together."

He grimaced as he pulled on his sweater. "No, we're not. You had a job to do, and you've done it. We now know that

Moore had a heart attack because someone fed him a bunch of speed and jacked his heart rate, then made sure he had an accident, which is what killed him. You know it wasn't someone from my team because we had nothing to gain, so you're good to go."

"Am I? Gosh! Thanks for explaining my job to me. That's awesome. Jackass." She glared at him. "What the hell?" she snarled.

"Look, someone has already taken a run at you. There's no need for you to stick around so it can happen again. It's daylight and you're safe by yourself here at the hotel for the moment. Everyone is heading to the track. Pack your things and head back to Munich. You'll be safe there and out of harm's way."

The way to get her out of here was to be a dick. He couldn't think while around her. Period. At least not with his rational head. That was the problem with Greer; she totally consumed his mind when they were together. To get through the rest of this weekend he needed a clear head. Then he could deal with the fallout of losing team members. But if something happened to Greer, there was no way in hell he'd recover.

"So, you've decided for me that it's time for me to leave to be on the safe side. Is that it?" She shook her fist at him. "This is about you and me and has nothing to do with Moore's death. You want me gone."

He deserved her wrath. And he was about to up the ante to be sure she stayed mad at him. "Yes! You're right. I want you gone. It's been fun, but let's face it, Greer, you're going to go back to your life and I'm going back to mine. You made your choice seven years ago, and it wasn't me." Why did those words still hurt like hell? "So, let's not play some stupid game

now and pretend it's all alright. It's not. We're done. Go home."

With that, he grabbed his sneakers and went down the stairs and out the door. He wished he hadn't had the room next door, because he wanted to stomp around a bit.

Two minutes later, he was in the shower, letting the hot spray ease the ache in his muscles. Too bad it couldn't ease the pain in his heart. He'd been necessarily harsh with Greer. Maybe too harsh, but goddammit, what the hell did she expect? He'd done the right thing. He needed her to be gone so he could focus on the team.



A short while later, he pulled into the paddock. He greeted his brother and sister in the trailer along with Mario and the other two drivers. "How is everyone doing today?"

There was a chorus of "fines," but it was subdued. That was alright with him. He felt that way, too.

"Hans, let's talk about some of your work yesterday," he said as he sat down next to the man. Dalton spent the next hour going over things with Hans and then with Tatum. Rory had been right. After reviewing some of the footage and the data from the sessions yesterday, Tatum was going to be a bigger problem. He had a lot more bad habits to break. Still, neither one was a total nightmare. He could work with them.

When he was done with the drivers, he stepped outside the trailer. "Jordana," he called out as he stood in the watery sunshine. It was chilly, but at least it wasn't raining.

“What’s up?” his sister said, walking to the foot of the stairs from the garage.

“I reviewed some of the data from yesterday.” He smiled at her. “Looking good. Really good.”

A grin lit her face, and she glowed. “Thanks. That means a lot.”

“Tonight, if you want, we can go over a few things. I mentioned a couple areas to Rory, but if you want more detail or anything, I’m available.”

He didn’t want to force his sister to accept his coaching. His father had done that with all of them, and it had made for a rough ride. Parents shouldn’t coach their children when it got to a certain level of play. It just screwed up the kid. He wasn’t Jordana’s dad, but was probably the closest thing to it. He wanted her to make the choice.

“I’d like that, Dalton. I’d like that a lot.”

He found himself smiling again as he watched her go back into the garage. Maybe having his little sister drive for them would be a good thing. Mario came out on to the steps behind him, and Dalton grabbed his arm as he was about to pass. “Do you have the video footage from the cars when they were in the garage the other day? The morning before Moore died?”

Mario frowned. “Yeah, I can get it for you, but why?”

“I just want to take a look. Send it to me from all three cars.”

“Will do.” Mario continued down the stairs.

The session was about to begin, and the trailer emptied out. Dalton sat down and pulled up the video Mario had sent. The first one from Hans’s car was short. It hadn’t been turned

on for very long before he got in and went out onto the track. But the other two were longer. He watched each of them through once. By then the session had finished and everyone had tromped back in.

It was another two hours before he had a chance to sit down and look at the videos again. This time, he put two laptops side by side and watched the videos simultaneously. He had no idea what he was looking for, but he'd know it when he saw it, or so he hoped. Both cars had been facing out to pit lane so he couldn't see the back of either one, which is what he really needed, but he watched as people went back and forth in front of the cars.

He was there along with Greta and Gus, Mario, and the whole crew. Catching sight of James on screen made Dalton feel like puking. The mechanic had been in his early twenties. Just a kid with his whole life ahead of him. Dalton put down his coffee mug and rubbed his face. Maybe this was pointless. But then he went back to staring at the screen.

James was in front of Moore's car. He was talking to someone. Dalton turned the sound way up, but it was still muffled. He was smiling and laughing. James then said something about the jacks and opened the hood and was lost from view. Dalton looked at the other screen. Gus was standing off to the side in front of the screens, talking to Mario. They walked out onto pit lane. No one else seemed to be around. A couple of minutes or so later, James closed the hood, and that was the last time he was on camera until Moore was getting into the car.

"Anything?" Rory asked as he came in to get his laptop. He still had his fire suit on.

"Nothing. How's it going out there?"

He nodded. “Good. Hans is making slow and steady progress, which is what we want to see. Tatum is still taking too many risks. He’s spun a few times, but he’s not getting it. It’s going to be a hard road with him. He got into it with Jack from Johnson Wright earlier. I don’t know what got into *his* Wheaties this morning, but he’s out there being reckless as hell, too.”

“Everyone is pushing. We all want to be number one. How’s Jordana?”

Rory’s worried expression morphed into a broad grin. “She’s amazing. I have to say she’s a hell of a better driver than I am, and she might be even better than you, brother.”

“That’s awesome.” Dalton smiled. “I was watching some of her stuff from yesterday. I think you’re right. I think she’s the best in the family, but don’t tell her I said that.”

“Come on out and see.”

Dalton got up and went into the garage. He watched Jordana do a couple of laps, and there was no denying she was the best in the family in terms of raw skill. Dalton could still take her at this point, but by the end of the season, it would be a dead heat between them.

“Still gonna rain tomorrow,” Gus said.

“What?” Dalton turned to his mechanic.

“Rain. I’m telling ya it’s gonna rain for the race tomorrow.”

He shrugged. “Okay, well, we’ll have to deal with it.”

“But at least I found my screwdriver.” Gus held it up.

Dalton glanced at it and then looked back at the screen. Hans was coming along nicely. “Where did you find it?”

“Funny thing. I was over at Johnson Wright’s garage, chatting with Lars, their mechanic, when I saw my screwdriver. Lars had set it aside. He had no idea who it belonged to. I must have had it with me when I went over there the other day. Anyway, it’s back now, and I feel much better.”

Dalton made some non-committal noise as he watched Tatum spin and hit the tire wall. He listened as Mario spoke to Tatum, who replied, “I’m fine. That asshole. It’s his fault. He pushed me off the track.”

Mario glanced at Dalton, and the two of them exchanged a look. It had been Tatum’s fault when he’d dove into the corner and hit Jack Roundtree. It was a rookie mistake, and now he would have to go apologize. That would go over like a lead balloon with Tatum, but this was racing, and it was part of the sport to apologize when a driver did something stupid on track.

He glanced around and saw that Gus was busy with getting Jordana and Hans squared away. The flatbed would bring in Tatum’s car and the driver. When he walked by Gus, the man stood up. “Oh, and you know what? I saw one of the entourage over there, too. Apparently they know each other from a car event in Vegas. Small world.”

“You know the racing world is very insular.”

“Yeah, but these guys aren’t really racing guys. Moore’s kid, Brian, is here as well. He’s upset about something. Just like his dad if you ask me. Always pissed off at the world.”

The flatbed arrived on pit lane, and they proceeded to get Tatum’s car off the back. The driver came storming into the garage. “It was all his fault. I was—”

Dalton held up a hand cutting off his driver's tirade. "We can discuss this in the trailer." He helped Tatum shed his gear. The other man was cursing and swearing up a storm as they made their way to the trailer. He stomped inside, and everyone present looked up. A second later, Tatum turned to Dalton and launched into his explanation of events.

Dalton stopped him and had him sit, then pulled up the video. "See here?" Dalton said, slowing the video down. "There was no room for you, but you tried to make a hole. Jack had nowhere to go. This was on you. He wasn't closing the door on you. There was no opening." Being blunt seemed to be the right tact with Tatum.

The other man stared at the screen. "But—"

Dalton shook his head. "Now we're going to go over there and apologize for knocking him into the wall. Depending on the damage, you might have ended his race before it's begun."

Tatum glared at Dalton and then glared at the screen. Then he swore some more and stood up. "Fine. Let's do it."

Dalton stood, too, and they walked through the paddock to the Johnson Wright garage. As they approached, Clyde's personal car was parked outside with some damage to the bumper. Clyde would hate that. Lars must not be able to fix it until they get back to their home garage.

As they entered the garage, he braced himself for what was to come. Jack wasn't known for having patience or being a good sport. Clyde was standing next to Jack's car, talking to Lars. "Clyde," Dalton called, "is Jack around?"

"Here I am," Jack said as he came up behind them.

"Jack." Dalton offered his hand. They shook.

"Sorry," Tatum said, offering his hand, too.

Jack smiled. “Ah, it’s okay. Rookie mistake. You’ll get the hang of it. We’ve all done it.”

Dalton tried not to stare, but he could’ve been knocked over with a feather. Clyde came over and was shooting daggers at them, but Jack was totally serene. “Lars says he can fix it. I’m buying some parts from some of the guys. I’m still missing some. Do you guys think—”

“See Gus. He’ll help you if we have anything.”

“Thanks.”

Clyde growled, “Get your drivers under control, Hughes.”

Tatum opened his mouth, but Dalton squeezed his arm. “Like Jack said, we’ve all made the same mistake. Thanks for being good sports.”

Jack nodded. “We all have to stick together. Hope things are starting to look up for you all.”

Dalton wanted to get Tatum out of there as soon as possible before he said something that would spoil Jack’s good mood. And why the hell was Jack in such a good mood? “You seem happy.” He hadn’t meant to say anything, but it just came out.

“Yeah, I think things are finally gonna go my way.” Clyde snorted at Jack’s comment and stomped off, but Jack ignored him. “Just a feeling I’ve got,” he said with a sly smile.

Dalton nodded. “Well, thanks again and good luck to you.” He started walking with Tatum out of the garage when the mystery surrounding Moore’s accident clicked into place. It was like all the pieces of the puzzle just suddenly fit. And he knew. He turned, and his gaze locked with Jack’s. The other man’s smile slid off his face.

Dalton turned and started hustling Tatum down the paddock. Jack knew some of Moore's entourage. Jack had a gambling problem, or so the rumor went. He was seriously out of funds if Clyde could be believed. Jack hadn't paid Clyde for the race yet, let alone the season. Gus's screwdriver was found in Johnson Wrights's garage.

And the last piece, James talking to someone who was standing at the back of the car. Dalton had thought he was talking about the air jacks in the car, but he'd been saying "Jack." And then he opened the hood. Jack would have had several minutes to loosen the screws with no one being the wiser.

They reached the trailer and Dalton told Tatum to go get changed. He pulled out his cell but realized he didn't have Detective Haas's number. He had no idea where the man's card was. Who would know? Juan Carlos must know, but where the hell was he? Dalton didn't have his direct number. He could call Greer. She would probably know.

He paused for just a second and then hit the button for her cell. He'd explain, and she'd be fine with it. The phone started ringing. Dalton looked up to see Jack behind the wheel of a dark sedan, the same shape as the one that tried to hit Greer. He was heading out of the paddock. *Shit.* Dalton started to run toward his SUV. He wasn't letting this fucker get away. "Come on, Greer, answer," he mumbled as he got into his vehicle. Greer's voicemail came on. He hung up. He called Rory. "Get me Detective Haas's number ASAP. It's Jack. He's leaving, and I'm going after him."

He cut his brother off and shot out of the paddock area. Jack was not getting away with this. Not on his watch.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The rumbling in her stomach led Greer to close her laptop and sit back in her chair. She'd skipped breakfast, and now that it was lunchtime, she was damn hungry. Until now, her righteous indignation about Dalton's behavior had fueled her. What an unmitigated asshole. Seriously.

She refused to consider that he might just have a point. What it really came down to was she'd hurt him and he hadn't forgiven her. Now, he didn't trust her either, which was...fair. She'd screwed up, and he'd borne the brunt of her mistake.

She pushed out a harsh breath. He didn't have to be an ass about it. Nor did she have to sit there and take it. He'd been right about the fact her job here was done. She was just waiting for a call back from her boss, and she should be good to go.

She rose and went to the bathroom. The ringing of her cell stopped her, but she didn't rush to answer. Her boss couldn't possibly have finished the report she'd submitted that quickly, so it wasn't him. And she wasn't talking to her family, so if any of them called, she wasn't picking up. The likeliest scenario was that the inbound call was spam.

When she was finished in the bathroom, she walked over and grabbed her phone. Dalton. had called? That was

unexpected and her heart fluttered. Why would he be calling? To apologize? She snorted. Pigs would fly first.

She resisted the temptation to call him back. Any communication between them could just lead to another fight. She was tired of fighting. That realization struck her, and she sat back down. She was tired. Of. Fighting. Not with Dalton, although that wasn't pleasant, but with everyone. Her entire family. She constantly fought against her mother trying to get her to do stuff for her sister. Her stepfather trying to do the same thing, or worse, get her to do some sort of job for his small insurance company.

She was tired of fighting the clients and having to tell them they weren't getting paid. She was even tired of fighting with Louisa over Christmas movies. She was just... done. If she'd learned nothing else from this job, it was that she needed a new life. She missed racing desperately, and even if she couldn't go back to being part of the Hughes family, albeit an extended part, then she would just have to find another racing family. There were lots of teams out there. Surely, one of them would take her money.

Smiling, she stood. It sucked that Dalton couldn't let things go. It more than sucked. Her chest ached with sadness, but she'd managed to get through it seven years ago, and she'd get through it now. It would just really suck.

Her phone vibrated and she looked at the screen. Her boss, Frank had texted.

Report looks good. We can argue about paying out later. Need you back here for the jewelry heist job.

She immediately sent a text back.

We'll need to pay out. The extenuating circumstances were beyond their control. I'm not coming back. I am officially on vacation. I have six weeks saved and I'm taking them. You've been after me about it for months so I'm doing it now. Louisa can do the jewelry heist.



Technically, Frank could fire her, but he wouldn't. She was his best investigator. Besides, she was way overdue for a vacay. He'd make a lot of noise and then send her a file to take a look at. It was how their game was played.

True to form, Frank sent a demanding email and then forwarded her the files. She promised to take a good look at them and give him any leads she came up with. Somewhat mollified, he went radio silent. She picked up her phone and headed down to the restaurant. If she was lucky, she might still get lunch before she headed back. She needed to talk to Detective Haas one last time as well. She wanted a copy of the toxicology screen.

As she was coming down the stairs, she passed Brian and Claire coming up. "How are you both?"

"How am I?" Brian snarled. "How am I?" he repeated. "I'm broke. That's how I am. Flat broke. Un-fucking-believable," he yelled and then stomped up the stairs.

Claire shrugged. "Apparently Dennis did change his will and has left the bulk of his estate to his friends."

Greer's mouth dropped open. "Seriously?"

Claire nodded. "Yeah. It's been a bit of a shock."

“I’m so sorry.”

“You and me both.” Claire moved past Greer and headed up the staircase.

Greer arrived at the bottom of the steps and stopped. What they’d just told her didn’t add up. From what she knew of Moore, he was like her dad, and as much of an asshole as he could be, it would never occur to him to give his hard-earned money to someone other than his family. Even if he didn’t believe Brian could handle it, wouldn’t he just put it in a trust or something?

She ventured out to the courtyard. Lyle, Goodman, and Bainbridge were in a huddle. They all stopped talking as she walked by. She nodded to them and kept going. Were those the friends the money was left to? *If it were me, I’d be hiring a lawyer.* Brian and Claire weren’t going to take this lying down. It was bound to get ugly.

She went into the dining room and caught the waiter’s attention. He agreed to get her a burger and fries. She also asked for a small beer. She wasn’t going to be picky. She just needed food. She sat down and called Detective Haas. “Detective, how are you?”

“I’m tired, Ms. Styger. Was there something you needed?”

“I’m sorry to bother you, but I was wondering if I could get a copy of the police report, the autopsy, and the tox screen for my report.”

There was a long pause. “I suppose it is possible. Are you leaving?”

“Well, yes. I think I’ve done as much as I can here. My understanding after we spoke is that you have the cause of death, which seems very unlikely to have been administered

by anyone at Hughes Racing, therefore there were mitigating circumstances. but they were out of Hughes Racing's control."

"I see," Detective Haas said. "You do not need the police investigation to be completed to turn in your report?"

The barman was pouring her beer slowly. "The insurance investigation is as complete as possible at this point. Unless, of course, you think there's something else, some other factor."

The bartender lopped off some of the foam and added more beer.

"I still am unsure how the drugs got into Mr. Moore's system. According to his doctor, Mr. Moore did not take Adderall. I am aware that both his son and his brother-in-law are on the drug, but there is nothing to suggest they gave it to him. Neither one of them inherits the bulk of the estate, nor does Mrs. Moore. Mr. Moore took the questionable act of leaving his money to his friends, Mr. Bainbridge, Mr. Lyle, and Mr. Goodman."

A weird tingle started at the base of Greer's neck. "Did Mr. Moore have any medical issues at all?"

"No, according to his doctor, he was very healthy. He'd just had his last physical, and he was perfectly fine."

"Huh." That wasn't what Goodman said.

"What is it, Ms. Styger?"

"Well, if I remember correctly, Mr. Goodman told us that Moore's blood pressure was up and so was his cholesterol. Those seem like things that a doctor would mention."

There was a silence, then, "Yes, they do."

The bartender held her beer up to the light. It was slightly cloudy. He frowned and then poured the beer down the drain.

He disappeared under the bar, presumably to adjust something, and then started pouring again.

The niggle at the back of her brain increased, like someone had just goosed the gas pedal. The waiter came and put her food in front of her and then left again. Then it clicked. “Detective Haas, who did Moore have breakfast with that morning?”

“Mr. Lyle, Mr. Bainbridge, Mr. Goodman, and Brian. Mrs. Moore and her brother came down slightly late.”

“If you were going to crush up Adderall and add them to a drink, which one would you choose?” she asked.

Detective Haas made a grunting sound. “That is a very good question. I suppose I would choose something that would hide the bitterness.”

“Yes, something that would already be slightly bitter,” she agreed. “Something that may have some grit to it normally.”

Detective Haas sucked in a breath. “You’re thinking someone put it in his coffee.”

“Yes.”

“That limits the pool considerably,” Detective Haas mused. “Brian does not inherit—”

“But he just found out that Moore changed his will after his death, so he thought he was going to inherit the money. I don’t think that takes him off the list.”

Detective Haas paused. “That is true. But did the other three gentlemen at the table know they inherited?”

She thought back to the outburst about the will when they were sitting at the table in the garage. “Obviously Goodman knew. I’m not sure about the other two. I don’t think they

knew, though. Or at least Bainbridge didn't. Lyle is harder to read."

"Well, this has been enlightening. I will do my best to get you copies of the files."

She gave him her email address and then ended the call. Staring down at her food, she picked up a fry and started to nibble on it. There was still something nagging at her, like a pebble in her shoe. The more she tried to latch on to it, the more it faded. She gave a mental shrug and finished her meal. Then she signed the bill and headed back to her room.

Frank had given her the final okay to call it good once she'd mentioned she was going to get the remaining police reports. She walked across the courtyard and into the other building. Her ribs still hurt from the attempt on her life, and she was exhausted, so she stood and waited for the elevator.

It finally dinged, and the doors opened slowly. "Yes, I've got the money."

She knew that voice.

"I told you I would have it by the end of the week. No, I won't get the rest until the will clears probate, but the advance that Goodman gave me..." The man on the phone looked up, and their gazes locked.

That thing she couldn't quite remember. The first night she was at the hotel. The man. Desperate for money. Fingers dancing on the bar. Agitated. Residue in his glass.

Her heart slammed against her ribcage. She glanced at the stairs.

"I'll call you back," Lyle said as he stepped off the elevator and put his phone in his pocket. "You know, don't you?"

She blinked. “I’m sorry?” Her voice squeaked. “I’m in a bit of a hurry. I’ll just take the stairs.” She tried to push past him, but he grabbed her arm.

“You know. It’s written all over your face.”

“I—I don’t know what you’re talking about. Let go of me.” She tried for indignant, but it came out too breathy. She jerked her arm to break his hold, but he refused to let go.

Unexpectedly, he yanked her to him and wrapped an arm around her neck. Breathing became difficult. She started to scream, but he muffled it with his hand over her mouth and nose. She clawed at his arm, at his face. She managed to scratch him, but it wasn’t enough to make him release her. Her vision was shrinking. She was losing consciousness.

Damn. She should’ve put it together sooner. Now it was too late.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Dalton swerved to avoid a tiny car that pulled out in front of him. The little car beeped at him, but he didn't care. Jack was getting away from him. His cell rang. He punched the button on his steering wheel to answer. "Detective Haas?"

"Mr. Hughes, I—"

"There's no time to explain. I'm following Jack Roundtree. He left the track, and we're on the winding road that runs parallel to the track. I don't know what it's called."

Detective Haas's voice changed. "What's going on?" he demanded.

"Jack Roundtree loosened the screws. He's running. He knows that I know it's him. Triangulate my phone and find us. I'm not letting him get away."

"Dalton, let him go. Don't do anything stupid. We'll find him."

"There's no way I'm letting this fucker out of my sight. He tried to run me off the road, and he tried to hit Greer."

Detective Haas yelled something to someone else in German but then came back on the line. "We're on the way to you. I know the road you're talking about. Please back off and let us get him. I don't want anyone else to get hurt."

“The only person who is going to get hurt is Roundtree when I get a hold of him.” He jabbed the button to hang up. Jack veered around another compact car and passed it fast, then disappeared around the blind curve. Dalton pulled out to pass but another car was coming at him. He had to swerve back. Cursing, he rounded the bend and passed the car as soon as he could. Jack had put more distance between them. Dalton put the gas pedal to the floor, and the SUV leaped ahead, but he had to slam on the brakes when a tractor pulled out ahead of him just around the next curve.

“Fuck!” he yelled as he hit the steering wheel. By the time he cleared the tractor, Jack Roundtree was nowhere in sight.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Greer opened her eyes slowly. It was dark. Her heart pounded in her ears. She was hyperventilating thanks to the gag in her mouth. How long had she been out? It couldn't be that long. No more than a couple of minutes if she had to guess, so where the hell was she? She flexed her hands. Tied with some kind of cloth. Her feet, too. *Jesus*. How long had she been out that Lyle had managed to take her somewhere and truss her up like a Christmas turkey?

She closed her eyes and willed her body to relax. A fine sheen of sweat broke out across her entire body. Breathing deeply to calm herself was difficult with the gage, but eventually, the roaring in her ears subsided a bit. She inhaled deeply through her nose. The smell. She knew it. It was cleaning products scented with lavender.

Squinting into the darkness, she made out shelves with bottles on them, and there were what looked like sticks in the corner. Mops. Brooms. Lyle had stashed her in the cleaning supply cupboard. She thought back to the hotel and tried to visualize where the cupboard was. Directly across from the elevator. Shit. Lyle hadn't taken her far at all. That's why he'd had time to tie her up before she came to. Probably only took him a couple of minutes.

She started rubbing her hands back and forth, trying to create some space with the ties, but it was hard going, and her arms were burning, especially the one she was lying on. The big question was, how long did she have until Lyle moved her? He wouldn't keep her here long because who knew when someone might open the closet.

Her heart rate ticked up again as the thought of Lyle had done sank in. He had killed his best friend. She wasn't sure how he'd loosened the wing, but he sure as hell had dosed Moore's coffee with Adderall. Moore was hyper to begin with. Add a bunch of Adderall, a drug only one peptide away from methamphetamine, and then make him have a bad accident—no wonder he had a heart attack.

Greer's stomach roiled. The smell was making her feel ill. The idea of vomiting with the rag in her mouth shot adrenaline through her system. She closed her eyes and willed herself to calm down again. Panicking would only get her killed.

She took stock of where she was situated in the room. On the floor on her right side curled up with her hands behind her. She straightened her legs. Could she touch anything with her boots? She moved them around but nothing was close. He'd put her in the middle of the floor so she couldn't quite reach any of the shelving. Damn.

She tried yelling next, but the rag muffled the sound too much, and the door to the closet was solid wood, like all the doors in this posh hotel. So that wasn't going to work either. There had to be something she could do. If only she hadn't fought with Dalton. Then he might actually come looking for her.

What if she never saw him again? That thought twisted her insides. She'd been an idiot seven years ago and an even

bigger idiot now. Instead of begging his forgiveness, she'd fought with him. He'd been right, and she'd denied it. She *had* been a coward, and not just about her father, but about him as well. She was so worried she was like her father and their relationship wouldn't survive because of her need to constantly win and be racing that she'd sabotaged their affair in anticipation of it collapsing. Hurt him before he hurt her. She closed her eyes. What a stupid move she'd made. And now she might not get a chance to go back and fix it.

She needed someone to find her. Rory? Jordana? They were both at the track. As it was, no one would expect her anywhere for hours. Really, until tomorrow morning when Louisa called her place. That would be the next time anyone wondered where she was. *Well, fuck.*

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Dalton continued to follow the road he'd been on. Jack couldn't have gotten that far ahead of him, could he? It seemed impossible that he disappeared. His knuckles whitened as he gripped the wheel. How could Jack do it? How could he kill Moore? Was he really that desperate?

Dalton was coming up to the embankment where the bastard had tried to push him off the road the other night. That had to have been Jack as well. He must have thought Dalton was getting too close. Damn. If only. Then James would still be alive. That thought hit him hard. And in the next instant, he was hit from behind.

Dalton swerved and managed to keep the SUV on the road, but just barely. The hit had come completely out of the blue. He glanced in his rearview mirror. Jack was behind him and gaining on him again. Dalton risked a peek at the speedometer. They were going too fast to play bumper cars. One of them was going to get seriously injured.

Just as Jack accelerated toward him, Dalton hit the brakes, but Jack was expecting it after last time. He hit Dalton's rear bumper, but not hard enough to damage his car. What the fuck was he going to do? The curve was coming, and there was no way Dalton wouldn't get pushed off the edge. Jack wasn't the

best driver in the world, but he was more than competent enough to make it happen.

Sweat broke out on Dalton's back. The extra rush of adrenaline shivered across his nerves. There was only one thing he could do. He slammed on the gas, and the SUV lurched forward. He needed to outrun Jack on the bend in the road. He flew down the road toward the dangerous hard left curve. Jack stayed hot on his bumper and getting larger in the rearview mirror.

As they started into the curve, Dalton knew he was going too fast. All Jack had to do was tap him, and he'd be gone. Jack was coming hard. Dalton hit the apex of the curve and immediately slammed on the brakes as he turned the wheel slightly. There was only one way this was going to work, and it was a long shot. The car went into a spin. Jack's eyes were huge and his mouth open as he hit Dalton's SUV, sending it across the road and half up the hill.

Dalton took a moment to make sure he was okay and then hauled himself out of the vehicle. Where the hell had Jack gone? Did he make it through the curve? He looked in both directions, but there was only a cop car approaching, lights and sirens wailing. He looked at the pavement, and the skid marks told the story.

Dalton ran to the other side of the road and looked down over the embankment. Jack's car was at the bottom on its left side. It had rolled a few times by the looks of things. "Jack?" he yelled. "Jack?" No response.

He started down the embankment. Detective Haas was yelling at him. Dalton turned, but he wasn't stopping.

He slid down the hillside as cautiously as he could without breaking his forward momentum. He reached the bottom and

went over to the car. “Jack?” he yelled.

There was a groan.

“Jack?” Dalton ran around to the front of the car and looked in through what used to be the windshield. It was a spiderweb in a million pieces. There was a blood stain on the glass where a fence post had gone through the windshield.

He kicked the passenger-side window out and stuck his head into the car. “Jack?”

“Dalton.” The other man moaned.

Jack was slumped over the airbag. Blood flowed profusely from a large gash on his forehead. Bile rose in Dalton’s throat when he caught sight of a fence post sticking out of Jack’s chest. It had gone through the steering wheel and hit Jack dead center. As much as he hated Jack Roundtree for what he’d done, he knew in that instant he didn’t want the other man dead. He wanted him to pay for what he did. He couldn’t pay if he was dead. “Jack, hang tight. The cops are here, and I’m sure they’re organizing something to get you out of here.”

Jack gave a half laugh. “I’m not ...getting out of ...this one, mate,” he wheezed.

There was some yelling from above, and Dalton looked up. Detective Haas was directing a group of men down the hillside. They had a stretcher on a rope. He looked back at Jack. “They’re coming for you. Hold on.”

While he waited anxiously, he asked, “Why’d you do it, Jack? Why kill Moore? Why kill James?” His voice broke.

Jack made a wheezing sound and then was silent. Dalton thought he’d died, but then he said, “Didn’t mean to kill... Moore. Just...told...make...accident. Had to...pay...debts.”

“But why James? And trying to kill me and Greer? That’s crazy.”

“You...too close...Greer... Didn’t...kill...James.”

Dalton frowned. “What do you mean you didn’t kill him? Wait, if you were just supposed to cause an accident for Moore, then who gave him the drugs? Who killed James?”

The rescue squad reached the car and came around. Jack made a gurgling sound. The men pulled Dalton back, but they were too late. Jack was gone.

Who the hell was his partner?

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

To ward off the stiffness growing in her limbs, Greer tried to stretch her legs and arms again. It was hard to tell for sure, but she thought she'd been tied up in this closet for at least an hour. Lyle had to be taking a big chance by leaving her there, but for the life of her, she couldn't come up with a way to get help. She had tried yelling and flailing around, but neither worked and now her body just hurt more.

It still galled her that she hadn't connected Lyle to this mess sooner. Would've been nice to do it before she came face to face with the killer. She let out a breath and tried to stay calm. The adrenaline was wearing off, and she was really starting to hurt. Her neck where he'd put her in a headlock was damn sore. The rest of her was going numb, except her ribs which still hurt from the other day. That pain continued to scream through her. She closed her eyes. There had to be a way out of this.

Suddenly, the door opened. She yelled into the cloth and flailed around as best she could. The door closed again, and then the room lit up. She blinked against the harsh light. Lyle was standing over her. *Bastard.*

"You are a rather large problem," he mumbled as he squatted next to her. "Good thing I am a great problem solver."

She yelled into the rag, but it was still so muffled.

Lyle was wearing a sweater, jeans, and loafers. His skin looked sallow in the overhead light. Being this close revealed the roots of his hair beginning to show white. It was mussed, and he ran a hand over it to smooth it out. She'd been right. He was older than he looked. She'd also gotten him good with one of her nails. A thin jagged scratch marred his cheekbone. A small victory, but it buoyed her spirits.

“Yes, you cut me but don't get too excited,” he said as he pulled a small bottle of water out of a large bag he had beside her on the floor. It was a racing gear bag. It was the same size and shape as a hockey bag with wheels on one end. *No. No. No.* She shook her head. She was not going in that bag.

Lyle had other ideas. He sat down and took the cap off the water. “Now I'm going to take the rag out of your mouth, and you're going to drink this. If you don't, I will stab you.” He pulled a long blade out of his pocket and held it to her throat. “It's not ideal, but don't think I won't do it.”

She stared at him. He wasn't joking. He would kill her right there if she didn't drink the drugged water. The question was, which scenario was worse? Drinking the drugged water and being taken somewhere else? Or having Lyle kill her there and then probably move her body somewhere else? Neither option was appealing. But being alive was better than being dead, she reasoned.

“I'm going to take the gag out. Make a sound, and I will kill you.” He pulled her into a sitting position and removed the gag.

She wanted to yell, to scream at the top of her lungs, but chances were good no one would hear her anyway. The hotel

was filled with racing people, who were likely all at the track, and if she made noise then Lyle would kill her.

He held the water to her lips. She drank a little bit but then turned her mouth away. It was horribly bitter and gritty. Some water spilled down the front of her and onto the floor.

“I told you I would kill you. I’m not joking.” He leaned forward and pressed the knife to her neck, drawing blood. She could feel the droplet running down her collarbone.

“I’m going to be sick. I’ll drink it, but I have to do it in bits. The rag. The smell. It makes me want to throw up.”

Lyle glared at her. He held the bottle up again and forced her to take a large gulp.

She sputtered and he had to pull the bottle back. “This would be easier if you let me hold the bottle,” she said.

“If you try anything, I’ll hurt you,” he said pushing the knife into her neck enough to draw a bit of blood. She could feel the drop run down her neck. She nodded to confirm she understood. Then he untied the rag around her wrists and yanked her arm around in front of her. “Give me the other one,” he demanded.

She wanted to refuse but he would hurt her. There was no mistaking the glint in his eye. She gave him her wrist and he re-tied them in front of her.

He put the bottle in her hands. “Drink,” he snarled.

She raised the bottle to her lips and took a few swallows. It was awful and she was having a hard time keeping the liquid down. “Why?” she croaked.

He laughed at her. “What, am I supposed to confess my sins now?”

Greer bit her lip. Maybe if she could keep him talking, it would buy her some time, but to do what, she had no idea.

She tried again. “You needed the money. Wouldn’t Moore just give it to you? You were all good friends.”

“That bastard. He didn’t understand the meaning of friendship. I asked him for help, and he laughed at me.” Lyle’s nostrils flared. “Drink,” he commanded.

She slowly raised the bottle again.

Lyle snorted. “Told me it was my own fault. Can you believe that?”

She coughed. “Why did you need help? Bad investment?” Her gag reflex was kicking in, and she knew she was going to throw up if she had to drink any more of the drugged water.

“*His* investment, and then he changed his mind. Brian may be an idiot, but he was right about one thing—Dennis changed his mind out of spite.” Then he smiled. “See how well that worked out for him?”

He grabbed the bottle from her and held it up to her mouth. She shook her head, but he pressed the knife into her neck again. She opened her mouth, and he upended the bottle into it.

She choked on the water and then had a coughing fit, spitting a lot of it out. She started to get woozy. Whatever was in the water was fast-acting because she was struggling to stay awake. She coughed some more as she fought to stay conscious, which led to her throwing up onto the floor. She didn’t want to go into the racing bag. *No. No. No...*

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

“He had a partner,” Dalton said as soon as he reached the top of the embankment.

Detective Haas nodded. “Yes, that makes sense.”

“Do you know who it is?” Dalton demanded.

“No, but I suspected as much. Moore only drank water at the track as far as anyone knows. The pills would have been too bitter to put in the water. He went out for the first session only about an hour after breakfast. The pills would have been metabolized by then, making his heart rate accelerate.”

Dalton wiped his hands on his jeans. “You think it was his family or one of his friends?”

“That seems most likely,” Detective Haas agreed.

“Do you know which one?”

Detective Haas merely stared at him. “Mr. Hughes, you need to go back to the hotel and recover. I will be by later to get your statement. Fortunately for you, we were not that far behind and witnessed what happened. Mr. Roundtree tried to kill you... once again.” He glanced over the embankment. “Nice driving by the way.”

“Thanks,” Dalton said in a flat voice. He wanted to pummel the man in front of him for answers, but that wouldn’t

help any. Maybe he was right. Going back to the hotel might be good. God knew his body needed a break.

“Jack said he didn’t kill James.”

Detective Haas nodded, unsurprised. “I believe Mr. Roundtree was at the hotel when James was killed and then at the track when his body was discovered.”

“How do you know that?” Dalton demanded.

“Security cameras at the hotel. He followed you out of the parking lot when you left. Cameras at the track show him arriving just after you.”

“Shit,” Dalton mumbled.

“Go back to the hotel, Mr. Hughes. We’ll be along shortly to get your statement.”

Dalton turned and then stopped. “Not sure my vehicle is driveable.” Another one. Dalton’s luck with cars this week was all bad.

Detective Haas looked over Dalton’s shoulder at the SUV on its side on the hill. “One of my men will drive you.” He gestured, and a uniformed officer started walking toward them. “Take Mr. Hughes to the hotel please.”

The officer nodded and escorted Dalton toward the police cars. Twenty minutes later, he pulled up in front of the hotel. Dalton peeled himself out of the car and headed through the parking lot into the main building. Everything hurt, including his brain. So many thoughts swirling he couldn’t seem to focus on any particular one.

He checked out the vehicles in the lot. Greer’s car was still here. *Odd*. She should’ve been long gone. Unless, of course,

she didn't listen to him and figured she'd stick around to the bitter end.

Women. Always such pains in the ass, and in the heart. What a mess.

He strode into the hotel and went into the dining room. The bartender shook his head. "You need food, yes?" He sighed. "We have specific hours. You need to eat during those hours. I will see what I can do."

Dalton just nodded and sat down. He didn't have the strength to argue with the guy. His stomach was empty, and his body was on overload. He needed to fuel it before he ran out of gas. He turned over today's events in his mind until he gave himself a headache. Who the hell could the murderer be?

His cell rang, and he answered it. "Rory."

"What the hell is going on?" his brother demanded.

"Jack Roundtree loosened the screws. I'm guessing he owed money to someone or some such."

"Where is he? Did he get away?"

Dalton rubbed a hand over his face. "Jack's dead." He went on to explain everything to his brother and sister since Rory had put him on speakerphone.

"Oh, my God, Dalton. Are you okay?" Jordana asked.

"I'm okay. Just a bit more beaten up. And incredibly tired. How did the session go?"

Jordana started to laugh. "Seriously? That's what you're concerned about?"

He chuckled harshly. "Sorry. Force of habit."

“Here,” the bartender said and put a hamburger and fries down in front of him.

“Thanks,” he mumbled. “I’ve got to go. I need to eat something. Detective Haas is coming by to take my statement in a bit.”

“Okay, brother, we’ll see you later,” Rory said and ended the call.

Dalton inhaled the food the bartender had delivered, and didn’t taste any of it. His mind was still stuck on the events of the last few days. He was eating his last fry when it hit him that Greer had been all alone here at the hotel, possibly with the murderer running around.

The food became a boulder in his gut. Surely, she’d be fine here. It was broad daylight. He regretted their fight more and more with each passing minute. The real reason he’d been such an asshole was because she’d hurt him. She hadn’t trusted him enough, and that stung. He would’ve helped her with her father.

He leaned back and gestured for the bill. The truth was, though, he’d like to think he would’ve been able to help her, but how well had he done with his own father? His family was a mess. He’d been slowly trying to put them back together, one at a time, but maybe in the end, she’d been right to send him packing. He would’ve put his family above her in a heartbeat back then. *Shit.*

He signed the bill and got up from the table. He would head back to his room but check on Greer as well. Just to make sure she was safe. The rest...was just too messy to deal with now. Maybe down the road they could go for coffee or something.

He walked out of the first building and started across the courtyard. Lyle was coming toward him, pulling a racing bag behind him.

“Dalton, what are you doing here? I thought you’d be at the track.”

He didn’t want to get into it. “I just came back to grab a shower and rest up a bit. The last few days have been tough.”

“For all of us,” he said as he touched Dalton’s shoulder. “See you later,” he called over his shoulder as he entered the main building.

Dalton went through the door and took the stairs two at a time. He argued with himself about banging on Greer’s door, but he just couldn’t let it go. He knocked. No answer. He tried again, but still no answer. Giving a mental shrug, he went into his room. Maybe she was down at the spa. Or she’d gone for a walk. Or there could be a million other things. So why was his gut screaming at him to pay attention? Greer was in trouble.

He pulled out his cell and called Rory. “Is Greer at the track?”

“Not that I saw, but we’re not there anymore.”

“Where are you?” Dalton asked as he looked out the sliding glass doors.

“Coming to the hotel. Jordana is with me. We thought you could use some support, big brother.”

He wanted to argue with them, but they were right. He needed some support. He needed his family. “Okay, see you soon.” He looked at the mountains in the distance as he took a deep breath. His back still ached, and after the crash today, a few more things hurt, but he was okay.

Lyle was at his rental BMW in the parking lot. He'd popped the trunk and was struggling to get the racing bag into his rental. The bag was long and heavy, but the rental had a short trunk. Where were the rest of the entourage? And what about Brian and Claire? Now that they were cut out of the will, what would they do?

Dalton watched as Lyle put down the seats and struggled to get the bag into the trunk. What was Lyle doing with a racing bag anyway? Where did he get it? It was a Hughes Racing bag. It must have been Moore's. What would he want with Moore's racing gear? His stomach dropped. Racing gear would not be that heavy. But a body would be.

He sprinted out of his room and down the hallway. He flew down the stairs and came out into the courtyard between the buildings. He took off at a dead run toward Lyle's car, which was backing out of the parking spot. He must have seen Dalton coming in his rearview mirror because he slammed on the gas and squealed the tires as he raced toward the driveway.

Dalton was still running, but there was no way he was going to catch up. There was a car coming up the lane outside the hotel. It was his siblings. He waved his arms frantically at them and then pointed at Lyle's car.

His sister's puzzled face was the last thing he saw before Rory jerked the car sideways across the driveway, blocking Lyle's exit. Lyle slammed on the brakes and skidded to a stop. Then he threw the car in reverse. Dalton was still running toward him but had no clue how to stop the car. His gut yelled that Greer was in the bag. He couldn't let Lyle get away but couldn't let Lyle crash the car with her in it, either.

Rory hit the gas and screamed into the parking lot after Lyle. Lyle pulled a J-turn and skidded around, facing Dalton.

With another squeal of the tires, Lyle sped straight for him closing the distance fast. Dalton dove onto one of the parked cars, nearly getting clipped by Lyle.

Lyle was still flying toward the back exit with Rory after him when a horse and rider came out of the barn and started across the drive. The horse reared, and Lyle swerved to miss it, hitting a line of parked cars.

Dalton ran toward the carnage. Rory and Jordana were out of the car and approaching the driver's door when the door swung open and Lyle jumped out. He lunged at Jordana, grabbed her by the arm, and drew her to him as he backed up into the car by the passenger door. He wrapped an arm around her neck and put a knife to it. "Come any closer, and I'll kill her."

Jordana looked terrified. She was also in pain. Her shoulder must be dislocated from the way he'd grabbed her arm. He could not let this man further hurt his little sister. And Greer. Was she alright? He wanted more than anything to open the trunk and pull her out, but he didn't dare.

"It's over, Lyle," Dalton called. He saw movement out of the corner of his eye. The horse and rider had gone back into the barn. That was at least one person who was safe.

"You just couldn't leave it alone. If Dennis had just died of a heart attack, no one would've cared. No one would miss him. He was an asshole. No one is sorry he's gone."

There were running footsteps. Dalton glanced behind him. Bainbridge and Brian were approaching.

"What are you doing, Philip?" Bainbridge demanded.

"He killed Dennis. And James," Dalton supplied.

“What? Why?” Bainbridge came to a stop not far from Dalton.

“You killed my father?” Brian yelled. “You asshole! You killed him for the money!”

Lyle screamed, “He owed me! He said it was a good deal and then backed out of it. I invested everything. Everything! And lost it all. You said yourself he’d done it on purpose. He was a mean bastard and no one cares that he’s dead.”

“I do! He was my father!” Tears streamed down Brian’s face.

Lyle was looking around wildly. He was getting desperate. Dalton’s gut churned. How could he get Jordana away from him and keep him from the car and Greer? Suddenly, there was movement in the car. He glanced over but tried not to make it obvious. Greer was crawling out of the bag. Her hands and feet were tied, and she had a gag in her mouth, but she was moving. *Thank God.* Profound relief swept through him, making his knees weak, but it was short-lived as Lyle moved the knife closer to his sister’s throat.

“Get out of my way. I want the keys to that car.” He quickly pointed to Rory’s car with his knife and then put it back in place.

“No,” Dalton said. The sounds of sirens in the distance were growing louder. There was no way he was letting Lyle out of here. To do so would be a death sentence for Jordana. She met her brother’s gaze and gave him a slight nod.

“I’ll kill her,” he threatened again.

Greer had spun herself sideways and had her feet against the door. What was she trying to do? The BMW. It had a button for the door release instead of a handle. All the new

electric models had it. He knew exactly what she was about to do. He met her gaze and gave her a tiny nod. She nodded back.

He raised his hand so it was above the level of the car door where she could see it. He counted down. Three. Two. One. Greer slammed the door button with her feet, making the door fly open and smash into Lyle. He stumbled forward, sending Jordana flying. Rory caught her as Dalton moved forward and cold-cocked Lyle with a right cross.

The man dropped like a stone. Dalton kicked the knife out of his hand.

Brian lunged forward and started to beat Lyle, but Bainbridge pulled him off.

Dalton went around the door, reached into the car, and pulled Greer into a sitting position. “Are you okay?” he asked as he removed the gag from her mouth.

“I’ve been better,” she managed to say and then slumped against him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

“Are you sure you don’t want any more tea?” Dalton asked.

“I will float away if I drink anything else,” Greer declared. They were sitting on the sofa in Greer’s room. Rory was there, along with Jordana, whose arm was in a sling. “How are you feeling?” she asked the other woman.

“Okay for now, but I suspect that’s the pain meds. It’s going to hurt like a bitch when they wear off.” They’d just come from the hospital, and she was sitting in the chair next to Greer. “It’s just all so unbelievable.”

“To say the least,” she agreed.

Dalton’s phone rang, and he answered. *Detective Haas*, he mouthed. “What’s going on?” he said into the phone. “Uh-huh.” There was a long pause and then “Okay.” Another long pause and then, “Thanks for telling me. I’ll come down to the station and sign the report before we leave on Sunday.” There was another pause and then, “Thanks for everything.” He hung up.

“What? There can’t be anything else,” Rory declared. “I can’t take it.”

Dalton laughed. “I hear that. Detective Haas said Goodman confessed to the whole scam the moment he hauled

him into the station. Moore had said this land deal was a good one. Lyle, Goodman, and Brian all invested everything they had to buy the land around the resort, figuring it would go way up in price. When Moore realized there was going to be a huge water rights issue, he reached out to the hotel chain about it. Turns out the owner, Jameson Drake, already knew about the issue and had decided to go elsewhere. Moore was trying to interest him in another property in Hawaii, but Drake turned him down.

“In the meantime, all the money they’d sunk into the property was lost. They couldn’t give it away once the water issue came to light. Apparently, Lyle went ballistic. He lost his entire retirement fund in the deal plus more that he borrowed. The loans were coming due, so he hatched a plan with Jack. They’d met in Vegas at an event, and Lyle knew Jack was a gambler and in debt. He promised Jack a way out if he helped.

“So Jack loosened the screws,” Rory said.

Dalton nodded. “And then things went wrong. If I hadn’t started asking questions, it would’ve been written off as an accident, or at least that’s what Lyle and Jack thought. Detective Haas was never going to let it go. He’d asked for a toxicology report during the original autopsy, so it all would’ve come out anyway. But Goodman said Lyle freaked out.” Dalton rubbed a spot on his chest. “He was out of control. He forced Goodman to say that stuff about having a bad physical just to back up the heart attack. Goodman, according to him, had no idea what the plan was until after it happened. His only job was to doctor the will. He cut Brian and Claire out and left the money to himself, Bainbridge, and Lyle. Brian had no clue about any of it. He told Brian he would give him some money if he didn’t contest the will.”

Greer sat there, too stunned at the revelations. “Greed is such a powerful motivator. It’s so damn scary.” She couldn’t believe it.

All this death and misery over money. She always wanted to win, but not at any cost. There were lines she wouldn’t cross. *That* was what made her different from her father. She closed her eyes and leaned back into the sofa.

“I think we should go,” Rory said. “Jordana needs rest and so do you two.”

Jordana stood up. “Sorry about tomorrow, Dalton.” She moved her shoulder and grimaced. “I can’t race, but I should be okay by next month.”

Dalton waved her off. “Don’t worry about it.”

“But it will put us behind in the championship. There’s no way Tatum or Hans will come in top three tomorrow. They’ll get some points but they’re too green to win. We can still—”

“Jordana, get some rest. We’ll worry about it later.”

She nodded, and the two left. Dalton stood up. “Greer, I’m glad you’re alright. I was...terrified when I realized Lyle had you in that bag.”

“Thanks. I was damn terrified, too.” She tried to stifle a yawn, but it didn’t work.

“Get some sleep. God knows I’m going to.” He started toward the door then turned back. “Maybe we could...talk after this. Go for coffee or something.”

She smiled. “I’d like that.”



Race day dawned with rain clouds laden with moisture overhead. Gus had been right. Dalton shook his head. He should know better than to doubt his mechanic. He stood in the garage and chatted with Tatum and Hans, providing last-minute instruction, but more just moral support. It had been a tough few days but the guys were ready to have some fun, and that's really what it was all about, at least for the racers.

Dalton turned from the screen and noticed Gus was working on Jordana's car. "What are you doing?"

Gus pretended not to hear him and kept on with what he was doing.

"Old man," Dalton said as he came around the front of the car. "What the hell are you doing? Jordana isn't—" He stopped talking. The name emblazoned above the door wasn't Jordana's. It said *Greer Styger*. He stared at Gus, who just turned tail and headed back to the rear of the car. "Does someone want to tell me what the hell is going on?"

"I'm driving for Hughes Racing," Greer said as she walked up behind him.

He turned to find her in a fire suit, and helmet in hand.

"Can you move so I can get into my car?"

"What the hell are you doing?" he demanded.

She met his gaze. "Winning the championship for you. You need points in every race to do it. Jordana was your best shot at coming in the top three. You know it, and I know it. She can't race, but I can."

“You haven’t been in a race car in seven years.”

“True. But it’s like riding a bike. How hard can it be?” She grinned at him and then pulled on her balaclava.

“Brother.” Rory appeared at his side. “She came to me with the idea this morning and I said yes. She’s right. We need all the help we can get. Now, shut up and get out of the way. I need to talk to my driver.”

Dalton stared at his brother and then at Greer but then he backed out of the way. Gus grinned at him and winked. This was nuts. He went over to the screens and waited for the race to start. The cars rolled out to pit lane. The rain hadn’t started yet, but Dalton knew the storm wasn’t far off. They did a drive-through on pit lane and then positioned themselves out on the grid. Tatum and Hans were eighth and ninth on the grid from their qualifying the previous day. Greer had to start at the back. He was surprised she was even allowed to race but figured Juan Carlos owed him one, and this was him paying it back.

He walked up to the car. Greer looked serene. Her eyes were closed, and she was smiling. This was where she belonged. He knew it. He’d always known it. It looks like she knew it, too. Now.

He opened the door and squatted next to her. “Good luck out there,” he said. “Don’t be crazy. Do what you can.”

She smiled. “I’ve got this. I had no idea how much I’ve missed racing. I’m not going to blow it.”

“Just be safe,” he said, his stomach already doing flips.

“Make you a deal. I come in the top three, and you let me race with Hughes Racing for the whole year. Don’t worry, I’ll pay my way.” The look she gave him said she wasn’t just

asking about racing. She was asking him to forgive her. To take her back into the fold.

He didn't know what to say. Did he want to go down that road again? The three-minute warning sound went off. He had to leave the grid. He checked his gut, but he knew the answer.

He leaned in and bumped his forehead to her helmet. "Hell yes!" he said.

He closed her door and gave her a thumbs-up before he left the grid. He felt light, lighter than he had in years. He could feel in his bones how great this season was going to be.

He hurried back into the garage and positioned himself in front of Greer's screen, pulling on the headset. He was listening to the last-minute instructions Rory and Timo were giving the drivers. The siren sounded, and they took off for the formation lap. A couple minutes later, they came up the straight, and the lights went green just as the rain started falling.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder. He turned to see Kendra standing there with a tall man dressed in a suit. He had dark curly hair and wide shoulders.

"Now's not the time," he said to Kendra.

"I know," she said. "But he says he has to talk to you."

Dalton turned to the man. "Can I help you?"

"I'm Lorenzo Bianchi. I believe we have some business to discuss."

EPILOGUE

“On the one hand I can’t believe it,” Greer said as she sat back in Dalton’s chair and put her feet up on his desk. “But on the other, I totally can.” It was good to be hanging out with Dalton and his family. *Back where she belonged.* It felt like home far more than California or her apartment in Munich. Being here with Dalton teased her with forever and she wasn’t going to be stupid enough to give it up ever again.

Dalton shook his head. “Do you mind?” he asked as he gestured to her feet.

“Not at all.” She grinned up at him.

“Why don’t you go find something to do? I have work.” He rubbed his face. The gesture tugged at her heart strings. He was under so much pressure. The cheque from her insurance company was going to help but it couldn’t solve all his problems.

Time to take his mind off his troubles, ““Still, it’s pretty hard to believe that Brian tried to kill Claire.”

Dalton sat on the credenza that was on the side wall. “You were the one that said he tried to push her down the stairs. Maybe it was an accident.”

Greer tilted her head and bit her lip, remembering the incident. “No, it wasn’t an accident. He did it on purpose. If he hadn’t worn those super rare sneakers with the orange 7-11 logo on them, I wouldn’t have thought twice about it. But, later, once I saw those on his feet, I knew it was him on the stairs and pushing Claire wasn’t an accident.”

“Have you heard from Haas? Did he tell you if they’re going to prosecute?”

“Haas said since his actions could’ve been misconstrued, it would be difficult to prove that Brian did it maliciously.”

“So Brian gets off with a warning.”

She nodded. “Not fair but Claire declined to press charges, so it wasn’t going anywhere. They’re wrapped up in dealing with the fake will and all that nonsense anyway. Probably better to work as a team since they stand to inherit everything between them.” Greer hated to do it but she had to ask. “What’s going on with Bianchi?”

Dalton crossed his arms over his chest. “I’ve had Hank go over the will and it’s sound. We could challenge it in court. Since the cancer was in Dad’s brain before he redrafted the document, we could claim he wasn’t in his right mind. But, honestly, that takes a lot of money, money we just don’t have.’ He heaved a heavy breath. “Even with the insurance cheque, things are going to be tight. There isn’t spare money to launch a lawsuit. Never mind the fact that Bianchi is rich. He’d bury us.”

“Maybe he’s not interested in being part of the team. Maybe he’ll let you buy him...” Her voice petered out as Dalton shook his head.

“I tried that. I had Hank ask him. No dice. He wants to stay part of the team. I just wish to hell I knew why. The whole thing is such a mess. If Dad weren’t already dead, I’d...”

When he didn’t finish the thought, she asked, “Are you going to talk to Bianci? I mean I know you fobbed him off at the track and you’re having Hank deal with him but maybe talking to him face to face would bring some clarity.”

“Maybe,” Dalton said and shrugged. “For now, it’s back to business. You should be practicing. Those races aren’t going to be easy to win you know. You’re rusty.”

She snorted. She wasn’t rusty. Well, not that much anyway. He just didn’t like that she could probably beat his ass if they went head to head. “Don’t worry about me. I’m fine. Promise.”

“Uh-huh. Greer. You came to investigate a death and ended up quitting your job and restarting your racing career after seven years away from the track. Not to mention you bamboozled your ex-boyfriend into taking you back. I’d say you’re a lot of things but I’m not sure fine is one of them. That was a lot of change in a very short time.”

Dalton was right. It was a lot of change, but it had been a long time coming. She was happier now than she’d been in years. Insomnia used to be the bane of her existence. Coupled with indecision. Now that she was back to racing, she slept like a baby. This was where she was supposed to be. She knew it down deep in her soul.

“Bamboozled? Seriously? That’s the word you’re going with?” She rolled her eyes. She loved to see the sparkle back in Dalton’s eyes. She loved even more the fact that she was the one who put it there.

“What? You bamboozled me. You hopped in my race car and took second place. I was delirious with happiness and let my defenses drop. You bamboozled me. How else can you explain why you’re sitting behind my desk with your feet up in my home office wearing nothing but my shirt? Bamboozled is the only word for it.” He fought a losing battle with the corners of his mouth to keep a straight face.

Greer rose from the chair and came over to stand in front of him. She narrowed her eyes. “How ‘bout I bamboozle you some more? I think we have plenty of bamboozling left to do.”

He outright grinned. “I thought you’d never ask.”

He pulled her to him and wrapped his arms around her, capturing her mouth in a scorching kiss.

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**Keep turning the page to read a sneak peek of Locked
Away, book 1 in the Lock And Key series.**

SNEAK PEEK: LOCKED AWAY

THE LOCK AND KEY SERIES

Kat Rollings' brother mysteriously vanishes while searching for pirate treasure. Unfortunately the treasure is rumored to be on a Caribbean island owned by the secretive Lock and Key Society. To save her brother, Kat must gain membership to the Society, but the price she pays might be more than she bargained for.

Rushton Fletcher, one of the Society's elite enforcement team, is tasked with handling a new member who might have murdered one of the Society's more popular women. When he reports to the island to enforce the Society's darker edicts and mete out justice, he is entranced by the sexy and beguiling Kat. Despite evidence suggesting her guilt, Rush finds himself drawn to her, unable to believe she could be the killer he seeks.

In a race to rescue her brother, and with a hurricane bearing down on the tropical paradise, Kat walks a treacherously thin line between bending the Society's rules and succumbing to her growing feelings for Rush. Preserving the Society's well-guarded secrets may force Rush to make an unthinkable choice – to eliminate Kat.

The dangerous game of cat and mouse to find the coveted bounty and her brother leaves their lives hanging in the

balance.

LOCKED AWAY

CHAPTER 1

“You don’t understand what you’re getting involved with,” the woman said as she backed away from the man with the knife.

“I need your token,” he spoke just above a whisper so she wouldn’t recognize his voice.

She shook her head. “You’re making a huge mistake. They won’t let you get away with it.” Her hand closed around the railing; her knuckles bone-white in the gloom.

He inched closer. His hand, holding a nine-millimeter with a suppressor, was steady. His plan was unfolding as he’d planned. It was much easier than he thought it would be. She was staring at him, studying him. Trying to memorize every detail, he was sure. It didn’t matter. The black hoodie he was wearing masked his features. He knew he seemed familiar to her, but she wouldn’t be able to place him. Already he could tell there was no recognition in her eyes. The wind blew her dress around her legs, and she stumbled a bit as she tried to back up.

“Give me your token, or you die,” he rasped.

She licked her lips. “You really have no idea what kind of trouble you’re asking for. This is way more than anything you can imagine.”

She was trying to stall, to figure a way out. He admired her fortitude in the face of danger. “I know exactly what I’m getting into.” He moved yet another step forward. “Your token. Now.”

“Archer won’t let this go. He’ll come after you.” Her voice shook.

He smiled. “Archer Gray has to live by the rules of the Society. When someone shows up with your token, he has to be let in. You will be on the outside. Archer can’t help you.”

Her eyes got big. It was sinking in that Archer’s hands would be tied by the Society rules. “You’re already a member.”

He chuckled. “Of a sort.” Oh, the irony of it all.

“You’re getting this for someone else.”

“You talk too much, Angel,” he ground out. “Token. Now.”

“I-I don’t—”

“Don’t even try it. Everyone knows you never leave home without it. It’s the reason I chose you. I don’t have to go looking for the token.” He waved the gun in front of her nose and her eyes widened. A burst of triumph flitted through him. “Last chance.”

Her reaction told him she’d read the situation correctly. He was serious. Her hands shook as she pulled her token out of her bra. “Archer has extra tokens, and he can choose who to give them to. When I get back in, I’m coming for you. I’ll tell everyone what you’ve done.”

He reached out and snatched the token out of her hand. Damn. She was right. He’d forgotten the loophole that allowed

Archer to add members whenever it suited him. He paused for a second. He'd always planned on killing her. No point in leaving any witness alive but now he really didn't have a choice. Pulling the trigger, he put two bullets into her heart.

He glanced around quickly as if even with the suppressor there might have been someone to hear. Still no one in sight. Adrenaline was his friend at the moment so he managed to heave her body over the railing into the river below. He watched her corpse plunge under the surface, bob back up, face down, and then smiled grimly as she was swept downstream by the current. He regretted having to take this step so soon, but witnesses to what he was up to would bring about drastic consequences that could cost him his life. And he wasn't willing to give that up. Not just yet.

Chapter 2

Katherine Rollings leaned on the boat's railing and stared into the water. It was the first time she'd ever seen the turquoise water of the Caribbean. Under normal circumstances, she'd be thrilled, excited to be on a trip like this. But these weren't normal circumstances.

Nothing about her life had been normal since her brother disappeared.

She looked up as they approached the island rising out of the water, a green jewel in the sea of blue. A small building stood sentry at the end of the pier. Beyond that were cabins painted in what she considered Caribbean colors, blues, yellows, and corals, but they all had white shutters and white verandas. The scene was perfect enough to be featured on a postcard. But was it too perfect? *Stepford Wives* perfect?

A small jolt of adrenaline electrified her blood when the sound of the boat's engine changed. This was it. If she got off

the boat, she'd never be able to turn back. The worst part of all of this was she wasn't sure exactly what she was getting into. Who the hell was the Lock and Key Society? Why were they so secret? And seriously, a secret society in this day and age? Ridiculous.

The realization of how crazy this all was didn't stop her hands from shaking.

"We're here, ladies and gentlemen," the boat driver said as he folded out a set of steps onto the dock. She'd been accompanied by two couples on the boat, and they were laughing, as if excited to be there. Obviously, these four were members and knew what to expect. Kat bit her lip. They looked happy, so maybe it wouldn't be that bad.

The other couples had gone ahead and it was now Kat's turn to leave the boat. The boat driver offered his hand to her.

"Thank you." She put her hand in his.

He squeezed it. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

She blinked. "W-what?" How did he know? She looked into his deep brown eyes.

"You look very nervous. I just asked if you're sure."

Kat swallowed. "I'm fine. Boats make me nervous," she improvised.

He hesitated but nodded. "My name is DeShawn. If you want to get off the island, call me." He pressed a card into her palm as he helped her onto the dock and then placed her roller suitcase beside her.

"Thank you," she said as she clutched the card.

She faced the building at the end of the dock. It was small, like a grass hut with a thatch roof but the doors were glass so

the grass hut part was obviously just an illusion. Illusion that pretty much summed up treasure hunting. It was all just an illusion and had no basis in reality at least none that she'd ever seen.

The walk to the hut wasn't long but with every step her heart rate accelerated, and queasiness fluttered in her belly. A fine sheen of sweat broke out on her back. *You can do this.* Danny was counting on her. That's what she'd been telling herself since her brother disappeared six weeks ago.

When he'd last contacted her, he'd spewed a story about a secret society and buried treasure that had made her roll her eyes. But the manic edge in his voice had frightened her. And the utter lack of communication since that rushed phone call. The mantra had kept her going. Doing as much research as she could on the Lock and Key Society kept her focused when she hit dead-end after dead-end on the secretive organization.

She'd repeated the charge to herself as she'd read about BlackEye's treasure. *You can do this.*

Treasure. She hated treasure. To her very marrow. Swallowing hard, she walked into the building at the end of the pier, pulling her bag behind her. The room was empty save for a tall man with an impressive head of white hair and a bit of a paunch. His cold blue gaze assessed her from behind a rather plain desk.

"May I help you?" He had a soft accent she couldn't place.

"Yes. I've come to...have an extended stay on the island."

The man's eyes narrowed. "This is a private island. I'm afraid you can't stay here unless you're a member."

"I would like to become a member," she asserted. How the hell was she supposed to do this? There were no "how-tos" on

joining a secret society at least none that she'd found.

He arched a brow. "It's not that simple."

She frowned and bit her lip. What was she supposed to do now? "What do I have to do?"

The man stood. "I'm afraid I can't tell you that."

He moved around the desk and came towards her. Looking over her shoulder, he gave a small nod. She turned to see a man who was obviously some sort of security standing there. He was average height but the size of two men with bulging muscles everywhere. The scariest thing however was his eyes. They were black holes in his face. Zero emotion. Dead.

Kat swallowed and turned back to the first man. He was going to give her to security. *Shit*. This wasn't going as she'd imagined it might.

The behemoth behind her stepped forward, and she shied away. Now what should she do?

The token! Chastising herself for not leading with the significant little trinket, she dug in her purse and withdrew a tiny white porcelain teapot decorated with messy purple flowers. It was the size that would fit in a dollhouse or one of those miniature houses. "I have this token," she said, opening her hand and showing him the teapot.

A look flitted across the man's face. Surprise? Anger? She couldn't tell. But then, he unleashed a smile.

"Ah! You are a new member. Please have a seat." He nodded at the scary guy who left and then went back around the desk. He indicated the seat across the desk from him.

"I'm Peter. My wife, Daisy, and I run the island for the Lock and Key Society." He offered his hand and Kat shook it.

“Kat Sanders.”

“Well, Ms. Sanders, since you’ve never been to a Society property before, you’re going to need to fill out some forms. Just a way for you to tell us a bit about yourself.”

She kept her smile fixed but her knees went weak. Damn good thing she was already sitting. Creating a false identity had been the one thing she’d been most terrified about. Would her cover hold up? In the end, she’d gone to someone her dad used on occasion when he wanted to do something that wasn’t one hundred percent above board, which happened quite frequently in the treasure hunting game.

“May I see your passport? I have to take a picture of it and your token.”

She pulled out her passport and the token, then handed them over. The passport was a fake but a good fake, or so she’d been told. It wouldn’t pass customs. She’d used her real passport when she’d landed in the Bahamas. But if she was going to use this passport for ID, then Merlin, the man who made it, assured her it would be fine. Sitting here now, she suddenly regretted believing those assurances.

Peter smiled. “May I get you a beverage of some kind?”

“No, I’m fine thank you.” She just wanted this over with. Glancing around her, she noted that the grass hut illusion stopped on the outside. The inside was all office space. The floor was a highly polished wood. The two desks were plain but made of an expensive wood as well. Behind the desks, were pictures of the Caribbean hanging on the cream-colored walls. Bright blues and turquoise made the office seem inviting but the steel door in the corner was a stark contrast. It didn’t fit in at all but then again, she had the distinct impression it wasn’t supposed to. She swallowed. Hard.

Peter handed her a tablet. “If you’ll fill out the online form, we’ll get you processed and on your way. While you’re doing that, I’ll call housekeeping and get a cabin set up for you. Do you know how long you’ll be staying?”

“I— Is there a time limit?” That had never occurred to her. What if they didn’t have a room? She found the panic clawing at her throat.

“You may stay as long as you like, dear,” said a voice behind her.

Peter smiled. “This is my wife, Daisy.”

“I-it’s nice to meet you, Daisy,” Kat turned and extended her hand. She was shocked to see it wasn’t shaking as her voice had been. Her insides were quaking at a ten on the Richter scale.

The small, bird-like woman with the long white braid and warm hazel eyes smiled. “Nice to meet you too Kat.” Even her hand was warm, welcoming.

Daisy was even smaller than Kat’s own five feet two inches. The older woman’s presence immediately calmed her down. Kat liked her instantly in spite of herself.

“May I get you anything?” Daisy offered. “A juice or a cocktail? How about a cup of tea?”

Peter touched his wife’s arm. “I just asked but she said no.”

“I’m good for the moment,” Kat said and added, “but thank you.”

“Okay, you get started on the forms and I’ll get your cabin sorted.” He picked up a cell phone from a holder on his desk.

Daisy sat down beside him and started organizing some papers.

Kat glanced down at the tablet and touched the screen. The first thing they wanted was her name and a phone number. That was simple enough. Then they asked about some of her likes and dislikes. Yes, she liked fine dining. No she didn't like basketball or football. Then they moved on to health questions. Did she have any ongoing health issues? The form had a long list of ailments she could select. Any dietary restrictions? Did she drink alcohol? Did she do drugs? And, if so, what kinds?

She didn't get the sense that they were admonishing her for her lifestyle choices, more just trying to find them out. It was kind of creepy the level of detailed information they were gathering. She almost shrugged but forced herself to remain still as she worked through the form. Initially, she'd been inclined to lie, but her father's voice resonated in her head... *stick as close to the truth as possible when lying*. It's easier to remember. Merlin had seconded that thought. So, Kat was truthful with her answers. She also told the truth about her reason for being on the island. She put that she was in desperate need of a vacation. And she was. That wasn't the whole truth, but it was at least part of it.

Finally, a few minutes later, she was finished. She handed the tablet back to Peter. "Lots of questions," she murmured.

"Yes, but it helps us get to know you so we can provide what you want and need during your time on the island and beyond." He checked a few things on the tablet and then put it in the desk drawer. "Now, there's the small matter of your fee."

Kat tried to maintain her sense of calm but her heart took off at a gallop. She had no idea how much they were going to

ask for, but she knew it would be steep. Bracing herself she asked, “How much will it cost and where should I send the money?”

Peter grabbed a piece of paper and a pen from the top of his desk. “The initiation fee is one hundred thousand dollars. After that, you will deposit quarterly another one hundred thousand dollars into the account I’m about to give you.”

One hundred thousand dollars was all the money she had. It was the proceeds of the life insurance policy she’d inherited from her parents when they died, mixed with her own savings over the last five years and some investments that had done well. She’d put everything into one account before she’d left but had never dreamed they’d want it all. Her palms started to sweat.

“Is there a problem?”

“Er, no. Not at all.” She swallowed again.

Peter smiled. “Here is the Swift number and the bank’s identifying number. And this is the account number.” He tapped the last number on the paper. “If you could just transfer the money, then we can get you settled in.”

She nodded but didn’t trust herself to speak. Instead, she went into her bank and filled out all the necessary information to do a wire transfer. It suddenly hit her. “This might take a few days to hit your account.”

Peter nodded. “To be expected. No problem. Just show me the screen where you sent it and we’ll be fine.”

Kat did as she was told, careful to keep her fingers covering her name on the screen. Then she cleared the screen and locked her phone.

He smiled. “Excellent. We have a few rules to go over. The island is isolated so it’s really a great way to ease into being a Society member. You should have no problem following the rules. When you stay at our other locations, sometimes it’s harder. Too many temptations to break the rules.”

What the hell did that mean? What set of rules was he talking about? She worked to keep her breathing even.

“By the way, where did you get your token?”

Peter asked the question casually, but Kat’s breath caught in her throat. His smile didn’t reach his eyes. He was watching her intensely.

She cleared her throat. “I’d rather not say,” she replied. How was she supposed to say her brother had given it to her but refused to tell her anything about it other than it was the way to join the Lock and Key Society and if things didn’t go well she might need it?

Daisy removed a thick manilla folder from a drawer and set it down on the surface of the desk in front of Kat. “These are the rules.”

“Wow. That’s a lot of rules,” she blurted. She shouldn’t have been surprised but she was. The contract had to be almost an inch thick. “Are you going to go through it rule by rule?” They’d be here for days.

Daisy chuckled, “Good heavens, no. Peter will go over the gist of it and then you can read it at your leisure. I’m afraid you are required to sign it today, but you are bound by the rules regardless of if you sign. Everything in here,” she put her hand on top of the contract, “stems from what Peter is going to tell you.”

Kat stared at the paper. The queasiness was back. How was she supposed to get through this without losing her nerve? Damn Danny and his treasure obsession.

“Don’t worry, dear. It’s not as bad as it looks.” Daisy offered another sweet smile and then sat back and waited for her husband to start.

Peter leaned forward. “The rules, or at least the major ones, are as follows. You are not allowed to discuss the Society with anyone. Ever. At all. If you tell someone about it who is not your immediate heir and you aren’t ill, on your deathbed, or under significant threat to your life, your membership will be revoked and depending on who you tell, you could be...eliminated.”

She started to laugh. He couldn’t be serious. Death for talking about this place? No way. But the laugh died in her throat at the blank look on his face. His eyes drilled holes into her. He was deathly serious. She stifled the hysterical laughter bubbling up her throat. This was insane. *Who were these people?* He had to be kidding. She gave him a nod since there was no way she could make her vocal cords work at this moment.

“Two: You may not tell anyone who the other members of the Society are. People come here specifically because we guard their privacy fiercely as we will guard yours. If you reveal that someone else is a member, it carries serious consequences that may include, but are not limited to, death.”

Jesus. This just couldn’t be real. Was it too late to leave? She wanted to turn tail and run, far, far away. Sadly, her knees wouldn’t hold her at this moment so she wasn’t going anywhere.

“Three: You cannot lie to us. If someone who works for the Society asks you a question you must tell the truth. Deception will not be tolerated in any form. If we find out you’ve lied to us, depending on the lie, it can bring about dire consequences. We will not tolerate being lied to.”

All the oxygen got sucked out of the room. She’d already lied to him. A few times. A bead of sweat slithered between her shoulder blades. But at least he hadn’t said death this time. Dire wasn’t as bad as death. She wanted to go home but it was already too late for that. She had no choice. Her brother Danny was here somewhere and she had to find him, even if it meant risking her life.

“Four: Kat, I cannot stress this one enough. You will see people, happenings, and events that do not align with your moral code. You *must* not interfere. You may join if you are invited or you may choose to avoid certain areas at certain times. Whatever your choices are, you may not harass, bother, draw attention to, or bully any other member. If you do not like what you see, just ignore it. We firmly believe in live and let live in the Society. If you create any kind of disturbance or cause any kind of problems for fellow members then you will be asked to leave the Society.

“This brings us to five: No member may leave the Society. Ever. Unless they are removed for one of the above reasons or for failure to pay dues. If that happens all the same rules still apply. Speak about the Society and nothing good will come of it. Do you understand these rules?”

Kat just stared at the man. She’d stopped being able to breathe ages ago. What the hell had her brother gotten involved in? She gulped a lungful of air. “Yes,” she finally uttered. “I understand.”

“Good. You are now a member of the Lock and Key Society. For life.” He handed her a piece of paper and a pen. Her hand shook slightly as she signed her name. Her fake name. According to the rules she’d just committed a deadly sin.

Peter stood.

Kat tried to get to her feet but stumbled a little.

“Peter, you’ve scared the poor woman. Don’t worry about all that death talk, dear. Hardly ever happens. You’ll be fine.”

Hardly ever? Somehow that didn’t make Kat feel any better. Another bubble of laughter rose in her throat and she bit the inside of her cheek to stop it from erupting. This was all so ludicrous, so outlandish, it just couldn’t be true.

Peter frowned. “Don’t worry, my dear. It all seems scary now but you will see how wonderful everything is at the Society and it will make going back to reality seem so disappointing. We are all family here, aren’t we, Daisy?”

She nodded. “For better or for worse but we take care of one another. You will find your place and then it will all be worth it.”

Kat straightened and offered him a small smile. The only thing she wanted to find was her brother and then she wanted to get the hell away from these people.

“Now, allow me to escort you to your cabin.” He walked over to the steel door in the corner of the room. “Please put your hand on this panel.” He pointed to a flat screen that stuck out from the wall at about a thirty-degree angle. He touched the screen a few times and then moved out of the way so she could put her hand on it.

She placed her right hand on the device and a bar of light traveled down the screen and back up again. Kind of like a photocopier. The screen beeped.

“There now. Your handprint is in our system.”

She pulled her hand back and resisted the urge to turn it over and look at it. She knew it was fine but she still wanted to check.

Peter used the screen again, touching it in various places and then moved back again. “See that round eyepiece on the wall? I need you to put your right eye up to it.”

She hesitated.

“Don’t worry, it won’t hurt.”

After clearing her throat again, she said, “I’m too short.”

Peter chuckled and moved the sensor downward until it was at the right height for her. She leaned forward and placed her face directly in front of the optical scanner. A light went over her eye and then the screen below beeped again.

“Excellent. Your retinal scan is in the system. Now when you go to any Lock and Key Society location, you just put your hand on the screen by the entrance and then do the same with your eye and the door will open. Give it a try.”

She did as instructed and the door popped open. “Um, neat.”

“Let me just grab your bag and we’ll go. So you know, the only way on or off the island is through this building to the dock unless you want to swim for it. The nearest island is about ten miles away, through open water.”

He held the door, and she walked out into the sunshine. Peter closed the door behind them. “You can’t get to the dock

unless you go through this door using your biometrics. The foliage around the building is thick and you can't get through it without a machete and there are a few surprises in it anyway that the machete won't fix. So, my dear, please let us know when you wish to leave, and we'll arrange it." He smiled and started down a manicured stone path. "By the way, I can give you a tour anytime. Would you like me to show you around now?"

The idea of spending more time with anyone who worked here made her break out in a sweat. She needed to keep a low profile. "I'm rather tired, so I think I'll pass for now." Her voice came out barely above a whisper.

"Okay." He glanced over his shoulder. "I'm always around."

A shiver went across her skin. What the hell had Danny gotten them into?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I grew up in a house filled with books and readers. Some of my fondest memories are of reading in the same room with my mother and sisters, arguing about whose turn it was to make tea. No one wanted to put their book down!

I was introduced to romance because of my mom's habit of leaving books all over the house. One day I picked one up. I still remember the cover. It was a Harlequin by Janet Daily. Little did I know at the time that it would set the stage for my future. I went on to discover mystery novels. Agatha Christie was my favorite. And then suspense with Wilber Smith and Ian Fleming.

I loved the thought of combining my favorite genres, and during high school, I attempted to write my first romantic suspense novel. I wrote the first four chapters and then exams happened and that was the end of that. I desperately hope that book died a quiet death somewhere in a computer recycling facility.

A few years later, (okay, quite a few) after two degrees, a husband and two kids, I attended a workshop in Tuscany that lit that spark for writing again. I have been pounding the keyboard ever since here in New Jersey, where I live with my children—who are thrilled with my writing as it means they get to eat more pizza—and my very supportive husband.

Please visit my webpage at <https://lorimatthewsbooks.com> to keep up on my news.

