



# WICKED LIES



SAINTS & SINNERS SERIES BOOK FOUR

TORIFOX

WICKED  
LIES

SAINTS & SINNERS SERIES BOOK TWO

TORI FOX

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# PROLOGUE

## LAKE

I look behind me as I walk briskly down the dark street. This isn't the best part of town. Nearly half the streetlights are out. But it's all I can afford. All I want to afford to keep myself hidden among the criminals that walk the glitzier parts of this godforsaken town.

But I am here for a reason. To get back on my feet. I can't think about the life I had.

I moved on for a reason. I keep my past a secret in order to protect those I love. Protect them from the mistakes I made that led me down this dark and treacherous path.

I look behind me one more time, still feeling like a shadow is following me. But that's all it is, a shadow. A figment of my imagination. I felt it the last three weeks, yet nothing has come to fruition. I even went to the police, but with no evidence and no actual sightings of someone, they laughed me away.

Maybe if they knew who my father was, they wouldn't turn a blind eye.

But I'm not that girl anymore. I'm just a stripper that works at some seedy dive in the bad part of LA.

I'm nearly to my apartment building, just a block and a half away, when I feel the presence closer than ever. I make a quick decision to turn down a dingy alleyway. It's a shortcut to the back entrance of my building, but I only take it in the daylight. I don't trust this neighborhood or the crime-ridden streets so my trust in the alleys is even less.



I pick up the pace as I walk the block to turn into the next alley that leads to my building when someone comes out of nowhere and slams me into a wet brick wall.

“You think you can run from us?” the man asks in a low voice.

I can feel the barrel of a gun pressed into my back, and I bite back the threat of tears as I shake my head.

“Where is it?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He laughs, sending a chill straight from my head to my toes.

“Don’t play coy with me.”

I chew on my lip. I knew this would happen. I knew I never should have dated my no-good ex. Now he’s locked up, and I’m left with the repercussions.

“I know you have it, Lake. Brandon has loose lips.”

“I haven’t seen or heard from Brandon in over a year. So I have no idea what he’s told you, but—”

I shut up as the man grips my ponytail and then slams my head against the brick.

“Lies. So many lies coming out of your whore of a mouth.”

This time the tears do fall. “I really have no idea what you’re talking about.”

The man clicks his tongue. “I’m giving you until midnight on Friday to get me what I want. Or else I won’t be so gentle with you.”

I make the mistake of turning around as he lets go of my hair, and I feel him take a step back. I just wanted to see him. Wanted to see the face of the man leaving me notes and threatening me.

But the second I turn around, he pistol whips me, and I collapse to the ground.

---

I sit in the dressing room of the strip club and work on covering my black eye. I thought I covered it well enough before I came in for my shift today, but one look from one of the other girls, and I know I did a shit job.

Luckily our manager hasn't come in yet or else I would never hear the end of it, and he would send me home. I can't afford to lose out on a night of tips. I need the money to pay my father back for my brother's mistakes.

I apply more concealer to my eye and set it with so much powder my makeup looks caked on, but I hope it's enough to cover the bruise in the dark lights.

"Lake," the stage manager calls my name.

I turn and see her standing in the doorway of the dressing room.

"You have five minutes. I have a request for you in one of the private rooms."

I nod at her and go back to my makeup. She doesn't say anything else but gives me a sad look before leaving the room. I quickly apply a coat of lip gloss, then slip on a lace outfit and a pair of heels before making my way to the VIP rooms.

The bouncer shows me to the door I'm supposed to go through, and I give him a slight nod.

Fear creeps up my spine. I don't know why I'm so scared. Even though this place is a dump, they take care of us girls. But for some reason, I worry that the man from two nights ago will be here. Even though I should still have one more day to get him what he wants.

I walk into the room and see a well-dressed man with his arms fanned across the back of the booth. He doesn't look like he belongs here. His suit is too expensive for a place like this. He screams power just from the way he holds the space in this room.

I go to slip off my robe, but he holds up a hand.

“I’m not here for that,” he tells me.

I breathe a sigh of relief when I don’t recognize his voice. He isn’t the man from the other night.

“Take a seat.” He gestures to the other side of the booth.

I do as he says because I can’t not with the way he emanates power.

I don’t say anything as I slide into the booth, making sure I stay as far away from him as possible.

He notices my hesitation and smirks at me.

“I don’t bite. Well, not in these circumstances.”

He keeps a straight face as he says it. Unlike most men who would smirk or smile.

“What do you want?” I blurt out.

He tilts his head to the side, taking me in. “This doesn’t seem like the type of place for you.”

“Yeah well, we all hit rock bottom at some point.”

This time, he does smirk. “Only the weak hit rock bottom.”

I frown. I don’t miss the way he implies he’s never hit bottom.

“I’m going to make this quick as I have far more important places to be.”

I roll my eyes but stop when he gives me a look that would put anyone in their place.

“I heard you may be in a bit of a predicament.”

“You heard?” I retort.

He shoots me another look, and I decide to keep my mouth shut.

“I have a way of making problems disappear. And I can make yours disappear if you do something for me.”

“I’m not the kind that does favors,” I say bluntly, then bite my tongue for snapping back.

This time, he does smirk at me. “I don’t know Miss Hawkins. I think you might be interested in what I have to say. For you and your brother’s sake.”

My eyes snap to his. This man knows who I really am. I use a fake last name to keep others from realizing I am a former socialite.

“Now you seem to be in some trouble. Trouble I can easily make go away if you follow my instructions.”

I swallow and nod.

He slides a piece of paper across the table. “Call this number tomorrow at ten in the morning and tell them you’ll follow their instructions.”

“Then what?” I ask as I grab the paper.

He shrugs. “Do as I say, and you’ll find out.”

I look at him skeptically. “So you want me to call some stranger and do as they say, and you’ll make my problems disappear.”

He grins at me, and it’s horrific. I wonder if I am speaking to the devil incarnate. “Precisely.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

I frown as I look at the number on the piece of paper. No name. Nothing else. Just a number.

He slides out of the booth.

“You just trust that I’ll do this.”

“I know you’ll call it.”

“And why’s that?”

He buttons his suit jacket as he stands. “Because you’ll lose everything if you don’t.”

I maintain my composure as he slides an envelope out of his inside coat pocket. “For your troubles.”

Then he turns around and walks out of the room.

I stare at the door for a good minute before I pick up the envelope.

There has to be twenty thousand dollars of cash inside.

I look back at the door and wonder if I just got myself into a lot more trouble than I’m already in.

**BEFORE**

## WILDER

“Ladies, there is enough of me to go around.”

Knox snorts from the seat next to me as four women crowd into the VIP section of the club.

“What?” I ask him with a smirk.

“I didn’t say anything,” Knox says to me.

“You know you could have one of these women for yourself. I am sure none of them would turn you down.”

He gives me a stern look. “And you know I am more than happy with the arrangement we have. I have no intention of changing my mind on that.”

I nod at him and turn my attention to the sexy brunette next to me. I get that Knox only ever sleeps with a woman when it’s us sharing. His heart and soul were decimated by the loss of his ex-girlfriend years ago, and he hasn’t found anyone to pick up the pieces. Sometimes I think he should just give in and sleep with someone on his own, and maybe that would change things, but I know he’ll never do it.

We leave to go on tour tomorrow after spending the last two weeks in LA doing rehearsals. I wanted to find a girl for us to share before we left because the girl we used to share here moved back home. I have my fair share to choose from for the evening, but there is such a darkness hanging over the band that I’m not even sure I want to.

Jackson is missing Charlie and has been pining for the last two weeks. She is joining us in a week, so I know his mood

will improve. Silas is a mess with Marley disappearing. I've never seen the man so distraught. Roan is a grumpy asshole as per usual, and Riot hasn't even been around to cause his mood to deteriorate.

Then there is the note I got the other day. I didn't want to bring it up since Silas had been the one getting them before, but they stopped once Marley ran off. I know he will only worry more about her if I tell him I got a note, and we came to LA. The only person I told is Knox.

But it just seems like an empty threat. A vagueness about knowing what I did.

I'm not really sure what it means. I've done a lot of shit in my past I'm not happy about. Shit that could send me to prison for life, but no one knows about it except for us. The one thing that ties our pasts together was the night I'll never forget. But I have no idea how anyone could know about what I did that night. About the shame I feel for doing something I never thought I would do.

I'm shaken from my thoughts as the brunette next to me climbs onto my lap.

"You know I always thought you were the sexiest guy in the band," she tells me as she grabs a lock of my long wavy blond hair. "You aren't like the others."

I roll my eyes. I don't look like the rest of the guys. Yes, I have a shit ton of tattoos. But where they are all dark and broody, I'm the complete opposite. I have blond hair and blue eyes. I always have a smile on my face. I've been wearing the same puka shell necklace since I was thirteen. I will be the first to admit I always wanted to move to California and be a surfer boy. Hell, the first thing I did when we moved here years ago was pick up surfing.

"I think your voice is sexy when you scream into the microphone," the girl tells me.

"Yeah?"

She nods as her hands glide up my chest. "I wonder if you sound the same way in bed."



I tilt my head to the side and give her a smile that I know makes all the ladies go weak in the knees. "I'm sure we can arrange it so you can find out."

She leans forward to kiss me but stops at the sound of a sharp whistle.

"Alright, boys, the party is over."

I sigh as I turn my head and see Riot. She must have just flown in from New Orleans and came straight to the club.

"We leave at six in the morning tomorrow, and I don't want any of you to be late."

I groan. "You know I can sleep on the bus."

She shoots me a glare. "And your dick can find pussy when we get to Portland."

Knox starts laughing beside me, and I punch him in the arm.

"Sorry to break up the party, but it's time to head out," Riot says in that stern voice of hers that means business.

The girl leans forward into my ear. "I can come over to your house. She doesn't have to know."

I pick her up and sit her in the booth next to me. "I wish you could, but Riot's right. We need to sleep before we head off on tour."

She pouts, and I wish I could kiss that frown off her face. But I know I need to get actual sleep tonight. I stand up from the booth and look down at her. "Maybe next time I'm in town."

"Thank you for listening to me for once," Riot jokes.

I wrap my arm around our manager's shoulder and squeeze her into my side. "You may be nothing but a wisp of a woman, but you scare the shit out of me."

She shakes her head and leads us out of the club.

---

## LAKE

I hold my head up high as I push open the doors to the Rise Management offices. I paste a smile on my face even though I am far from happy on the inside. But I am playing my part like I was asked. The only way to get out of the shit I got sucked into all because I thought I could change the way my life was turning out. Now I'm not so sure it was a good idea.

“Hey Lake,” the receptionist says to me. “How are you today?”

“Great,” I lie. “Excited to start this tour.”

“You can head back to the conference room for the meeting,” she tells me.

I give her a nod then walk down the hall to the conference room. Never in a million years did I think I would work in the music industry. Not after the shit I'd seen growing up. But here I am. That number I called six weeks ago told me exactly what I needed to do. What was expected of me. The woman I talked to helped get me this job with Rise, and so far I've done as she asked. All the pieces falling into place.

I don't understand why she is having me do these things. And I don't like what I'm doing, but my life hasn't been threatened since the day that man met me in the strip club. So I should be grateful.

I take a seat in one of the conference chairs and give a smile to the man sitting at the head of the table. As soon as I pull out my iPad, he starts to go over everything for the tour. I'll be the merch manager for a band that's been growing in

popularity over the last year. They scored an opening slot for eight weeks on the Saints & Sinners tour. It will definitely give them the exposure they need to become a top selling act. But I couldn't care less. I have no drive or passion to do this. But it's keeping me safe. I don't know how, but it is.

The job the woman gave me is relatively simple. She organized the hard parts, and I didn't want to ask how she pulled it off. But I was told to get a job with Rise Management, get on the Saints & Sinners tour, then leave a few notes for one of the guys in the band. I shouldn't let it affect me, but I don't think the man that is protecting me knows I have a past with Wilder Reed and Knox Beckett.

I slept with them once. Back in my old life. One of my friends got us into a VIP party at a club, and Saints & Sinners happened to be there. I didn't think I would sleep with one of them that night, much less let two of them dominate me, but I don't regret it. It was some of the best sex of my life.

So doing what I've been asked to do does eat away at me. Maybe if I didn't know them, I wouldn't feel so bad.

Not that I do know them. The thing we had was a one-night thing. A thrill for the night.

But yesterday I was at their sound check, since the band I'm working for did a run through of their show with them. I was able to sneak off and leave a note as I was entrusted to do in their dressing room. I placed it in the backpack I saw Wilder with earlier. And the guilt ate at me. I know what those notes say. I had to write it. And it was a threat. I have no idea what about, since it was vague as hell. But I'm not stupid. I know nothing good can come from this. And I hate that I was treated the same way by the man that was threatening me, and here I am doing the same thing.

"As The Angels Fall will be meeting up with the band in Chicago. You will fly there on July second and then join Saints & Sinners along the tour of the East Coast until they break after the St. Louis date. Your detailed itinerary was sent to you this morning. Any questions?" the tour manager asks.

He continues to talk, but I am only half paying attention. My mind is lost in so many thoughts. Not just of what I've been asked to do to Saints & Sinners by a couple of strangers. But of my past. Of the life I let go of to save my brother. Of the life I feel like I'm being pulled back into. This industry is full of thieves and liars, and I've broken the promise I made to myself.

---

"You okay?" the voice on the other side of the phone asks me.

"I told you not to call me."

"Lake, I'm not like you. I can't just forget about you."

I clench my jaw at the sound of my brother's voice. I wish I could hate him. Wish I could just forget about him like he claims I did. But my whole life I've been protecting him. I sacrificed so much for him. And now it's gotten me so tied up in a world of lies.

"I haven't forgotten about you Nathan."

"Then why don't you ever come see me."

I groan into the phone. "You know I can't. Or have you forgotten what I did for you?"

"Dad will forgive you," he says quietly.

I laugh. "You know that's a lie. Dad practically threw me out of the house when I..." I don't let myself finish my sentence. I don't want to put the blame on Nathan. I know he already feels enough guilt that I'm in the position I'm in.

"I'll tell him the truth, you know. That it wasn't you."

"And what will that do? You know then he will just be angry at both of us. It's better he just thinks I'm the one to blame."

He sighs into the phone. "I wish I never—"

"But you did, Nathan," I cut him off.

“I was young and stupid, and I should never—”

I let my anger out as I cut him off again. “No, you should never have done any of the things you did. I warned you for so long. Told you the price you would pay if you kept doing what you were doing and look where it’s gotten us.” I take a breath to try and calm down. “Now I’m the one who has been left on the streets to fend for myself. And you? I’m sure you are on the same path you’ve been on.”

“I’m clean.”

I hold back a snort. “Oh yeah? For how long, Nathan? I’ve heard this before, and it never lasts.”

“I mean it this time.”

“Sure you do.”

I can tell he’s getting frustrated with me, but I don’t have the heart to believe him anymore. The sad thing is I worry about where he is getting the money to fund his habit. He can’t do what he did before without throwing both of us under the bus.

“I’m telling the truth. I don’t want to be that person anymore.”

“Yeah, okay,” I say apologetically.

We’re both silent for a while, but the sound of his breathing on the other end of the phone lets me know he’s still there.

“Mom misses you.”

This time I do snort. “Really? Mom? Are you sure you’re clean and not hallucinating? Because the last time that woman had any interest in me was at least three husbands ago.”

“I’m staying with her.”

“What?” I shriek.

“Yeah she reached out to me, and that’s what helped me. I’ve been with her for three months now.”

“Where are you?”

“Currently living in the Cayman Islands with husband number five.”

“And how is that going?”

He laughs, and it makes my heart hurt. I haven’t heard him laugh like that in years, not since long before I gave up everything for him. “I give it another six months. If that.”

“These poor men.”

“They should know her reputation by now, but somehow they always fall for her charm.”

The sound of my work phone going off distracts me. “Hey, I got to go.”

“Please don’t be a stranger.”

I wish I couldn’t be, but he knows it’s better if I stay away. “I’ll talk to you later, Nathan. Please don’t call me.”

I hang up before he can argue with me. I fight back tears thinking about everything I gave up to save him from our father’s wrath. Not that I blame my dad for being angry with what happened. But like I always have done for my baby brother, I took the blame and ruined my own life so he wouldn’t ruin his.

## WILDER

I pace my hotel room. I got a third note tonight. And this one wasn't like the others. No empty threats. This one had a picture of my sister. And I know it was taken today since I FaceTimed her earlier. I remember the bright red top she was wearing. Which only means she was being followed today.

I chew on my nails wondering if I should call Carter West. The one man I don't want to owe any more favors to, but the one man who can make sure my sister is safe. But then Saylor would ask questions. She has always been inquisitive, and she would want to know who the man is. And that is part of my past I can't let her find out. I don't want to put her in even more danger than she already is in.

I decide to call her instead. But my calls go unanswered.

"Damn it, Saylor, pick up your fucking phone."

I want to punch the wall. I want to jump on a plane and fly out to New Orleans. But I don't see the point. It would take hours to get to her, and if someone is threatening her now, it could be too late.

I dial her two more times, and she finally picks up, causing me to breathe a sigh of relief.

"What do you want so badly that you need to call me repeatedly?" She laughs into the phone.

"Where are you?"

"Umm, walking home."

“Get in a cab,” I growl. I hate being the asshole big brother, but there are times I need to be. Like right now.

“Huh?”

I sigh. “Just humor me, and get in a goddamn cab, Saylor. I mean it.”

“Why do I need to get in a cab?”

“I just worry about you,” I lie. “It’s late at night, and you’re alone on the streets. It’s not safe.”

I hear her muffled words talking to someone on the street.

“Saylor.”

She doesn’t say anything, and I start to worry. Fear creeps onto my shoulders. Regret that I didn’t take these threats more seriously from the start.

I yell into the phone as the sound of her scream hits my ears. “Saylor! Say!”

The screeching of tires and a loud thunk reverberate through the phone.

“What is going on, Saylor? Talk to me!”

But there is no answer on the other end. I hear voices, but I can’t make out the words. My heart drops to my stomach, scared beyond belief that something happened to her.

But then her voice comes over the line.

“I... I’m here.”

I breathe a sigh of relief knowing she is okay. Or at least relatively okay. “What the fuck happened? It sounded like you got hit by a car.”

“I did.”

“What the fuck?” I yell into the phone, panic taking over.

“Someone pushed me.” She pauses before continuing. “How did you know?”

Fuck. I knew I should have taken this shit more seriously. But I’m an idiot. “Shit. Shit. I’m coming home. I’ll be there in



—”

“Wild, how did you know?”

“I’ll call you when I land.”

I hang up on her abruptly. I never wanted her to know about the threats. I didn’t want to explain why they were happening. Not that I know exactly why, but I have an inkling. And that would just make me need to tell her more than I ever wanted to tell her. We both have secrets. I know there are things she isn’t telling me about her past. But I let it go because I have secrets, too. Things she never needs to know. So I’ll continue to lie to her as much as I can to keep her safe.

I throw shit in my duffel bag I brought into the hotel as I dial Riot.

“I need to fly home. Now.”

“What’s going on?” she asks me, concern lacing her words.

“It’s Saylor. She was hit by a car.”

“Oh my god! Is she okay?” she asks, stunned. “Oh god, she can’t be okay if you need to leave.”

I sigh as I run my hand through my hair. “She’s fine. Well, she says she is, but I need to make sure.”

“Of course you do. Let me see what I can do. Since we have three days off, I can get you to New Orleans as soon as possible and then have you meet us in Minneapolis. Are you going to need longer? I can cancel—”

“No, we don’t need to cancel any shows. I’m bringing her here.”

“Wilder. I know you want to protect your sister, but her being hit by a car doesn’t mean you need to bring her on tour. She is going to flip out.”

I pinch the bridge of my nose. “Please don’t tell me what to do and not do for my sister, Ri. She won’t be happy, but I have no other choice.”

“What do you mean?”

Shit. We've collectively decided not to tell Riot about the notes. Not wanting her to ask more questions than is necessary. "It's not just the car. I know she's been down lately. I think being on tour with us will be good for her." That's not entirely a lie.

I can hear Riot thinking through the phone. "Fine. You're right. Janae has said Saylor has been acting weird lately."

I'm glad Janae has noticed. Saylor loves hanging out at Riot's best friend's voodoo shop, and Janae would be the first person to notice something is off with my sister.

"I'll call you back as soon as I can get you a flight."

I toss my phone on the bed and rest my elbows on my knees, dropping my head down. I really hope Saylor is okay. I hope that this was some random coincidence. But deep down I know it's not.

---

I get to the hospital the next morning around eight. Saylor is asleep when I get to her room. She has a bandage around her head and a few bruises on her arms. I pull up a chair next to her and grab her hand. My sister hasn't had the best of luck in her life. Our parents pretty much ignored her for most of her childhood. They were too busy building their careers to realize the impact it had on her. But I saw it. She acted out. A lot. Anything to grab attention from anyone she could. And it led to poor decisions. Most of them I blame myself for. I put myself in charge of watching over her, and I feel like all it did was destroy her. Make her choose the wrong path. The drugs, the drinking. That's not something a teenager should be around. But I was young and dumb when I let her be on tour with us. I was making the same mistakes and couldn't see past my own vices to realize I was hurting her in the process.

I still blame myself for what happened to her eight years ago. When she was raped and ran off to live with our aunt. I have no idea what happened. She's never told me. And I'm not sure she ever will. But something happened to her at our aunt's

house. She changed while she was there. And I am happy for it. I'm glad she found a way to deal with the trauma she suffered through. But I still wish she would let me in.

“Wild.”

Her voice is quiet, but I still hear her and look up to meet her eyes.

“Hey, sis.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Umm, you were in an accident. I had to be here.”

She pulls her hand out of mine. “It was nothing. I just have a scratch on my head.”

She winces as she touches the bandage on her head.

“That’s more than a scratch.”

She frowns at me. “You’re supposed to be on tour.”

“And I still am. Thankfully, this happened on a night we were off. I don’t know what I would have done if I found out this happened while I was playing.”

“I’m fine.”

I shake my head. “Okay, whatever you say. But we had a few days in between tour stops. I would have postponed a show if necessary.”

“And I would punch you in the face if you did that. I’m an adult. I can take care of myself.” She frowns.

“I’m well aware of that. But you’re still my sister. Someone should be here for you. And we both know Mom and Dad won’t be.”

She shifts in the bed and sits up more. “I was planning on calling Willow this morning.”

“But she can’t be here all the time to keep you safe.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” she shouts then winces from whatever pain it must have caused her. “It was an accident.”

I want to tell her the truth. Tell her about the threats I had thought were nothing. But I don't want her to hate me over not taking them seriously.

"I just worry about you, Say."

She lets out an exasperated breath. "Yeah, well thank you for caring. But I'm twenty-three. I can take care of myself."

"Saylor," I sigh.

"I mean it, Wilder. I am perfectly able to take care of myself. I've been doing it for years."

I know she's already annoyed I'm here, and I don't want to push her buttons. So I refrain from bringing up the fact that she hasn't always been able to. Or that I am making her come on tour with us.

Before I can say anything else, the doctor walks into the room.

"Ms. Reed, how are you feeling this morning?"

Saylor pastes a fake smile onto her face. I've seen it enough to know it's not genuine.

"Absolutely fine. Can I leave soon?"

The doctor smiles at her then looks over at the machines connected to her. "Soon. I do want to keep you for a few more hours just to monitor you. Make sure that head of yours is okay."

"It feels perfectly fine."

"Saylor," I scold.

She glares at me.

"And you are?" The doctor turns to me.

I hold out my hand and shake his. "Wilder Reed, her brother."

"Ah, yes. She did put you as a contact on her intake form."

I raise a brow at my sister, and she just shrugs.

“Nice to meet you. I do have to say I’m not a fan of your music, a little too loud for my tastes. But my kids love it.”

I give the doc a smile. “I’ll have to sign some albums for them.”

“They would love that.”

“Umm, can we go back to me and not my conceited brother,” Saylor whines. “When can I leave?”

The doctor chuckles, the lines around his eyes deepening. “A few hours, my dear. I’m going to have one more scan done of your brain to make sure no swelling happened overnight. As long as that comes back clear, you will be free to go.”

“Thank you, Dr. Michaels.”

The doctor lets her know he will send a nurse in about thirty minutes to take her for the scan, then leaves.

“You really didn’t have to come here,” Saylor says with a yawn.

I give her a firm look. “I’m your brother. You know I would be here no matter what. Even if you just stubbed a toe.”

“Let’s not be dramatic.”

I laugh. “I care about you, Say. I wanted to make sure you were alright.”

She gives me a curious look but then yawns again.

“You should get some rest. I’m going to grab a coffee.”

She nods at me as her eyes flutter closed.

Once I know she’s asleep, I head out of her room in search of coffee, contemplating if I should make the phone call I don’t want to make. But I decide against it. I don’t want to be pulled into that world again. Not that I was ever allowed to leave. Not after the decisions I made. The actions I took. I feel like my life is on the cusp of falling apart. Teetering on the edge of a cliff, and one strong breeze will make me fall.

So I don’t make the phone call.

Instead I head back to Saylor's room and watch her sleep as my thoughts fade to my past.

I still remember pulling that trigger like it was yesterday. Thinking the band would change my life. But no, taking a life did. No one knows that I think about it every day. That it eats away at me. I'm good at putting on a front. Pretending I am just fine. But inside I feel broken. Not like the man I was ten years ago. Before everything went down. And now it's all catching up to me. The notes, the threats, this attempt on my baby sister's life.

I don't know how long I sit there lost in my thoughts. But the sound of Saylor's voice knocks them out of me.

"So what did you know? How did you know this would happen?"

I look over at my sister and wince. There is a bandage on her head, and I feel so much guilt. But I can't let her know that. I don't want her to know about the threats. "I didn't. I was just worried about you."

She looks at me like I've lost my mind. "Lies. All lies, Wild. I know you know something."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh come on, Wild. You call me and tell me to get into a cab. How is that not inferring that you know something?"

I bite my lip. "I was watching out for your safety."

"And you just happened to know that someone would push me in front of traffic?" she asks me accusingly.

"How the hell would I know that?" I ask, my voice getting louder. "I was just worried about you, Say. You've been alone for the last few weeks. And then I hear that you decide to walk halfway across the city at midnight. I was looking out for you."

She frowns at me, starting and stopping her sentence a few times. "I—well... okay, that makes sense. But I don't remember that being exactly what happened, but my brain is a little foggy right now."

Concern laces my features as I lean toward the bed. “Are you okay? Do you need me to get the doctor?”

She shakes her head.

“Say, I’m—”

“You’re worried. I know.” She grabs my hand and squeezes. “But I had a head injury. Of course things are going to be a little hazy for me.”

“You’re right. Sorry for acting like your big brother,” I say maliciously.

“Wilder,” she groans. “Can we just not talk about this?”

“You brought it up.”

“I know I did but—”

A knock on the door has us both stopping our tiff and looking at the doctor as he walks in.

“Hello, Ms. Reed. How are you feeling this evening?”

Saylor gives the doctor a smile. “Better.”

“She said her head is foggy,” I add.

Saylor glares at me, but I turn my focus back on the doctor.

“Nothing to be concerned about, Mr. Reed. That happens with head injuries. Luckily she doesn’t have a concussion so that fog should dissipate rather quickly.”

“Good,” she says before looking over at me, and I know that she wants answers I don’t plan on giving her.

“Now let me take a look at you and see how everything is going. I think we may be able to discharge you as long as your vitals are clear.”

I watch Saylor as the doctor does a brief exam. I know she is not going to like what I am going to tell her when we get out of here. But she doesn’t have a choice. She is coming with me. Joining Saints & Sinners on tour. It’s for her own safety. And my peace of mind.

## WILDER

Saylor has been surprisingly okay with being on tour with us. Even though I hate sharing my bus with her. But knowing I can keep an eye on her is more important than getting my dick wet. The first few days were rough. We were constantly fighting, but she seems to have gotten over me forcing her to come on tour. I think she secretly likes it since she can actually do something rather than be alone at home.

We got to Chicago yesterday night. Our first of four shows here is tonight, and I'm pumped. The crowd here is always intense, and I love it.

We run through sound check, and I can tell the guys are just as excited to play here as I am. Even Silas seems to have some life to him. He seemed more normal last night when we went out to dinner. I am only hoping that he is finally finding some clarity with Marley leaving. And I only hope she returns soon. He needs it. The band needs it. But our rehearsal today was the best we've sounded since we started the tour.

I'm walking around the arena taking it all in, still in awe of the fact we get to play music for a living. That is never something that's gone to my head. The fact we can sell out 70,000 seats to people who want to see us sends chills down my arms.

I walk toward the lower bowl of the arena and see a blond sitting in one of the seats typing away on a computer.

I vaguely remember seeing her backstage earlier. At least I think it was her.



As I approach, something clicks in my mind. I've seen her before. In fact, I am pretty sure I've fucked her before.

She looks up at me, sensing my presence, and her cheeks flame.

I do know her. Although she looks different than I remember. One of her arms is covered in tattoos. Both of her legs are tattooed as well, and from what I can see of her thighs, those tattoos go pretty high up underneath the ripped shorts she's wearing.

When I meet her gaze, it all clicks. She is a socialite. One that Knox and I had quite a bit of fun with one wild night.

"Wilder Reed," she says as she sets her computer down on the seat next to her.

I give her a grin. "A fan?"

She snorts. "Hardly."

"You might be one of the few people, then, that don't like Saints & Sinners."

"Oh I like your music. I was just saying I wasn't a fan of you."

"Ouch, you wound me."

She laughs, a sweet strong laugh that has me remembering a lot of things about that one night we spent together.

"I remember you," I tell her.

"You do?"

I nod. "Lake, right?"

She smiles at me. "Yeah."

"You fell off the social scene. I remember talking to your friend one night asking where you were, and she said you moved. I was hoping to get another taste of you. Knox and I both were."

"Yeah, well, I got over the party scene."

I get it. That scene she speaks of was not one I wanted to be a part of. Don't get me wrong, I love partying and the

lifestyle I lead. But there was bad news written with that crowd. A lot of drugs, a lot of bad decisions. The social elite always hold on to dark secrets.

“So, how has life been?”

She winces for a second, and I almost miss it but she covers it with a huge smile. “Great.”

“What have you been up to?”

“Just working a lot,” she answers curtly.

“I’m surprised to see you here. Never took you for someone that wanted to be in this industry. I thought you wanted to be a stylist.”

“You remember that?” she asks, surprised.

I nod. The thing is, I remember a lot about Lake. We may have only spent one night together. But it was a memory I can’t let go of. Not just because of the sex. But our conversation. Before and after.

“I was kind of disappointed I never saw you again after that night if I’m entirely honest.”

She rolls her eyes at me. “I see you haven’t lost your charm.”

“I wasn’t trying to be charming,” I tell her honestly.

She raises a brow at me. “Wilder, you ooze charm. You can literally say hi to a girl, and she would be batting her eyelashes and taking her clothes off.”

I snort. “Okay, you have a point.” I give her my most charming smile. “But it doesn’t seem to be working on you.”

“You already charmed me once.”

“Is this a charm you once shame on you, charm you twice shame on me situation?”

She smiles at me, and I swear I feel my heart skip a beat. This woman is drop dead gorgeous. Even if she’s changed. She’s skinnier now than she was before. And her once

platinum hair is more of a golden blonde now. Her once virgin skin now kissed with tattoos. She is hotter than she was.

“Yeah, I suppose.”

Awkward silence takes up the space between us so I try anything to break it. “So what are you doing here?”

“I work for As The Angels Fall now. Well their management company. I took a job as a merch manager for the tour.”

“Hmm. I’m surprised you’re working at all.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

I realize that came off as rude. “Sorry. Just when I first met you, you seemed to be perfectly content as a socialite.”

“Well, things change.”

“And you decided to work in the music industry instead of being a stylist.”

She frowns. “It’s a long story. One that I’m not going to tell you.”

“Fair enough.” I can tell from her sudden stand-offish attitude that she doesn’t want to tell me anything, and I don’t deserve to know. Besides that one incredible night together, we are practically strangers.

“Well I should get back to work,” she says as she pulls her computer onto her lap.

“Yeah, okay. I’ll see you around, Lake.”

She nods but doesn’t say anything as she gets back to typing on her computer. I take it as my sign to leave, but I stall for just a second as I take her in. She really is beautiful. And I sure as hell hope that we can pick up where we left off years ago. Knox included.

## LAKE

I splash water on my face in the bathroom backstage. I had no intention of running into Wilder. In fact, I was hoping that somehow I could avoid him these eight weeks and just do my job and deliver the notes like I was instructed to do. But I'm a fool to think I would never actually see him. We are going to be around each other a lot. But maybe I can avoid him as much as possible.

I dry my hands and head outside. I spent the day answering emails and making sure the merch counts we predicted were all set correctly. Tomorrow I know I'll have a lot of work to do once I see what the sell through is like tonight.

I head out to the bus that I'm sharing with As The Angels Fall's management team touring with us. We have a brief meeting on the bus, and then I can head back to the hotel for a few hours before I need to be here for the show. We got here a few days ago when all the stage equipment showed up so I've had time to settle into my room for the week. I really wish I could go back there now. I need time to think. I really didn't expect to run into Wilder so soon, even though I knew it was inevitable. I guess I should have found a better place to work, although I didn't think he would be wandering the empty arena. I shake the thoughts about him as I climb onto the bus and get to business.

By the time I am headed to the hotel after the show, thoughts of him have only gotten stronger. I remember that night so vividly. The way Knox controlled everything that was being done. The way Wilder listened to him and touched me

just as he was told. The feel of Wilder's hands on my body, his tongue on my nipples. The way they brought me so much pleasure I didn't think I could take it anymore. But I did. I let them do so many things to me that night. Nothing I had ever done before. But I'm sure it was the alcohol and the ecstasy that had me so willing to do anything and everything.

And the thing I hate most is that I want to do it again. I want to feel Wilder's hands on me. I want Knox to control me. I want to be left to their commands and let pleasure overwhelm me. Maybe because I know it will get me out of my head. It will let me feel something other than shame and regret for the life I've chosen.

Because I do hate what I've done. Never in a million years would I have thought I would become a stripper in order to make the money I need to survive. But after the choices my brother made and the stupid decision I made to cover for him, I really didn't have a choice. I was cut off. Made into the black sheep of my family all because I was doing what I thought was right. And my brother promised he would change. That he would set things right. But two years later, he still hasn't come clean. Hasn't told our father it was him who stole the money. I'm not even sure I know the extent of what he did. All I know is he was tired of LA, moved to New Orleans, and then suddenly a hundred thousand dollars was missing from Dad's account. Of course, it was easy to place the blame on me. I was the one in LA. Even after I tried to explain to Dad that it couldn't have been me. But Nathan was always the golden child. He went to law school at Dad's alma mater. He was supposed to take over the firm. Dad saw his move to New Orleans as a way to gain more experience. And I am sure once Nathan leaves Mom in the Caymans, he'll head back to LA and start working for Dad. He'll get the company and never come clean.

I shudder at the thought. I don't want to keep living this lie. I want to move on. I want my life back. Not that I could ever get it because, not only am I the black sheep of the family, but I was also shunned from the social circles I lived in.

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I heard the guys in As The Angels Fall and Saints & Sinners were headed to a club tonight so I feel safe sitting in the hotel bar enjoying a martini and crunching numbers for the next shows in Nashville. I decide to up everything by thirty percent after comparing numbers to the massive quantity that we sold through tonight. Luckily the screen printer is able to mass produce things quickly and get everything to us by the time we need it.

I close my laptop and order another martini as my mind flits back to my conversation with Wilder this afternoon. I'm only halfway mad now that I ran into him and more curious to know if he will bring up sleeping with him and Knox again. Maybe it's the alcohol fog of two martinis and barely any food today, but for some reason I want that to happen. I curl my toes in my Chucks as I think about that night again. I feel myself getting wet from the thought. And now I wish I had taken the invite from their tour manager and gone to the club.

I want Wilder's lips on mine as Knox eats me out. I want to feel them both fuck me. I want to feel so full I think I might burst.

My thoughts are interrupted as the server brings me the martini, and I thank him.

God, I need to not think about fucking them. It would ruin everything I am supposed to be doing.

I don't think that whoever that man was that made my problems go away would appreciate the fact that I am fucking the man he wanted me to target.

But I'm horny. I haven't had sex in over a year. Ever since the no-good boyfriend I started dating ended up in prison and got me into another mess. How is it that I let myself take the fall for my brother, and then I meet a man who ends up getting me into even more trouble. Maybe it's karma for something I've done at some point in my life. Who knows. I'm just glad that my ex-boyfriend's troubles are no longer an issue. The

money he owed to some dealer has been paid off, and the threats I had been receiving are long gone.

Of course, I worry that I am going to be tied up with this other man. Not that I've heard anything from him since that night in the strip club. I've only dealt with the woman he told me to call. I really want to ask questions and know why I am doing what I'm doing, but I know I can't. I need to just do the job I was told to do. Even if it means hurting Wilder.

As if on cue with me thinking about him, I hear his voice. I look up and see a few guys from As The Angels Fall and Saints & Sinners have entered the hotel bar.

Michael and Riley from As The Angels Fall along with Jax Knight and Wilder. I need to get out of here before he sees me because I don't trust myself around him. Especially after nearly three martinis.

But I have no such luck. As I chug down my third drink, he slides into the booth next to me.

"Lake Hawkins, didn't think I would get to see you tonight."

I try not to let it affect me that he remembers my full name. I was supposed to be a notch in his bedpost, but for some reason, he remembers a lot more about me than I thought he ever would. Hell, I never thought he would even remember me. Yet he recognized me even with how much I've changed in the last two years.

"Hi, Wilder."

"Enjoying your night?" he slurs.

Well I'm glad he's drunk because it will be easier to slip out of here. "Sort of."

"Were you working?" he asks, looking at my computer.

"Yeah, I had a bit to get done tonight."

He looks at my empty martini glass. "You need another drink?"

"I should be getting to bed."

“But I just got here,” he says with that damn charming smile that makes my toes curl.

“I need to get up early.”

“What time?”

“Why does it matter?” I ask, even though I think I know the reason why.

“I think you are trying to avoid hanging out with me,” he says as he leans over, making his way into my personal space.

Well that would be the truth because if he knew what I was thinking of earlier, there is no way that he would let me go back to my room alone tonight.

“I’m tired.” Which is half true.

“One drink.”

I look into his piercing blue eyes and can’t turn him down. “Fine.”

He smiles at me, and I swear my panties get wetter. *Why does he have to be so attractive?*

“Good answer.” He smirks. “Dirty martini, dry, extra olives?”

Another thing he remembers about me. “Yes, please.”

“I’ll be right back.”

I watch him as he walks to the bar. He starts talking to Jax Knight who looks over at me and waves. I wave back and wonder if this is a good idea. I mean I know it’s not. I should not be getting close to Wilder. Even if it’s just talking. Because the guilt eats at me knowing I’m the one leaving him threatening notes.

Michael and Riley slide into the booth across from me, and Jax pulls up a chair at the end of the table.

“Hey, Lake, how’s it going?” Riley asks me.

“Good. Just finishing up some work. How was your first show?”



“Fucking pumped still. That was the biggest crowd we’ve ever played for.”

“We thought we hit the top when we sold out our last tour, but this is something else,” Michael adds in. “Just walking around that empty stadium earlier was mind-blowing.”

“This is why we wanted them on tour with us,” Jax says. “I know our fans will love them. They are going to be bigger than us one day.”

Michael laughs. “Not happening, but thanks for thinking so.”

“I was being entirely honest. You guys have something special. If I recall the last tour you did sold out within hours.”

Wilder slides into the booth next to me again and sets my martini down in front of me as he takes a pull from his beer. “You guys were amazing tonight. I was also at that show in LA last year at The Shrine. Mind-blowing. I don’t know how many times I have to say it.”

A blush lands on Michael’s cheeks. “Thanks, man, it’s good to hear that from you guys. Truly.”

Wilder looks over at me. “So, Lake, are you going to watch us play?”

I run my fingers along the edge of my glass. “Maybe.”

“Does your job require you to be at a merch booth?”

“It doesn’t,” Michael says.

“How do you know?” I ask him.

“Because I asked our tour manager. I was hoping you were going to watch us play tonight.”

I flush at his words. I met Michael a few weeks ago, and he has been casually flirting with me ever since. But I swore off musicians even if my mind is telling me I want Wilder.

Of course, Wilder can see right through Michael’s flirting and scoots closer to me. “And I want you to watch us play. When was the last time you saw a Saints & Sinners show?”

“I actually haven’t,” I admit.

Wilder gasps teasingly, like he is offended. “Well you should. I heard it turns the ladies on to watch five hot men play.”

I roll my eyes at him.

“So how do you guys know each other?” Michael asks.

“We met a few years ago,” Wilder says. And I wait for him to say something to make Michael jealous since he clearly knows he likes me, but he refrains from saying anything incriminating.

“Have you been friends since then? I think I would have remembered seeing you around.”

“No, we haven’t seen each other in years. Just a coincidence that I got this job working for your management company, and you happened to be on tour with them,” I lie.

“Well I would like it if you watched us tomorrow night, maybe grab another drink after the show.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

I can tell Wilder doesn’t like my answer as he makes a point to brush his fingers against the side of my thigh.

“You going to stick around and watch us, too?” Jax asks.

“I mean, if I watch *As The Angels Fall*, I should probably see what all the hype is about *Saints & Sinners*, too,” I tease him.

Wilder leans in close to me. “Not as good as the hype you’ve heard about me,” he whispers so only I can hear.

A chill goes down my spine as I think about our time together and exactly what Wilder is referencing. His hand slides to my thigh and squeezes, and I don’t even think about moving it. His hands on me brings me back to a simpler time in my life, and it makes me want to go back.

His icy-blue eyes lock onto mine as we stare at each other, a silent conversation passing between us. I can feel his need

for me in his stare, and if he were to slide his hand further up my thigh, he would feel my want for him.

Someone clears their throat at the table breaking the spell between us. I shift awkwardly, removing Wilder's hand from my thigh.

"I don't think you got a chance, Michael." Riley laughs.

I bite hard on my lip then grab my martini and chug half of it down. "Yeah, no one has a chance with me. I'm not a groupie. And definitely not hooking up with anyone on this tour."

"Damn," Michael sighs.

Riley rubs Michael's head, messing up his perfectly coiffed hair. "Guess you're going to have to pine after someone else now."

"I was never pining."

I smile at that trying to hold in a laugh because Michael definitely seemed to be pining after me the last few weeks.

Wilder leans into me again, and I casually slide into the wall along the side of the booth to get away from him.

Jax takes notice and pulls Wilder away. "You're trying too hard, man. Michael has a better chance than you at this point."

Wilder flips him off then shoots me that charming grin that I hate so much because of the way it affects me.

"Well I should be getting to bed." I say that for my own good, or else I know I'll stay here and drink another martini and choose poorly. Because Wilder smells too damn good.

"Can I walk you to your room?"

I know I should say no. I shouldn't let myself get close to him. But he put a spell on me years ago, and for some reason, I still feel wrapped up in it.

"Yes."

"No chance, Michael." Riley laughs.

I slide out of the booth and look at Michael then Wilder. “For either of you.”

Wilder’s hand lands on my lower back, and I push it away. I can’t let him get any ideas. The only reason I’m even letting him walk me to my room is because I need to find out if his room is on the same floor as mine.

“Good night. I will see you guys later.”

We walk in silence to the elevator. My mind swirling in ten different directions thinking how this night could go. Am I strong enough to not sleep with him? Or should I? Would that make everything easier for me? Easier to leave notes and fuck up his life if I find a way to get close to him.

I start to hate myself even more for agreeing to do this. Not that I had a choice, or even knew what I was agreeing to, when I gave that woman a call six weeks ago. But I could have backed out. I could have taken care of my own problems with my ex and found a way to give the twenty grand back to the man who offered me the deal. Not that I had any way of getting in contact with him or had even heard from him since. I just know that the money my ex stole has been paid, and my life is no longer in danger. But is this worse? Have I gotten myself tied up in something far greater than the poor decision I made to date a criminal when I felt my life falling apart?

“What’s going on in that head of yours?”

I almost forgot Wilder was next to me as the elevator dings that it’s arrived. “Just work stuff,” I lie.

We walk into the elevator, and Wilder forgets what personal space is as he corners me. “I can help you forget about it.”

I press my hands into his chest. “Not happening.”

“Why not?” he asks as I press the button for my floor.

“Because I don’t need any distractions.” Which is true.

“Distractions can be a good thing.”

I laugh. “Sometimes they can be. But this job is important to me.”

“Says the girl who never wanted to work in the industry.”

“I said that?” I ask him.

He nods. “You made some comment about your dad and not wanting to lie and cheat your way to the top.”

I probably did say that because I still feel the same way about the entertainment industry. “Yeah, well things change, people change. I’m doing this my way. Not his.”

“I didn’t mean to offend you, Lake.”

I take a deep breath before answering. “I know you didn’t. But I do mean it when I say I don’t want distractions. Even if this was never the job I wanted, it’s still a job and still important to me.”

He nods. “I get it.”

When the elevator stops at my floor I get off, and Wilder follows next to me but keeps his hands to himself for the first time tonight. Which I find chivalrous.

When we stop in front of my door, I turn to face him. “Well, this is me.”

“It’s good seeing you again, Lake. I do want you to know that.”

I nod because I really don’t know what else to say.

“Friends?” he asks.

“Friends.”

He smiles at me before taking a step closer into my personal space. “Unless you realize being friends is stupid, and you want that distraction. Knox and I could use one.”

I know my cheeks are turning red at the mention of Knox and Wilder together, but I hold my ground. “Thanks for the offer, but no.”

I turn abruptly and let myself into my room and shut the door in Wilder’s face before he can respond. Luckily, he must walk away because he doesn’t knock or demand anything through the door.

I lean against it and sigh. These eight weeks are going to be harder than I thought.

## WILDER

I was hoping to get lucky last night with Lake, but she just shut the door in my face. It did hurt my ego, but that doesn't mean I am going to stop trying. There is just something about that girl. And I am not just talking about the incredible sex we had that one night. I felt something about her that night. Something I never told Knox about. He is good about fucking and forgetting. And I mean, I am, too, for the most part, but every now and then, I meet someone that just makes me feel different about it all. That maybe I should settle down. And I never have. In all my years on this planet, I've never had a girlfriend. I dated a few girls, but nothing was ever exclusive. I just never wanted to settle.

But something about Lake is different. At least, I feel like it is. Maybe I just need to fuck her again to get her off my mind and out of my system. Which is why I intend on pursuing her no matter what. And I know Knox could use the distraction, too. One thing I am glad about is that I didn't bring that groupie to the hotel last night. Lake is a much better prize.

“Yo, Wilder, you ready?” Roan asks me.

I see the guys standing around me, waiting for me to make my way to the stage for soundcheck. I got lost in my thoughts which is something I rarely ever do in front of them. Despite them being my best friends, I try to hide my internal thoughts from them. They don't need to worry about me, not when Roan is slowly falling apart and lately Silas has been a total wreck. I'm the glue that holds this band together. I keep them laughing and help them forget about all the shit we went

through. They don't think it affects me. That I've managed to easily move on from the years we spent working the streets to make the money we needed. Money I could have easily asked for from my parents, even if they did despise me pursuing music. But I never wanted their help. I never wanted them to say I told you so if this never worked out. So I spent my late teenage years and early twenties hustling. Knox was the one that helped pull me into it. I know he hated it, getting the rich kid involved in the shit he did to survive. But it was a thrill for me. Until it all came crashing down.

"Yeah, man," I respond to Roan.

"You okay?" he asks me.

I nod. "Yeah."

The other guys walk out of the green room once they see me on my feet, but Roan holds back. "You sure? You had that pensive look on your face. Like you were stuck in your head."

"Like you are?" I bite back.

"This isn't about me. We both know I have too many demons to deal with. I just want to make sure you don't have demons, too."

"Nah, I'm all good. Just thinking about a girl."

He laughs. "Must be some girl if she puts that look on your face."

"She's something for sure."

"Care to share the details?" he asks, surprising me.

"Is Roan Matheiu trying to get some juicy gossip? Am I rubbing off on you?" I ask him as I bump my shoulder to his.

"Forget I asked."

He storms off, and I pull his arm back. "No way. This is a first. I need to remember this moment."

"Fuck off, Wilder."

I chuckle as Roan gets that angry face back he usually wears. "Ahh, there is the man I know."



He shakes his head at me. “You’re an ass.”

“Maybe I am, but for real, want some tea?”

He starts walking down the hall toward the stage. “You know, man, if you really do ever feel like talking about your problems instead of covering it all up with jokes and sarcasm, I’ll be here.”

I stop in my tracks as I watch him walk away. I never thought anyone saw past me. Saw that I really was going through shit just like the rest of them. Maybe I do need to be more open with them. Maybe then it will help get rid of the blackness I feel in my soul.

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Sound check runs smoothly, and the anticipation for tonight amps me up. This has always been one of my favorite cities to play in, and I cannot wait for the crowd tonight after last night’s wild crowd. But right now, I need fifteen minutes alone before our next interview.

Riot had six interviews set up for us today, and we’ve been through half of them, and it’s exhausting. It’s usually Silas and me controlling the flow of the interviews, but since he has been stuck in his head ever since Marley left, it’s pretty much been me controlling the show. Jax has been more vocal, too, which I am grateful for. But with Roan and Knox being the quiet ones and Silas joining the pack, it’s starting to become overwhelming to keep up a front that all is good with the band. I mean, we are solid together, tighter than we’ve ever been. But individually, fame and life has gotten to us all.

I head to my bus and run right into Lake as I turn a corner in the parking lot.

“Shit, sorry.” She sounds flustered as she stares at the tablet in her hand and doesn’t pay one bit of attention to me.

“Something wrong, sweet cheeks?”

Her eyes snap to mine. “Wilder. Hey.”

“Didn’t expect to be seeing me so soon?”

“Actually no, I thought you would be tied up in interviews all day.”

“Keeping tabs on me?”

“Hardly. I talked to your tour manager earlier, and he let us know the schedule for the day.”

“Oh. Makes sense. Everything okay with you?” I ask.

“Ugh, yeah great.”

She tries to walk past me, but I pull her into me. I don’t even know why I do it. I got the picture last night that she didn’t want to do anything with me or us. Not that that has ever stopped me.

“You sure?”

She looks up into my eyes and then quickly at my mouth before returning her gaze to me. But I don’t miss that longing glance.

“Lake?” I whisper.

“Everything’s great,” she tells me, but I know she’s lying. I just don’t know about what.

“Okay.”

She looks at me, and I can see a longing in her eyes. “So I thought about what you said the other night.”

“I said a lot of things.”

She rolls her eyes at me. “You know what I’m talking about.”

I smirk at her. “Ahh, so she does want a piece of me.”

“Oh my god, why am I even thinking about agreeing to this. You are such a—”

“Charming gentleman?”

“No, that wasn’t what I was going to say at—”

“Sexy motherfucker?”

“Wilder,” she groans.

“Professional lovmaker?”

“I’m going to pretend you just didn’t say that.”

I pull her closer to me so the only space between us is where she is holding her tablet. “So you’re saying you want me to fuck your brains out while Knox tells me what to do, and then he joins in, and we both fuck you until you pass out.”

Her cheeks turn red, and I know that is exactly what she wants.

“Just say the word, baby.”

She blinks a few times then steps away. “Just during the tour.”

“Fine.”

“This will just be something for us both to relax and not think about work.”

“Absolutely not a problem for me.”

“And when the tour is over, you have to promise you’ll never pursue me.”

Now I can’t guarantee that, but a wicked little lie won’t hurt. “Acceptable.”

“Okay.”

“Okay then,” I say.

“So…”

“Tomorrow night after the show we are having an afterparty. You should be there.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll have Riot or my sister tell you the details because I am not sure where it’s at.”

“I can ask Michael or Riley.”

I pull her back into me. “Don’t ask Michael.”

“You jealous?” she teases.

“Hardly. But I don’t want to give him any ideas.”

“I would say that is jealousy.”

Of course I’m fucking jealous. I saw the way he was looking at her last night, the way he wanted her. And there is no way I am letting him put his hands on her. She’s mine. At least for the next eight weeks.

I growl and pull the tablet from her hands, tossing it to the ground. I can buy her a new one. I pull her into me until there is no space between us.

“You have no idea what jealousy does to me,” I bark. Then my lips are on hers. And fuck if every damn memory of that night with her comes flooding back with one brush of her lips. The way she moaned my name, the way she tasted, the face she made when she came over and over again.

I slide my hands into her hair and attack her lips. I bite on her lip, sucking it into my mouth, and she moans, a soft, quiet gasp escaping her lips as I tighten my hold on her. She tastes like cinnamon and desire. That chemistry we had four years ago is just as intense today.

I slide my tongue into her mouth, and she wraps her arms around my neck. I kiss her like my life depends on it, and I have the urge to press her into the bus next to us and ravage her. Fuck waiting for tomorrow night. I need her now.

She bites down hard on my lip, and I am nearly ready to make my previous thought come to life when I hear voices behind me. I manage to pull my lips from hers and rest my forehead against hers.

“Goddamn, Lake,” I whisper.

She’s silent as her hands slowly make their way out of my hair and slide down my chest, separating us in the process.

A blush is on her cheeks as she speaks, “Well I need to get back to work.”

“Probably.”

“Okay, I’ll... um... see you later.” She bends down and picks her tablet up off the ground and starts to walk away.

“Tomorrow,” I tell her. “And Lake?”

She turns and looks at me.

“Don’t wear any panties.”

She shakes her head as she walks away, and suddenly everything feels lighter.

## LAKE

I managed to avoid Wilder during the show tonight. I decided to spend the night at the main merch booth that I knew would be the busiest. After that kiss yesterday and my foolish idea to take him up on his offer, I needed to avoid him.

I am second guessing myself for agreeing with Wilder. I am struggling with my conscience, thinking it's a good idea to get tangled up with him and Knox when I am literally the person given the task to destroy them. I should probably get my head checked. But that kiss. Good gods that kiss had me tied up in knots all day yesterday and today. Hence why I avoided watching them play tonight. I just knew if I saw Wilder on that stage, I might have jumped him after the show.

But this plan is a good plan. If I can get closer to them, well mostly just Wilder, then it will be easier for me to leave the notes behind. At least that is what I'm telling myself. I know that part of me just wants the pleasure that will come with it. And if that kiss yesterday afternoon was a sign of what's to come, it's no wonder I signed myself up for this train wreck.

I slip into the dress I picked out to wear to the club tonight and adjust the length. It's short. Nearly too short, but it does wonders for my too thin frame. It actually makes it look like I have hips. And my boobs look decent. They may be small, but at least they are perky.

I run my hands down the silver material and give myself one more pep talk before I head out the door, grabbing my

clutch on the way.

I texted Wilder earlier that I would meet him at the club even though he wanted me to come with him. But I needed these moments to myself. I needed to make sure what I was doing was a good idea. Because I was about five minutes from packing my bags and quitting this stupid task I've been given. I couldn't care less about my job as a merch manager, but I also didn't want to just up and leave the management company high and dry. I have some integrity when it comes to working. Probably the reason I stayed working as a stripper for the last two years instead of finding some other job, even though nothing else would pay the money that did. I just hated every minute of it. I knew it was what I had to do to remain out of the spotlight. And somehow not one person found me. Or maybe no one cared to look for me. Not even the paps. Not after the scandal I let myself get in the middle of with my family.

I shake my thoughts as the elevator dings its arrival. I make my way downstairs and to the lobby of the hotel while I wait for my Uber to show up.

By the time I make it to the club, I've managed to get all the self-hatred for myself I was thinking about out of my mind and set forth on finding the guys. I let the door guy know my name, and as Wilder promised I am let in right away, bypassing the long line that circles the block of this hot new club in Chicago.

I head to the bar and order a martini before making my way to the VIP section. I need alcohol to calm my nerves. Because I am nervous. I am literally here to meet up with someone to have sex. And even though I've had sex with the two of them before, I'm still nervous. It's been so long, and my subconscious is getting to me.

I get through the roped-off section and start looking for the booth Saints & Sinners are in when I run into Michael.

“Lake, I didn't know you were coming out tonight.”

I shrug. “I wasn't going to but changed my mind last minute.”

“How did you know...” he starts but then stops halfway through his question. “Let me guess. Wilder.”

“Yeah, he asked me to come out tonight.”

“So I really don’t have a chance with you then. You are all about him?”

I kind of feel bad for the guy because if I wasn’t on some mission to destroy Wilder’s life, then I probably would go for someone like Michael. Despite him being a rock star, he is the safer choice. But I don’t feel the zing with him I feel around Wilder. “He’s just a friend,” I tell him.

Michael nods, and I can see the disappointment on his face. “Okay, Lake.” He runs his hands through his hair. “But fair warning. The guy is a total player. He may be nice and charming, but I know he runs through women.”

“I’m well aware.”

“So why are you meeting with him then?”

I purse my lips. “Because he’s a friend.”

I can tell Michael knows I’m lying. “Well, if you ever change your mind.”

I give him a sad smile knowing he is the much safer bet if I did have to choose a rock star.

“We’re over here, by the way,” he says as he directs me to the room in the corner that’s large enough to fit about twenty people.

I see Wilder first. Of course my eyes would go right to him. He’s wearing tight black jeans and a black T-shirt that clings to the muscles that I know are hiding under his shirt. His hair is up in the man bun it’s usually in, giving me a side profile of his square jawline. The damn puka necklace he’s been known to wear is around his neck, and I can’t help but laugh to myself. This tattooed rock star has the makings of a surfer boy.

He’s talking with Knox and a girl with cherry red hair. She looks young, and I start to get jealous. Why would I be jealous? This isn’t supposed to mean anything. At least that’s



what I am telling myself as those damn butterflies do something to my stomach. Something I wish they weren't doing.

He must feel my gaze on him because he turns to look at me. A smile takes over his face, and I can't help but smile back. My mind fluttering back to that kiss when I agreed to be his plaything.

Plaything. That's what I need to remember. This doesn't mean anything to him, just like it can't mean anything to me. I'm here for a reason, and that reason is to make sure I never have to deal with the dealers that were after my ex ever again.

He saunters over to me, and the way my name caresses his lips has my toes curling in my heels. "Lake."

"Hey, Wilder."

"You actually came. For a second there, I didn't think you would show."

"I almost didn't," I fib, not sure why I want him to think I don't want this. Maybe I say it to convince myself.

"Well I'm glad you did."

I grin widely at him. "I'm sure you are."

"Come meet my sister," he tells me as he grabs my forearm and directs me back to where he was.

I realize then that the redhead must have been his sister, and I breathe a silent sigh of relief that only lasts a second. If that's his sister, then she is on tour with them. I know she lives in New Orleans. I did the research to find that out after I wrote the first note that threatened her. Suddenly I am feeling like this is all wrong. I shouldn't be doing this. I shouldn't sleep with him to get closer to him when it's going to ruin not only him but possibly his sister, too.

"Where did Saylor go?"

Knox looks over at me, surprise lighting up his features. "Bathroom."

"Hey."

“Hi.”

Wilder looks between the two of us. “Wow, you guys are making this feel really awkward. How about I pour us a drink?” He looks around at the iced bottles on the table. “I can make you a martini, Lake, but without the vermouth.”

“That’s fine,” I tell him. I look over at Knox who is studying me.

“You look different than I remember.”

“So you remember me, too?”

He chuckles, a deep throaty laugh. “Lake, you were one of our favorites. Hard to forget.”

I blush at his words. “Well, it was a fun night.”

“It was.”

“And it’s going to be a fun tour,” Wilder adds.

I take a seat next to Knox after he gestures for me to sit down. Wilder hands me a martini he managed to make from the bottle service on the table. I try not to drink it quickly, but the second he sits down on the other side of me and sets his hand on my thigh, the nerves hit.

Why am I doing this again? Not to mention that the first time I am going to have sex in over a year is going to be with two well-endowed men. Fuck, maybe this wasn’t a good idea.

“So you are working for As The Angels Fall?” Knox asks me, no doubt feeling the same awkward tension I am feeling.

“Yeah,” I answer, pushing my hair behind my ear.

“Dream job?” he asks.

Wilder scoffs. “Hardly, this girl wanted to be—”

“It’s a job,” I say, cutting Wilder off.

“Weird job for a socialite,” Knox responds.

My heart clenches. I never thought I would miss that life. I mean I don’t really miss this, going out to the clubs, but I miss my friends, the people that were always there for me.

Wilder squeezes my thigh like he can feel the shift in my mood. “She’s not much of a socialite anymore. Outgrew the scene.”

I look over at Wilder, and he shrugs. I mouth a thank you to him even if he doesn’t know what it’s for. We haven’t talked about it, not really, but he can obviously tell that my life is nowhere the life that it used to be.

“I never really liked the scene,” Knox admits. “But I was drawn into it nonetheless.”

“You are one of the biggest rock stars in the world, kinda comes with the territory,” I tell him.

“Sure does.”

I catch a glimpse of sadness on Knox’s face but don’t question it. We are definitely not on that level. I’m not even close to being on that level with Wilder. And I don’t want to be. The less we know about each other, the easier this will be.

Time starts to pass in a blur. I dance and drink though I make sure to limit myself to three drinks. Just enough to feel a buzz so I don’t second-guess myself over my decisions. Wilder has his hands all over me, and Knox slowly begins to touch me, sending a thrill down my spine as flashes of that night four years ago make an appearance.

Suddenly I feel like I want this no matter the consequences. I want both sets of their rough hands on me, ravaging me, fucking me into oblivion.

Wilder’s sister, Saylor, comes back to the table and trips, spilling her drink everywhere. Knox’s hand disappears from my thigh. I watch him as he watches her. And I swear I see something in his gaze. But maybe it’s just the buzz vibrating through my body. He is here because he wants to fuck me, yet he seems to can’t take his eyes off Wilder’s sister.

“You okay, sis?” Wilder asks.

She nods at him. “Yeah. I think I just had enough to drink. Maybe I should head back to the hotel.”

“Okay. Let me text a security guard,” Wilder says as he pulls out his phone.

“Can you take me?” she asks.

I look over at Wilder, and I see his apprehension. We both know if he leaves, this night will never happen.

“I’ll take her,” Knox says as he stands and walks past me.

Wilder sends him a look like a silent prayer, and then the two of them talk for a minute. I can barely hear them over the bass of the music, but I think Knox agreed to meet us later on.

I watch as he escorts Saylor away.

“Sorry about that,” he says to me. “She’s been weird lately. Drinking more than usual. She rarely drinks, so I don’t know what’s going on.”

I think back to that envelope I was told to deliver. When I flew to Seattle and was told to slide it underneath a hotel room door. The note I was told to write saying he should be more careful with those he cares about. I heard through the grapevine his sister was in an accident, and now I’m beginning to wonder if that had something to do with this.

I shudder and go to stand, rethinking everything, but Wilder pulls me back into my seat.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

I look into his crystalline eyes. “Nowhere.” Maybe it was nothing. Maybe I am thinking too hard about all of this. Maybe I should just let the night go on. And stop thinking about how I might ruin everything.

“Let me grab you another drink.”

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**LAKE**

“He should be here soon,” Wilder tells me as I sit nervously on the bed in his hotel room.

“Okay,” I whisper as I drop my head and pick at my nails.

“Are you nervous?”

I look up at him. “What?”

“You sure you want to do this?”

I brush my hair off my face and hesitate with my answer. “Yeah. I... of course.”

He frowns at me. “You don’t seem like it.”

I sigh and fold my arms over my chest. “This just seems transactional. I mean... I don’t know what I mean. Last time we did this it was so natural. And now...” she trails off.

“We were drunk last time. We all just kind of connected on a level.” He walks over to me and kneels on the floor so I am forced to meet his eyes. “I only brought it up the other day because we had so much fun. Knox... he doesn’t fuck anyone unless we’re sharing. It’s his thing.”

“What about you?”

He smirks at me. “You asking me if I would fuck you without him around?”

I feel my cheeks flaming. “Um no. Do you fuck other girls?” I don’t even know why I asked when I know the

answer. He's a manwhore, whether he's fucking a girl he's sharing with Knox or on his own.

He places his hands on my thighs then slowly slides them up my leg. Goose bumps take over, and I curse at myself for reacting like this.

"I would fuck you right now, Lake."

"That's not what I was asking."

"I know."

He grazes his thumb so close to the junction of my thighs, I squeeze them together. I chew on my lip, well aware I am making this so much more awkward than it needs to be. I've already fucked him. But it was years ago. Before I was this version of me. And I am not sure this version of me is the one he wants. Socialite Lake was much more fun.

He stands up and tilts my chin up so I am forced to stare into his eyes. Eyes that mesmerized me the first time I met him.

"You're beautiful, Lake. Prettier than I remember."

"You don't need to feed me compliments."

"No?" he asks as he runs his thumb over my bottom lip. "What if I like feeding you compliments?"

I try to shake my head, but he just grips my chin tighter.

"Would you rather I degrade you?"

I can't help but laugh at that. "Isn't that Knox's job?"

"Well he isn't here, is he?"

My eyes light up from his words. My body betraying me at the thought of Wilder Reed degrading me.

He doesn't waste any time when he sees my reaction. His lips fuse to mine for the briefest kiss before he pulls away.

I watch him as he takes a step back from the bed and unbuttons his jeans. "Get on your knees."

I grin at him playfully. Something about his tone and demeanor causing all my nerves to disappear. I slowly slide off

the bed and keep my eyes on him as my knees hit the floor. I can't believe I'm doing this. My nerves may have disappeared, but my guilt hasn't. I left those notes for him. Yet when I look into his eyes all I want is him. All thoughts of Knox joining us go out the window as I see the desire written across Wilder's face.

With slightly shaky hands, I push the guilt as deep down as it will go then grab ahold of his waistband. He puts his hands over mine as we both push down his jeans. He kicks them off, and I waste no time going for his briefs as my own desires start to take over.

His dick stands at attention. And memories hit me of that one night I spent with him and Knox. The way they both made me come so many times I lost count. The way Wilder knew how to find every sensitive spot on my body. The way he worshiped me while Knox degraded me.

He lets out a groan as I grip his cock, squeezing the base before sliding up to the tip.

"What if Knox shows up?" I ask as I look up at him.

"Then he can fucking join in, but don't talk about that, woman. Put those sinful lips on my dick."

"He won't like it if you start without him. I remember those rules from last time."

"And you're on your knees right now with your mouth inches from me. If you don't start, I'm going to shove my dick so hard down your throat you gag."

"Promise?" I tease.

He's silent at my response, no doubt speechless that I just asked him to gag me with his dick. But seconds later he is wrapping his hand under my jaw, forcing me to open my mouth wide. I barely have time to take a breath before he slides his dick into my mouth with force. I gag at the quick intrusion, but the salty taste of his skin on my tongue, the memories of the one night we had, have me opening my throat to let him fuck my face.

“Goddamn it, Lake. Your mouth is like heaven. How the fuck did I not make you suck me off that night?”

Butterflies dance in my stomach. He remembers that night as well as I do. He has to. I never thought he would. Not with all the women he’s had to have been with. All the nights he and Knox have shared together. But he remembers his time with me, and it turns me on.

I grab his thighs and suck him deep into my mouth, moaning as I do. Not just for his pleasure but my own. I can feel the dampness between my thighs growing as his hands move to my hair and pull hard.

“Fuck you feel good. So goddamn good.”

I smile at his praise. I pull him out of my mouth to the tip and swirl my tongue along the head of his cock then flick my tongue along the bottom. He curses then thrusts so deep into my mouth, my nose hits his skin. I try to keep from gagging as best I can, but it’s a struggle. He’s huge and thick. Bigger than I remember.

Suddenly, he is pulling me off him and lifting me from my knees. He picks me up and tosses me on the bed. I laugh, I can’t help myself.

“That is a laugh I’m never going to forget,” he mutters as he kneels at the edge of the bed and pushes my dress up to my waist.

Guilt hits me hard, knowing that when he discovers the truth, my laugh is the last thing he will want to remember. But those thoughts quickly disappear as he finds the black lacy panties I have on.

“I thought I told you not to wear any.”

I smirk at him. “Oops. I must have forgotten.”

“Bad girl,” he growls as he rips my underwear off and dives between my folds with his tongue.

He isn’t gentle. He literally devours me. Biting and sucking. This is not the Wilder from that night a few years ago. This is a new version of him. And I like his aggression.



I grip his hair as he sucks hard on my clit. “Oh my god, Wild,” I moan.

I thrash on the bed, never has a man made me so close to coming so quickly. Not even with the two of them. They took their time on me. Had me begging. But Wilder isn't wasting time. He's eating me like a starved man.

He presses my thighs open. “Keep these pretty thighs open for me, Lake.”

I try to, but the pleasure is too much, and I find myself trying to close them again.

He barks at me. “I know you can follow instructions. And if you don't keep these open, I will tie them open.”

Those words alone send me down a spiral of lust and need and desire. I'm so close. So, so close. “Please, Wilder,” I groan.

He pulls away from me, looking up at me from between my thighs. His long hair is a mess from my hands, but the feral grin on his face has my entire body flushing. “I could make you wait.”

I shake my head violently. “Please, no. Just make me come.”

“So demanding.”

His fingers glide between my folds with the simplest touch causing goose bumps all over my body.

“So responsive to the lightest touch. Do you think I could make you come just by blowing on your clit?”

I swallow and bite down on my lip. Can he just do something already?

“I don't care how you make me come, just do it already.”

He laughs as he sits up on his haunches. “Maybe I should wait for Knox. He might like finding you like this. Needy, wanting, soaking.”

I know he is teasing me. I know he wouldn't make me wait. But then a devious grin takes over his face.

“Asshole,” I mutter as I move my hand to my center.

He’s so quick to pull it away that I barely even register what he’s doing before I am coming so hard. Three fingers slam into my core as he drops back between my thighs and bites hard on my clit.

I scream so loud I am sure everyone in the hotel can hear me. Pain and pleasure are radiating through my body, flooding every single nerve, firing at every single synapse.

“God, you are gorgeous when you come,” he mutters against my thigh.

I try to smile at him, but he’s left me breathless.

“Now get on your hands and knees,” he commands.

“What about Knox?” I ask, knowing exactly where this is headed.

“Fuck Knox. He’s taking too long, and if I don’t get my dick inside of you in the next thirty seconds, I am going to lose it.”

I flip over and do as he says, my body already needy again. And I want to feel him. All of him, buried so deep inside of me, I forget my name.

I hear the tear of a condom before his hands land roughly on my hips. “I can’t hold back Lake.”

“Don’t,” I whisper.

Within seconds he is slamming into me. I scream at the intrusion. He’s stretching me so much it’s almost painful, but I don’t tell him to stop. Because it feels good, he feels so good.

His fingers dig into my hips as he pulses into me with so much intensity. But I don’t hold back, I meet him thrust for thrust.

“Such a good girl,” he groans. “Take it. Pull me into you. Feel how deep I am.”

I grip the sheets beneath me with white knuckles. I fight to let go of the thoughts in my head that keep creeping up. Knowing I’m a terrible person for getting in his bed when I’m

being paid to ruin his life. But this can be a one-time thing, right? I can get my pleasure from this and then end it. Pull back on my promise of letting him have me for the duration of the tour.

His hand lands in my hair, and he pulls it back, my back arching as he gets even deeper.

“Fuck, Lake. You feel better than I remember. This pussy...goddamn.”

I get lost in the pleasure. The way he is stretching me, bringing me so close to the brink again. “More,” I breathe.

“You need more? Is my dick not enough for you? You want me to go find Knox? You want both your tight holes filled? You want us to fuck you so hard you break in two?”

I moan at the thought of having both of them like I did before. But I don't want that. Despite the fun I had with them, I want Wilder more.

I fight to shake my head with the grip he has on my hair. “Just more of you.”

“Fuck,” he mutters. Then he is wrapping his arms around my waist and pulling me back as he leans back on his legs.

He takes me with him, so I am straddling him. His front to my back. His lips find my ear, and he sucks the lobe into his mouth before his teeth bite down.

“Such a filthy girl. I'm not sure if you deserve this cock. I know you are thinking about his.”

He holds my hips up, and he slowly presses just his tip into me. One hand keeps me in place while the other slithers underneath my dress and up to my stomach.

“Please, Wilder. I promise you I'm not. I just want you. As deep as you can go. I don't need him.”

I feel him smile against my neck as he drops his hand from under my dress, grabs my hip and slams me down onto his dick. He's so deep I can barely breathe. But I need this. I want this. I want him. I meet his thrusts with every moan and scream that comes out of my mouth.

“You’re fucking gorgeous,” he moans into my neck. “So gorgeous riding my cock like this.”

“Touch me,” I let out on a shaky breath.

He lets go of my hips and pulls my dress over my head and quickly removes my bra. My breasts bounce freely, and his hands slide up my body, grabbing hold of them and pinching my nipples.

“Is this what you need?” he groans into my ear as he thrusts deep inside of me.

I grab his hand and pull it down my body between my thighs.

“You want me to make you come, sweetheart?”

“Yes,” I whisper.

“As you wish.”

He rubs at my clit while I meet every single one of his thrusts. I can feel my orgasm reaching the precipice. My entire body lights up like a firework. My breathing is ragged as I scream his name.

“Fucking hell,” he mutters against my back as he pulls his hand out from my thighs and starts fucking me like a madman.

I can’t come down from this high. His touch, his lips on my back, his words are keeping my orgasm coming. I wrap my hands around the back of his neck as he pounds into me. Soon enough he is screaming my own name as he empties himself into me.

He falls backward and kicks his legs out from under him until he is flat on his back and I’m laying on top of him. He turns my head so it’s resting against his shoulder and looks at me, stroking my jawline.

“I’m glad Knox didn’t show up.”

I blush at the honesty in his words.

“I much rather liked having you to myself.”

I press my hand to his cheek. “I liked it, too.”

He lets go of me and slides out from under me then hovers over me, his eyes studying me before his lips meet mine in a slow, languid kiss. And I realize I want this. I want to spend this time with him even if I know it will only end in betrayal and heartache.

## WILDER

Lake left right after our intense make-out session. It was probably for the best since I would have ended up fucking her until the sun came up if she stayed.

I roll over and see that it's five in the morning. I should try to get some more sleep before sound check, but I am still riding the high of Lake.

I grab my phone and text Knox, wondering what the hell happened to him last night. He seemed like he was ready to play. Like he was ready for our game. Then he didn't answer my texts after dropping my sister off. Knowing him he laid down in bed, and his old ass fell asleep.

I toss my phone to the side and try to keep my thoughts from going back to Lake. The girl is a fucking bombshell. Her hourglass figure, her tits, that ass of hers. And now that she is tattooed, she embodies even more sex appeal.

I groan inwardly. My dick is coming to life just from thinking about her. I need to clear my head. Because I can't think about her. That's kind of the rule Knox and I have. No feelings, just fucking when it comes to the women we share.

I pick up my phone and still don't see a text from him. He could be asleep, but there is also a chance he is working out. Fucker is always at the gym. I know lifting weights clears his mind. Makes the thoughts and the guilt that drown him disappear.

I change my clothes and head to the gym, not surprised at all when I find him.

“Hey, fucker.”

He nods at me as he finishes a set.

“Thought I would find you here since you weren’t answering your phone.”

“Left it in the room.”

“Ahh.” Unlike most of us, the man is not attached to his phone.

“How was your night?” he asks me as he sets down his weights.

“Despite you ditching us, it was a great time. That woman’s pussy is fucking magical.”

He nods. “Yeah, brother, she was pretty fuckin’ good. And sorry about ditching you. After dropping your drunk sister back at her hotel room, I got tired and fell asleep.”

“Well you can join us next time. Probably when we hit Cincinnati for those two shows.” I clench my jaw thinking about sharing her. Do I want to? Or do I want to keep her for myself for the next eight weeks?

“I’m looking forward to it.”

There is something in his eyes I just can’t place, but I change the subject. It’s far too early to get into whatever is going on in his head which I know has to do with his ex, Maggie.

I take a seat on the bench across from him. “Can I ask you something?”

He nods.

“Do you see anything weird with Saylor? She’s been drinking, which she rarely does, and something just seems off with her.”

He tells me what I already know. That there is something going on with her, but in typical Saylor fashion, she avoids the subject. I know I should have told her about the notes. Let her know my fears for her safety aren’t coming out of left field.

But I worry what that knowledge may do to her. I don't want her to fall deeper into whatever spiral she is in.

From the look on Knox's face I know he's worried about her, too.

---

I watch Lake as she instructs a guy where to put a truckload of merch. She's beautiful as always. Her blond hair is pulled up in a ponytail showing off her high cheekbones. She's wearing cutoff shorts and a loose tank top. I want to devour her. Her legs are thick with muscle, her tattoos just add to the appeal. I want those legs wrapped around me. As in right now. I am sure I can find some private place in one of the many rooms backstage. I don't give a shit if I am supposed to be fucking her with Knox. After just one night I want her to myself. And I never care about that shit. I'm usually one and done when it comes to fucking someone, but for some reason, with Lake, I want more. More nights. More kisses. More out of this world sex.

She must sense my eyes on her because she looks over her shoulder and sees me, giving me a brief smile before turning back to the person she was talking to.

I decide to let her go and head back to the greenroom where the rest of the guys are sitting. The last show in Chicago is tonight, and the crowd has been absolutely crazy. I am sure tonight will be no different. Then we drive overnight to Nashville with another show tomorrow. I hate to admit I feel old, but I am. I'm already tired with the three shows in a row we had. With tonight and tomorrow that puts us at five shows in a row then a final sixth show the following night before we finally get a break.

"Wilder, so glad you could join us," Riot says as I walk into the room.

I look around, confused. Everyone is here, including my sister. "Am I late for something?"



She gives me a stern look and lets out an exasperated breath. “You have an interview in five minutes. I told you to be here at three. Did you not get my text?”

I pull my phone out of my pocket and sure enough, see a few missed texts from her. I was so lost in watching Lake I didn't even realize my phone was going off.

“Sorry, lost track of time.”

Knox snorts, and I send a glare to him.

Riot looks between the two of us as something dawns on her face. “Please do not tell me you were fucking some girl and ignoring me.”

I wish I had been fucking Lake, but I am too embarrassed to tell anyone I was watching her for thirty minutes.

Riot ignores my silence. “Well anyway, Steven Rouse with Encore magazine will be here any minute. He's a rough one. You guys need to be on your toes. I read through some of the questions he is planning on asking and apparently, he's noticed or heard from someone that things aren't going well for you guys.”

“Things are fine,” Jackson says.

Riot rolls her eyes. “Maybe for you. But people have noticed that Silas is not himself in interviews.” Silas doesn't say a word as she points at Roan. “And you have been acting worse than you ever have. Some paps saw you with drugs the other night at the club. Which don't even get me started on the repercussions of that. I was able to get your publicist to kill the story. But apparently, Steven knows. He thinks the band is going to crash and burn. That you've outlived your prime, and now you are all ready to make this your final tour.”

“What the fuck?” I say. “That is far from the truth. Jackson and I were just working on some new songs the other day.”

“And you guys know that. I know that. I know that you are all going through a lot of shit right now. But you can't let these damn journalists find that out. Because it can ruin your career. And that's the last thing I want for you.”

“Riot, you know that Wilder and I always make sure these interviews go smoothly,” Jackson says as he runs his hands through his hair. I know hearing this is going to stress him out. He carries the weight of this band on his shoulders. Even though we all should. But I get it. It seems that lately Silas and Roan have taken a step aside. At least they still show up on stage and put on a performance.

“I know you two will. I just wanted to warn you all.” There is a knock at the door, and she swears before continuing. “So please Silas act like you normally would and Roan for the love of god can you please contribute to an interview for once.”

Roan grunts, and Silas shrugs then excuses himself to the bathroom. I’m no idiot. I know he is probably going in there to do a bump in order to improve his mood. But if that is what it takes to get through the interview with Steven Rouse, then I don’t care.

My sister pipes in. “You guys will be fine. Just don’t let your personal issues come out in the interview. I know that this guy wants the personal stuff. But keep it light. Don’t let him dig. I’ve seen him ruin some careers.”

Great. That makes me feel better about all this.

Saylor moves to the door to let in the guy, and I take an empty seat next to Jackson.

“You good?” he asks me.

“Perfectly fine.”

“Were you with that girl?”

I lean back into the couch and stretch my legs out in front of me. “I only wish man.”

Steven Rouse walks into the room and introduces himself. I take a deep breath and let the interview go on.



# LAKE

I collapse into a random chair I find in the backstage area of the stadium. Tonight was insane. Not only did we sell out of eighty percent of the merch, but the crowd was also absolutely wild. I just need a breather before I continue to make sure the crew has everything packed into the semis and ready to go to Nashville. There is such a short turnaround time between today and tomorrow. I know my day tomorrow is going to be busy. Hence why I need a short breather. Apparently, the tour company added a show to Nashville due to the other show selling out within minutes, and they could only book them for tomorrow night. I need to make calls and make sure everything will be restocked in time for tomorrow which I know is going to lead to a long night and an even more exhausting day. I wanted to catch the show tonight, too. But between the crazy crowds and the way merch was selling, I ended up needing to man a booth.

I close my eyes for all of two seconds when I hear Wilder's voice in the hall. I managed to avoid him earlier when I caught him watching me while talking to one of the guys in charge of delivering the merch around the arena. I was supposed to have a short conversation with him, but when I felt Wilder's eyes on me, I managed to draw it out for far longer than it needed to be.

I know I was okay with sleeping with him last night, but after I left his room this morning and headed to my own, the guilt took over. Because I know that feelings for him will develop. It's inevitable. I know these things. Just like I knew

with Brandon, my ex, even though he was the worst possible choice for me.

And if I let things develop with Wilder it's only going to be worse for both of us. No matter how I felt last night.

"Lake Hawkins, you falling asleep on the job?" I hear Wilder's voice.

I peek open my eyes to look at him. "Hardly. Resting for the three minutes I can spare. And you are interrupting them."

"Busy night?"

"Yes. It was exhausting, and I have a long night ahead of me."

"Damn. I was hoping to steal you for a few or try to convince you to stay on my bus tonight."

I raise a brow at him as I open my eyes. "Don't you share a bus with your sister?"

"How do you know that?"

"People talk." Which is partly true. I did spend part of today finding out as much as I could about Wilder and his sister.

"Ahh. Well I am sure I can get her to go somewhere else."

I crack my neck and stand, knowing that my rest break is not going to be a break at all. "You going to kick your sister off your bus so you can get laid?"

"I'll do what I must."

I shake my head at him and laugh. "Not happening."

He grabs my arm and pulls me closer to him. "Oh, come on, Lake."

I push him off. "Nope. I am not getting between you two." Another lie because I know that is exactly what I am going to be told to do by my employer. "Why is she here anyway?"

"She was threatened."

"Oh my god." I hate that it was my doing.

“And I feel like she is safer here.”

Little do you know that is far from the truth, I think to myself.

“But I am not here to talk about Saylor. When am I going to see you again?”

I sigh and pull my hands through my ponytail. “Look, Wild, I’m not sure—”

“Don’t,” his voice commanding. “Don’t even think about saying that we shouldn’t see each other again.”

“I just feel like it’s going to make everything complicated.”

“What would make it complicated? You work for one band, I’m in another. I don’t see how that makes things complicated.”

“I just—well, maybe complicated was the wrong word. I just don’t have much time and—”

“Then tell me your schedule, and we’ll make this work.”

I chew on my lip. I don’t think I am going to get out of this. And if I’m honest with myself, I don’t want to get out of this. I want to spend my nights tangled in sheets with Wilder Reed. Too bad I’m also being paid to destroy his life.

“The next few days are going to be busy for me,” I tell him honestly.

“Fair. What about Cincinnati?”

We have four days there, and I know that he will make sure that we somehow see each other. But I need to make this less about us, more for my own good so I don’t develop feelings. “That could work.”

“Good.”

“Will it work for Knox?” I ask.

I see disappointment on Wilder’s face for a split second. “I’ll talk to him.”

“Okay.”

“Well, I’ll let you get back to work.”

“Thanks. See you around.”

He grins at me. “Oh you will, sweet cheeks.” He grabs my arm one more time and pulls me into him. “You look beautiful tonight by the way.”

I blush at his words and try to pull away, but he pulls me so close to him, we are chest to chest. Before I can stop him, his lips are on mine, and before I even know what I am doing, I collapse into him.

He pulls away faster than I anticipate and gives me a wink before walking away.

I curse at the ground. Mad at myself for the way he affects me. Because I’m so turned on by just talking to him. This cannot be good.

---

I think I got maybe four hours of sleep last night on the bus. I was so busy making sure everything ran smoothly for the show tonight I lost track of time. And the second I woke up, we were pulling into the stadium parking lot. I’ve been busy ever since. The screen printing company said we would have the new order I placed after the first show by noon today. But it’s nearly two in the afternoon, and it’s still not here. I pull my phone out to send out another text to them and notice three missed calls from an unknown number, and I know it’s the woman that made sure I got this job. It’s always her when I see the blocked name on the screen.

“Shit.”

I ignore the calls and decide to worry more about this job than her. After three calls, I’m finally told the delivery truck is three minutes out, giving me some sense of relief.

I direct the crew to be prepared for the delivery when my phone starts ringing again.

I walk away so that no one can overhear my conversation and answer it.

“Hello?”

“Ms. Hawkins, so glad you finally found the time to answer my call.”

I let out a frustrated grunt. “If you don’t remember, you asked me to do this job. And I don’t just do the bare minimum. I want to make sure that everything goes smoothly. Because if I was fired from this job, then how the hell would I do the one you asked me to do.”

“Fair enough,” she says dimly. “But I do expect you to answer my calls.”

“I was busy.”

“And now you clearly aren’t, so listen up.” Her tone is aggravated and much more aggressive than I’m used to. This doesn’t even sound like the same woman who first told me what to do and where to go. This one sounds like her life depends on what I’m doing. “I need another note delivered.”

“I figured as much since you did call me,” I snap.

“I don’t need attitude from you, I already get enough from...” She stops talking abruptly, and I know that everything she is asking me to do isn’t just coming from her. I had my suspicions. Suspicions that it leads to the man who found me in the strip club that night a few months ago.

“We need things to move faster. I need Wilder Reed to be scared and take action.”

I look around to make sure no one is near me and won’t overhear. “Are you ever going to tell me what Wilder did?”

“Absolutely not. You have one job. Deliver the notes.”

I scoff. “I actually have two jobs. You could have made my life easier and just made me do the job of being a groupie. Then I wouldn’t have to also make sure the tour for As The Angels Fall runs smoothly.”



“Again with the attitude, Ms. Hawkins. Now I expect the note to be delivered tonight.”

“Fine. What do you want it to say this time?”

“Write this down so you don’t screw it up.”

I let out an exasperated sigh. I don’t have a pen around but know I’ll remember what she’s asking. “Just tell me.”

“It should say, ‘I know what you did. And I will make sure the world does, too.’”

“Is that it?” My words come out sardonic.

“What is with the attitude? You’ve never given me any before.” She pauses. “Please don’t tell me you slept with him.”

How the hell did she even come to that conclusion?

“Umm, no.”

“Then why are you being so defensive?”

I look around and see a delivery truck pulling up and know it’s the merch I need. “I’m just very busy is all.”

“Hmm. Okay. Can you get this delivered tonight? It’s important.”

“Yes,” I tell her.

“Good.”

“Are you ever—” I don’t even get to finish my question because she’s already hung up on me.

I wish I could call her back. But I can’t. I also need to not let this become personal. And I feel like it already has. Wilder has me caught in his web, but little does he know he is also caught in mine.

I shove my phone back into my jeans and walk over to the delivery truck.

“Hi, Lake. I am taking inventory. It should be eight hundred boxes, correct?”

I nod.

“You okay?”

I blink at Brian unsure why he would ask me that.

“You look upset.”

“Oh...ugh... I was on the phone with my brother. He tends to put me in a mood.” That’s not a complete lie. He always puts me in a mood.

“I got a brother that does the same to me, so I understand.”

I give him a short nod. “Can you just make sure this is all sorted and lined up along the hallway with the rest of the merch so I can take inventory before we start delivering it to the booths?”

“Not a problem.”

“Thanks. I’m just going to take a quick breather. Need to calm down after that call.”

“No worries. Should have it all sorted within thirty minutes. I recruited some of the crew from Saints & Sinners to help since they are mostly set up at this point.”

“You are a saint, Brian. Thank you.”

I head out to the bus, needing a break and maybe a shot to calm my nerves. I know it’s risky doing this, especially now that I’ve grown a relationship with Wilder. Or a situationship, I should say. I just need to make sure he never finds out it is me that is leaving him these notes. Because I know he would never forgive me.



## WILDER

The crowd is going wild as we head off stage after our encore. I hand my guitar off to one of the roadies then follow the guys into the green room. We all take a shot and do our usual toast with just the guys. Sometimes we let Riot join us, but she's over in the corner talking to my sister.

I eye Saylor carefully. We got in a fight last night before we headed to Nashville. I know I shouldn't be the asshole older brother, but my concern about her is growing. She's been drinking a lot lately, which she rarely does, and I had to open my damn mouth and bring it up last night. She stormed off my bus in anger, and the guilt ate at me until I was able to finally fall asleep. I still have no idea where she slept last night. Riot said it wasn't with her. I know I need to talk to her and apologize, but she walks out of the room before I can even get to her.

"Drinks tonight?" Jackson asks us. "Some of the guys in As The Angels Fall invited us out."

Roan looks over at Riot, and I can see a sadness in his eyes. "I'm in."

Silas shakes his head. "Not really feeling it tonight."

I don't know how the man is surviving at this point. Besides the copious amount of drugs and booze. But he's worn down. He looks like shit. It's probably for the best that he stays in. He needs sleep. He needs to get his mind right. None of us can help him at this point. It seems like he's given up. I

wish I could find Marley, the girl who broke his heart, and drag her ass here.

“Same man. I’m tired,” Knox chimes in.

“Old man,” I huff.

He flips me off before he settles into the couch.

“Where y’all headed?”

“Some club. Not even sure,” Jackson answers.

My mind immediately goes to Lake, and I wonder if she’ll be there. We kind of discussed waiting until Cincinnati, but she looked sexy as fuck when I ran into her backstage earlier.

“I’m in,” I tell them.

We end up chilling in the greenroom for half an hour before Riot tells us we can head to the hotel. It’s the usual debacle when we leave. Screaming fans and groupies waiting around for us. We’ve learned that if we wait close to an hour, the crowds usually die down, and it’s much easier for the SUVs to get us out of the parking lot and back to the hotel. Of course, that doesn’t mean there aren’t fans waiting at the hotel for us. It still blows my mind that this is my life. That people scream my name. We’re just rock stars, but sometimes we can be treated like pop stars.

We pull up to the back entrance of the hotel and manage to get in without any troubles, so I head up to my room and shower before heading to Saylor’s room. She puts up a front again and tries to act like she is fine, changing the subject on me like she usually does. I even tried to be nice to her and invite her out with us, but she seemed more than happy to stay behind.

I fold my arms over my chest as I wait for the elevator to head back down to the SUVs. She told me she slept on Knox’s bus last night and brushed it off like it was nothing. I should believe her. And I should believe my best friend, but something seems off. I don’t think he would go behind my back like that. It’s the one rule we’ve always had. But they’ve been spending so much time together.

The thought quickly disappears as Lake steps off the elevator.

“Oh hey, Wilder,” she says with a blush on her cheeks.

I suck on my lip as I take her in. She’s not in the skinny jeans and tight-ass tank top she had on earlier. She’s wearing a sparkly black dress that is very short, showing off her tan legs that I suddenly want wrapped around me.

“Where are you headed off to?”

She fidgets with her small purse. “I was going to meet the guys at the club. But I...ugh forgot something.”

“Are you staying on this floor?” I ask her curiously since I know for a fact she isn’t. I got that out of Riot earlier.

She looks over at the number near the elevator door and laughs. “Oh. No, I’m not. I...um totally got off on the wrong floor.”

She looks nervous. Kind of like she was the other night. Maybe it’s me. Maybe I bring it out in her.

I run my fingers down her arm, and immediately it’s covered in goose bumps. I smile at that. At how easily I affect her. And it goes both ways—looking at her now has me wanting to devour her.

I reach around her and hit the elevator button. She doesn’t move, and her proximity to me has me inhaling that sweet vanilla scent of hers.

The elevator door opens immediately, and I push her inside. I know she can feel the need coming off my body just the way I can feel it coming off hers.

I back her up against the wall and drop my lips to her neck.

“Wilder,” she hisses as she grabs my arms.

“Hmm?”

“We can’t do this here,” she says with desire lacing her words, whatever nerves she had earlier disappear with my touch.

I suck hard on the side of her neck, and she moans, tightening my grip on her arm.

“You sure about that?”

“You can’t be serious,” she huffs.

“For someone who thinks that, you seem awfully happy to touch me right now.” I smirk against her neck.

She immediately drops her hands off me, and I take a step back. “What floor?” I grin.

“Eleven,” she whispers.

I turn and hit the button for the floor which happens to be right under the button for my floor so I can see how she made the mistake.

“Aren’t you going down?” she asks me when she sees I didn’t push another button.

“You’re going out with the guys. So am I. Maybe I want to escort you to your room for whatever it is you forgot.”

She shakes her head at me. “You’re trouble.”

“The best kind.”

She rolls her eyes at me then pushes past me as the door opens. “I can tell from the look in your eyes. I know exactly what you’re thinking, and it’s not happening.”

I follow her down the hall to her room with the biggest grin on my face. “And why’s that?”

She pulls out her keycard and waves it in front of the scanner. “Because I told Riley that I would be right back.”

“You can ride with us.”

She mumbles something under her breath before she steps into the bathroom. I’m half encouraged to follow her inside, but I hold back and wait for her in her room.

She’s snapping her purse shut as she walks out. “Okay, I’m ready.”

“What did you forget?”

“My lip gloss. Can’t live without it.”

I take two steps toward her. “You came all the way back here for that? You sure you weren’t looking for me?”

She presses her hand into my chest to walk past me. “So cocky.”

I grab her wrist and wrap it behind her body. “You like my cock.”

“I liked it, yes. But I have no interest in it anymore.”

I pull her flush against me. “Oh really?”

She nods.

“I thought you were looking forward to my cock being deep inside of you when we got to Cincinnati.”

She shrugs. “Maybe I was more interested in Knox’s.”

I wrap my hand around her waist and squeeze her ass. “I don’t think so.”

“No?”

I shake my head. “I saw the way you looked at me when you got off on my floor. I felt the way you grabbed me in that elevator. I know you want me.”

“I agreed to the two of you.”

“That needy?”

She purses her lips, and I know I got her caught up in a lie.

“If I were to slide my hand under this dress right now, you wouldn’t be wet?”

She tenses slightly under my touch but comes at me with her quick wit. “It takes more than looking at you to make me wet. So keep dreaming.”

I laugh out loud. “I am pretty sure the last time I had you in my arms, I wasn’t dreaming. And you were soaked.”

“Maybe because sucking dick turns me on, but since I haven’t sucked your dick—”

I cut her off by sliding my fingers between her legs.



“Wilder,” she shouts.

I chuckle as I pull my hand out from between her thighs and bring my fingers to her lips. “These feel wet to me.”

She struggles for me to let her go, and I can’t help but slide my fingers into my mouth. “Mmm, just like I remember.”

“Wild,” she stammers.

“I think I want more.”

“No, we can’t! I’m going to be late!”

But it’s no use. I pick her up and toss her on the bed. She tries to crawl off, but I’m too fast for her as I grab her ankles and push them apart. I gaze down at the red lace panties she has on.

“Who were these for?”

She tries to shut her legs. “No one.”

“Hmm.”

“Don’t *hmm* me! I mean it Wilder. We can’t... oh my god,” she moans as I drop my face and lick her from ass to clit.

“Feel pretty wet to me,” I mutter against her clit.

Her hands land in my hair. “Fuck, of course I am. You have your mouth...”

Her words fade away as I flick her clit with my tongue then pull back. “You were saying?”

“Damn it, Wilder, don’t stop. Just keep going.”

I chuckle against her center as I feast on her. She bucks against my mouth, and I have to hold her legs down.

“You taste so good.”

“Stop talking, and just make me come!” she shouts.

“You know Knox wouldn’t like this behavior.”

“Don’t bring him up when your mouth is on me.”

I suck hard on her clit then pull back so I'm looking into her gorgeous blue eyes. "So you haven't been thinking about Knox then?"

She groans. "No, damn it. All I can think about is you. Like all the time. It's unhealthy. I thought avoiding you would help, but clearly you were right and just looking at you has me dripping with need."

"When did you get wet?"

"What?"

"Was it when I sucked on your neck in the elevator? Or maybe when I held your wrist behind your back?"

She rubs her folds against my mouth, and I fight my own desires as I hold back. I don't want to make her come until she tells me what I want to hear.

"Please, Wilder."

"Tell me," I say as I tease a finger around her entrance.

"Fine. It was when you reached around me to push the elevator button. Your presence is enough to turn me on. Maybe it was even before that when I ran into you backstage earlier. I wanted you to drag me into a room and have your way with me."

I smile at her honesty. "So you've been wet for the last eight hours."

She props herself up on her elbows and stares me down. "I got myself off in the guys' greenroom when they were playing. All I could think about was you. And how I wanted you buried so deep inside of me."

My cock is rock-hard at her words. "I wish I walked in on you fingering yourself."

"I fantasized you did."

"Fuck, woman," I groan before sliding my fingers inside of her and going back to her clit.

This isn't enough. I need to do more than taste her. I need to be inside of her. I don't even give a shit about going to the

club tonight. I want to spend the next however many hours pleasuring her until she passes out.

I pull back and take my pants off. I watch her as her eyes drop to my cock. I grab ahold of it and squeeze, precum dripping from the tip.

She springs up and pushes me down on the bed then straddles me. “Why do I want you so much?”

I rip her panties off. “I could be asking myself the same question.”

I barely have my hands on her hips when she slides down on me. Her pussy is magical. I wasn't lying when I said that to Knox. It's better than I remember. Not just from years ago but from a few nights ago even. I don't know what it is or why this woman has such a pull on me, but she does.

“Damn, Lake,” I groan as she twists her hips, rotating on me as she grinds down.

“I need more,” she whines.

I thrust up into her hard. “How much more?”

“I don't know. I just...” She throws her head back in ecstasy as I grip her hips hard.

“This dress has got to go.” I lift it over her head, and her tits bounce from the movement. I waste no time sitting up with her in my lap as I latch on to a rosy nipple and suck it into my mouth.

Her hands grip my hair as she rides me, and I know what she means. I want to be deeper. I need more. I pull away from her breast and pull her mouth to mine. Kissing her with force, needing to feel her everywhere as I pull her onto me.

“Wild,” she groans.

I know it's not enough. I know she wants more. I wonder if I can give her enough. Thoughts falling down the rabbit hole of how I've shared her. How maybe that's what she needs. But right now I want her for myself.

I push the thoughts aside as I push her off me. “Get on your knees. Grab the headboard.”

She looks over her shoulder at me, and I slap her ass. Hard.

“Now, woman!”

She bites her lip and smiles and does as I say. Within seconds, I am behind her, slamming into her as I reach around and pinch her clit. She starts coming, and I don’t stop my rapid pace, wanting to ride out the feel of her tight pussy as long as I can. When I feel my balls tightening, I pull her hips into me and explode.

She’s still holding on to the headboard breathing hard as I drop my head to her back. I wrap my arms around her and breathe in before reaching up and grabbing her hands off the headboard. I pull out as I turn her around and pull her into me, pressing a kiss to her forehead.

“I didn’t think it could get any better than last time,” she mumbles into my chest.

I lift her chin up so she has to look me in the eyes. I don’t even know what to say to her because I feel the same way. Instead, I press my lips to hers.

When I pull away, she goes to get up, and I pull her back down. “Where are you going?”

“To the bathroom.”

“Why?”

She raises a brow at me. “Do I really have to explain it to you?”

I run my hand down her side and between her legs, feeling my cum leaking from her. I don’t know why I had sex without a condom. I never don’t use one. But I find myself enjoying the feel of a piece of me leaking out of her.

“Are you on birth control?”

Again she raises a brow at me. “A little late to be asking that.”

“Sorry. I should have asked you before. I always use a condom. I was just...”

“Caught up in the moment?”

I nod.

“Yeah, well now I’m definitely late.”

I chuckle. “I very much like the reason you’re late.”

She gives me a grin. “I do, too.”

I trace my finger along her inner thigh.

“I am, by the way. On birth control.”

“Good because the next time I fuck you, I’m not using any protection again.”

“Next time?”

“Yeah, babe. Next time.”

She chews on her lip like she is contemplating if there should be a next time. “And when will that be?”

“Give me ten minutes.”

She laughs out loud at that, smacking her hand against my chest. “Okay, surfer boy.”

“Surfer boy?”

“Come on, Wilder. You know you look like one.” She toys with the puka shell necklace at my neck.

“I don’t think I’m much of a boy.”

“You know what I meant.”

I smirk at her. “I’m all man, baby.”

“Please never say that again.”

I laugh then shove my fingers back into her pussy, pushing my cum back inside of her.

She moans. “What are you doing?” she asks breathlessly.

“Proving to you that I am all man.”

“That’s not... oh my god,” she hisses.

I work my fingers deep inside of her, rubbing against her G-spot. “This is mine.”

“Oh god. Wild,” she groans.

“I don’t want you to forget that. I don’t want you to forget whose cum is inside of you while you dance out on the dance floor tonight. While it begins to drip down your leg, showing everyone that you belong to someone.”

I fuck her with my fingers until she comes again, her nails digging into my forearm.

“I-I don’t think I’m going out tonight.”

“But you looked so sexy in that little black dress.”

She licks her lips then looks me straight in the eyes. “Has it been ten minutes yet?”

“Vixen,” I growl before I push her onto her back and enter her in one hard thrust.



# LAKE

I twist a piece of Wilder's hair in my fingers. We ended up not going out. I just couldn't get enough of him. He does things to my body that I just can't explain. And for some reason it's made all my guilt disappear. Guilt I should have. It wasn't an accident that I ended up on his floor. I was actually there to drop off a note like I was instructed to do. I didn't think I would run into him at the elevator. I figured he was already at the club. So instead I made some lame excuse of hitting the wrong button.

Even as I think about it now, I wonder if maybe I can just forget everything. Forget that I took twenty thousand in cash to do this job. Maybe I could be the girl I used to be back when I walked in the same social circles as Wilder. When I was the socialite who went to parties and clubs and danced the night away. Instead of the girl that hid away from the world so her brother could have the life she had. The girl who became a stripper to make ends meet. To get the money to pay back her father.

"What's going through that pretty head of yours?" Wilder asks me.

I blink a few times and look up at him. At this gorgeous man. He could be a freaking model. With his square jawline and perfect nose. His stunning crystal-blue eyes and locks of luscious hair. Not to mention the body he has. I know he surfs. Part of the reason I called him surfer boy. I remember him telling me about hitting waves the day we met. I thought it was crazy a guy from the south was so into surfing, but he told me



about all the times he drove to Florida as a teenager to just get some wave time.

Then he moved to LA and never wanted to leave. The way he talked about it made it seem like he didn't want to be in New Orleans, in his hometown. I never really understood why because I never asked. He was just a man I found attractive over drinks at some fancy night club. When he asked me if I wanted to have sex with him and Knox, I didn't think twice about it. I was so drawn to him. And I was a crazy twenty-three-year-old that wanted to try anything sexual.

Maybe that is why I am drawn to him now. I remember the hours we talked that night before anything else even happened. And here I am, over four years later, laying in my hotel room bed on tour with a band that is opening for him. I never wanted to work in the music industry. Never wanted to follow in my family's footsteps. But here I am. It almost feels like kismet. Even though I'm here for all the wrong reasons.

"Lake."

"Hmm?" I ask him.

"You got lost in thought there."

"Sorry. I guess I just have a lot on my mind."

"Anything you want to talk about?"

I sigh. Because I wish I could. This connection between us makes me want to tell him everything, but I can't. "Not really. Can we just go back to the game we were playing?"

"Sure thing."

I give him a weak smile, then go back to the silly game we were playing. "Would you rather eat only onions for the rest of your life or garlic?"

"Onions. At least you can do a lot more with them than garlic."

I contemplate his answer. "That's true. I'll agree with that."

He smiles at me, and it makes my heart skip a beat, but I push the butterflies away.

“Would you rather have gills or claws?”

I tap my finger on my chin. “Claws.”

“Why?”

“I don’t want to be stuck under water with a shark.”

“But you could swim away.”

“Not if they are faster than me. Besides claws would let me protect myself.”

“Fair enough,” he says. “I would still choose the gills, though.”

“Weirdo.”

He pinches my arm. “Hey, I like the water.”

“True. You are a surfer boy.” I laugh. “How long have you had that puka shell necklace by the way?”

He shrugs. “I don’t know. Why?”

“The nineties called, and they are asking for it back.”

“Brat.”

I snort as I laugh. “It’s true, though.”

“It’s stylish.”

I pluck at the necklace around his neck. “Trust me, it’s not.”

He pinches my nipple through the tank I threw on, and I yelp. “Okay fine. Wear what you want.”

“I plan to.”

“Just know that I’m always going to make fun of you for it.”

“Fair.”

I shake my head at him. “Okay so would you rather jump in a pool full of snakes or a pool full of spiders?”

“Snakes. One hundred percent.”

I sit up a little and look at him. “Oh, are you scared of spiders?”

He shivers, and I can’t help but laugh at him.

“Oh my god, you are.”

“They’re poisonous!”

“And snakes aren’t?”

“That’s beside the point,” he adds. “They have eight legs, and they crawl all over you and no. Just no.”

I laugh and then run my fingers over his bare chest like spiders running up and down him.

“Stop.”

“No way this is too funny.”

He starts to squirm, and then I realize it’s not just the spider talk, but the guy is actually ticklish. I go for his sides, and he starts to fight me, trying to grab my arms, but I’m too fast for him.

“Oh my god, you are ticklish,” I say as I start to crack up.

“Why’s that so funny?”

I can’t stop laughing. “Because you’re like this big macho rock star with a hot bod, and you can’t handle a few tickles.”

“You think I’m hot?”

That deserves an eye roll. “No, I think your body is. Your face is kinda meh.”

He finally gets a hold of my wrists and flips me over and pins me down. “So you’re just fucking me for my hot bod?”

“One hundred percent.”

“I guess I could be down for that.”

“Why’s that?”

He nips at my lips. “Because I get a magical fucking pussy out of it.”

I start laughing. “Did you just call my pussy magical?”

“Sure did.”

“You’re so weird.”

“Yet you like my hot bod.”

I struggle to get out of his hold, but it’s no use. His hot body is also strong as fuck.

“Oh the things I could do to you if I were to tie you up.”

I swallow at his words. Not because they scare me but because I want him to tie me up. I want him to do all the things he has ever wanted to do to me.

“Then do it,” I groan.

“Fuck woman, you are absolutely insat—”

His words are cut off by my phone ringing.

“I should get that.”

“Why? It’s two in the morning.”

“Exactly. It could be an emergency.”

To my surprise, he actually lets me go then leans over to the nightstand and grabs my phone.

I see Nathan’s name on the screen, and I start to panic. Why is my brother calling me? At two in the morning, no less. Unless he isn’t in the Cayman Islands with Mom anymore.

I let the call go to voicemail then look up at Wilder and find him studying me. “I should be getting back to my room.”

I grab his arm because I don’t want him to leave even, though I need him to so I can talk to my brother. Wilder has no need to know my business. To know about my past.

“It’s just my brother.”

He nods. “Hey, I’m just the guy you’re fucking, so I know when it’s time for me to leave.”

“Wild.”

He pulls his pants on and slips his shirt over his head. “I get it, Lake. Sometimes we have secrets we need to keep.”

“It’s not that at all. It’s... my past is hard, and my brother is my past.” It’s the most I can give him.

He walks up to me and grasps my face. “I get it. I mean it.” He presses a kiss to my lips that quickly turns deeper. I don’t want him to leave. I want to tickle him. I want him to tie me down. I want to feel like the girl I used to be. Because that’s how he makes me feel. But the reality is that this isn’t a fairytale.

He pulls away when my phone starts ringing again. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Okay.”

“But I can’t promise that I am going to keep my hands off you.”

I smile at that, those butterflies returning yet again. “Don’t.”

“Fuck, you’re killing me.”

He leans down and gives me one more quick kiss before he grabs his shoes and heads out the door.

I wait a few minutes. To clear my head, to catch my breath. To get rid of the thoughts of what me and him could be together. Then I pick up my phone and call Nathan.

“Lake.”

“What do you want Nathan? I’ve told you not to call me.”

He sighs into the phone, and I know that sigh. He’s in trouble again. “I just have a favor to ask.”

“No. I told you no more favors.”

“Please. I just need a plane ticket home.”

“Why? I thought you like living on the beach with the woman who birthed us.” I know my attitude is shitty. But I was having a good night, and he had to go and ruin it.

He takes too long to answer, and I know he fucked up again.

“What the hell did you do?”

I can hear him fidgeting in the background. “I just. I got into some trouble. I really need to get out of here.”

Of course he did. “Then ask mother dearest.”

“I can’t.”

Great, he probably stole from her newest husband. “I don’t know why you think I can afford to buy you a plane ticket. You know I’m still trying to pay back what you stole from Dad,” I lie.

“I heard you paid him off.”

How the hell does he even know that? I’ve never told a soul about the deal I made with that man at the strip club. “I don’t know where you heard that, but it isn’t true.”

“Dad told me.”

What the hell?

“Come on, sis, please.”

“How much is the ticket?” I ask him, hating myself for even thinking of helping him out again because I have no idea the shit it will get me into.

“Just a couple thousand.”

I gawk. “A couple thousand! I am not buying you a first-class ticket.”

“Come on, Lake. You know I can’t fly—”

“Ask Dad if you need the ticket so bad. Since it seems like you two are just fine.”

“Lake...”

“No. I’m done.”

I hang up my phone and put it on silent so I can easily ignore him. I lay back on the bed and stare at the ceiling, pissed off and confused.

I finally decide to turn off the lights, and I set my phone on the nightstand when I see a text.

**Wilder: Your pussy really is magical, babe.**

I let out a laugh, his words bringing a smile to my face even when I don't want to smile.





# WILDER

“That shot didn’t count,” Roan whines when I make a basket while playing a game of Horse in the parking lot of the venue in Cincinnati.

“This is exactly where you shot from, asshole.” I point to the ground.

“You took three steps forward!”

I shrug because it may have happened. I’m beyond buzzed right now since Roan and I thought it would be a good idea to day drink in eighty degree weather and shoot hoops while waiting for sound check. Probably not our smartest idea.

Roan picks the ball up from the ground and dribbles it around with one hand while the other holds a beer. “That gives you an R.”

“I’m the comeback kid!” I shout at him.

“If those are the lies you want to keep telling yourself.”

I slam the rest of my beer and toss the can in the trash. I open the cooler to grab another beer and find it empty.

“We’re out of beer.”

Roan walks over and sits on the ledge next to the cooler. “I got some more in my bus.”

“Same.” I look up and see Riot walking toward us. I know she is going to give us shit for drinking before soundcheck.

“Fuck,” Roan mutters.

I pat Roan on the shoulder. “This is all you, buddy. I’ll go grab the beers.”

“You’re really going to leave me to deal with her?”

I take a few steps backward toward the buses. “She’s your ex-wife.”

“Which makes it even worse,” he mumbles.

I mouth good luck at him before sneaking in between some buses so I don’t have to deal with Riot. I love the woman, but sometimes you just know when to avoid her.

I make my way around the maze of crew buses and the buses for the opening band when I hear a voice I’m starting to be very familiar with. I walk around the corner and see her pacing in front of Silas’s bus. She is wearing loose-fitted jeans with more tears in them than actual denim, and a tight crop top makes her tits look amazing. Her hair is thrown in a messy bun with loose pieces blowing across her face in the gentle wind.

She’s fucking stunning.

“I’m working on it. I promise,” she says into the phone. “I’m doing the best I can...it’s not easy...that is not what is happening.” She pauses and rests her head against the back of a bus with her eyes closed. “Yes. I’ll work faster... I know.”

She opens her eyes, and they meet mine.

“I have to go.” She immediately hangs up the phone.

“What’s wrong?” I ask her.

“Nothing.”

“You look upset.”

“I’m fine.”

That’s a flat-out lie. I take a few steps closer to her. “You know when a woman says she’s fine, that usually means she isn’t.”

“You think you know women so well?”

I smirk at her. “I’m very familiar with women.”

She raises a brow at me just as I cage her in behind the bus. “Knowing how to work a woman’s body to orgasm is a lot different than understanding their mind.”

“I practically raised my sister. So I am pretty good at understanding their minds.”

She puts a hand to my chest. “You mean your sister who is constantly giving you shit and avoiding you?”

I deflate at her comment. “You noticed?”

“Yeah.”

“She’s just pissed I brought her on tour with me.”

“Why did you?” Lake asks.

I’m not about to tell this woman that someone has been threatening me. “She needed to get away from her regular life for a while.”

“And you think you were the one who should decide that?” Her words are laced with accusation.

“Yes.”

She laughs in my face. “You don’t understand women at all then.”

She dips underneath my arm that is blocking her in and starts to walk away.

“So you don’t want to tell me what’s wrong with you?”

She looks over her shoulder. “Not particularly.”

Before she can get away, I snag her hand and pull her past two buses.

“Where are you taking me?”

I don’t say anything as I get to my bus, open the door, and push her up the stairs.

“Wilder, what are you doing?” She folds her arms over her chest as she stands in front of the couch on my bus.

I walk up the two stairs and grab her waist, unbuttoning her ripped jeans.

“Stop. We can’t do this here.”

“It’s my bus.”

“So. Someone could walk in.”

“Like who?” I ask as I push her jeans down. “Besides, I locked the door.”

“And what is this that you’re doing exactly?”

I slide my hands to her jawline. “Helping you chill out.”

“I don’t need to relax. I’m perfectly fine.”

“No you aren’t,” I whisper against her lips.

“We can’t do this,” she stammers.

I push her down onto the couch. “Stop telling me I can’t do things I want to do. Like eat this pussy right now to make you relax.”

“Wilder!” she shouts as I drop to my knees and take no time diving between her thighs.

Apparently she really did need this because I feel the tension in her dissipate as I eat her out.

“Okay, maybe you were right,” she says breathlessly.

“I told you I know women.”

“Their bodies.”

I pull away and look up at her. “Are you telling me that whatever was bothering you is still on your mind?”

She doesn’t say anything and instead grabs my head and pushes it back between her thighs. I lick and suck on her clit working fast to bring her to the brink.

But just when I know she is about to fall over the edge, the door to my bus opens.

“Oh my god!” I hear Saylor shout at the same time Lake does.

I quickly shift my body to cover up Lake and turn my head to look at my sister. “What the hell, Say?”

“You told me you wouldn’t have sex on this tour bus!”

“What are you even doing here?”

She gives me a look like I’m stupid. “This is my bus, too, you know.”

Lake buries her head against my neck and whispers. “Just make her leave so I can go.”

I don’t even have to say anything because Saylor runs off the bus. Brat left the door wide open, though.

“Fuck, I’m sorry.”

I think Lake is crying, but she’s laughing silently into my chest.

“What’s so funny?”

She pushes me off her then stands and pulls up her jeans. “You really don’t know women at all.”

I go to say something but can’t find the words. Instead Lake cups my cheek and kisses me briefly.

“I’ll see you later, surfer boy.”

I watch as she walks off the bus. I’m pissed I didn’t get to watch her come. And even more pissed my dick is fucking rock-hard right now, and she walked away from me.



## WILDER

I sit at the bar alone in the hotel lobby waiting for Lake as I think things over. I texted her to meet me tonight because I was bored and thinking too hard about something I don't want to think about—the idea that something is going on with Knox and Saylor. The last week he has been pretty much nonexistent when it comes to going out. I know he said he was fucking someone and wanted to keep it a secret who it was, but how am I supposed to feel when my best friend is keeping secrets from me? I try not to get angry over the fact that I think they are fucking each other, but I am. That was one thing that has always been a rule. Saylor was off limits. Hell, the two of them are eleven years apart. And Knox's past is not something I want Saylor involved in. Not that I am much better. If Saylor ever found out what I did, she would never think of me the same way.

“You okay?”

The sweetness of Lake's voice jars me from my thoughts as she takes a seat next to me.

“Hey, babe.”

“What's going on?”

I shake my head and grab the shot off the bar I ordered a while ago.

She looks at me then the empty shot glass. “Okay, I see that you're in a mood. I'm gonna head out.”

I grab her arm so she can't leave. “Please don't.”

“Then talk to me. What’s going on?”

“I think something is going on with my sister and Knox. They’ve been spending so much time together. And I don’t know. What if they are hooking up? Maybe they are more than just friends.”

Her brows raise when she hears it, and I’m curious if she sees it, too. She’s been hanging around enough.

“No way.”

“You don’t think so?” I ask.

She shrugs. “I mean, it’s possible, but I don’t see your best friend going behind your back like that. Not to mention the way Knox is—”

I cut her off. “Please don’t even bring up the way he is sexually. I don’t want to think about that at all.”

She laughs. “You know you like to act the same way. Once Knox wasn’t the one leading, you kinda took over.”

“You’re changing the subject.”

Her fingers graze my arm. “And I think it’s hot. I like when you become dominant in the bedroom.”

“Lake.”

“You still haven’t tied me up, you know.”

And fuck those words make my dick hard. “The night is young.”

She smiles at me, and suddenly I realize exactly why she said it. I could give two shits right now about my sister and whatever she may be doing with Knox if it means I can tie Lake up and fuck her brains out.

“So your sister?”

I flag down the bartender. “I don’t want to talk about my sister anymore.”

She smiles at me. “Good. Even if she is fucking Knox. I don’t want to think about that. I’d rather think about what you are planning on doing to me tonight.”



“Babe, if you don’t quit bringing up sex, I will fuck you on this bar top. I don’t care about the press or the fact I’ll go to prison.”

The bartender clears his throat. “Umm. about that, please don’t have sex on my bar.”

Lake throws her head back in laughter. “Not planning on it. This one you may need to watch out for though,” she says as she hooks her thumb toward me.

The bartender ignores her comment. “So what can I get you?”

“I’ll have another beer, and she’ll have a dirty martini. Dry. Extra olives.”

He nods at us and walks away.

“So how was your day today?”

We had the last two days off. Yesterday we got to Pittsburgh, and tomorrow night we have our first of three shows here. “Not too bad. I worked with Silas and Jackson on new music.”

“Wow, Silas actually pulled his head out of the sand?”

I nod. I told her all about Silas and the shit he went through a few days ago and how hard it’s been on the band.

“You think his mood has changed for good?”

I shrug. “It’s hard to say. He goes through phases. Although it didn’t seem like drugs were putting him in a good mood today.”

“That’s always a plus.”

I nod. “I’m hoping he is learning to move on. But I don’t have much faith in that.”

“Grief takes time. You can’t rush it.”

“You speak like you know of it.”

She grabs her martini and takes a long swallow then hangs her head.

“Lake?”

“I’ve just been through a lot over the last few years. I didn’t lose anyone per se, but it still feels like I did.”

“What happened?”

She chews on her lip, something I notice she does whenever she doesn’t want to talk about something. “It’s a lot, and I don’t want to bore you with my past.”

“I’m a good listener.”

“Are you? ’Cause you do like to talk a lot.”

“Hey now. I like talking. What’s the big deal?”

“And gossiping.”

“No harm, no foul.”

She laughs at that. “Maybe some other time. I don’t want to get into the gritty details of my life. But I’ve learned to cope with it.”

I look at her and see sadness in her eyes. Maybe she has learned to cope with it, but I also see that even if she can cope, it still eats away at her.

“I’ll tell you about it. Maybe. In a few days or weeks. Maybe when I know for sure this thing is... I don’t even know what I’m talking about.”

She doesn’t have to say it for me to understand. We are supposed to be fucking, but us talking about our problems seems more like a relationship than anything else. And maybe she’s right. Maybe we shouldn’t be talking about the things that bother us, and we should just focus on sex.

She takes a long drink from her martini. “So what did you want to do tonight?” she asks me.

“Besides you.”

“I think we have made it entirely clear that you want to do me tonight.”

“Well then, baby, what are we waiting for?”

She smiles at me with that seductive grin she gets sometimes, and I can’t help but lean forward and kiss her. Her

lips are soft against mine, and I relish the feeling of them. I'll never get enough of them. The bartender clears his throat behind us, and I quickly pull away.

“Close me out,” I tell him, not taking my eyes off Lake's.

She gives me a secret smile.

“So do you really want me to tie you up tonight?” I ask her.

She looks at me with the most sweet and innocent face and deadpan. “I would be disappointed if you didn't.”



# LAKE

I hate myself. I really do sometimes.

Getting to know more about Wilder has me wanting to quit this job I have and just be with him. I have barely even broken the surface on anything personal either. And after just a few short conversations, I'm ready to give up everything. Ready to find a way to pay that man back just so I don't owe him a debt, and I can be free of him and the mystery woman. It was stupid of me to take his offer to get me out of the situation I got myself into with my ex. Which was all because of the situation with my dad. And my stupid brother.

But the thing that is making me feel so terrible about myself is that I know something personal about Wilder now. Something that can get me closer to him admitting whatever it is that he did. I still have no idea why this will benefit the woman at all. Ideas are going in every direction, maybe she is a scorned ex. Maybe she had a secret kid with him. I have no idea. But she asked me to get more personal with him. Find something out that would spur him to tell the truth, and maybe this tidbit of information about his sister and Knox will do just that.

I hate myself even more because I spent the afternoon watching her. Seeing exactly what it was that she was doing. I saw her speak to Knox once, and the conversation looked intimate. But it could all be in my head.

Either way, I shouldn't be doing what I'm doing now. Which is standing outside a tattoo shop in Pittsburgh watching

through the window as Knox wraps his arms around Saylor.

I feel bad for Wilder. He is going to be so pissed when he finds out the truth. But I try not to let that affect me. I need to think about how this benefits me. How I needed this information to move on with my own life.

I walk away from the shop window and hail a cab to get back to the hotel. Knowing what I need to do in order to get out of this damn deal.

When I'm back in my room, I scribble onto a note, "I know what your sister has been up to" and shove it into an envelope just like all the other notes I left. I make my way back to the hotel lobby where I saw Wilder sitting with Jackson earlier and see he's still there. So I quickly make my way to his room and shove the envelope under the door.

I hate myself. I really, truly do.



# WILDER

I sit on the bed in my hotel room and read the note again.

*I know what your sister has been up to.*

I'm pissed. Annoyed. Frustrated. So many emotions are flooding through my system right now. Because I want to know what the hell this note means. Saylor left my room twenty minutes ago, and she had no idea what it meant. Neither did Knox. But I can't shake the feeling that something is going on with them. I don't know why I feel that way. I know Knox. He's my best friend, my brother, and he would never go behind my back like that. But the fact is the two of them have been hanging out a lot. The way he hasn't once brought up joining Lake and me. And him even telling me he is fucking someone. Not to mention the way he knew Saylor wasn't wearing panties earlier. And I don't think that had anything to do with the stupid excuse he gave that she took them off because they were rubbing against the tattoo. Things just don't add up.

I wish I had someone to talk to about this. But Knox is the person I would turn to. Silas is a close second because that man just gets women on a whole other level, but he is just too broken right now to be of any use.

I could talk to Jackson or Roan, but the only person I really want to talk to about all of this is Lake. And she isn't



answering her phone right now.

So I head out to the store and grab a bottle of whiskey to drown my mind in. Anything to get my anger from these notes out of my head and anything at all to get me to quit thinking about what Knox could be doing behind my back.

---

I'm sitting in my room drinking straight from the bottle when I hear a knock on my door. Lake told me she had work to do tonight so I have no idea who it could be. I'm still pissed about the note and the fact that Knox took Saylor to get a tattoo. I should have known something was going on with them. Even though they choose to deny it's anything sexual, that it's just a friendship. But I saw the way my sister was looking at him. And I just know. There is no doubt in my mind. But I can't just flat-out say something and lose my best friend over it.

I open the door, and I am surprised to find Lake on the other side.

"I thought you were busy tonight."

"I was. But I got my work done."

"Good for you." I turn from the door and walk back to the chair I was sitting in and take another long pull from the bottle of whiskey. This isn't even my drink of choice. But guzzling a bottle of gin sounded like a bad idea.

Lake followed me into the room and now stands across from me with her arms folded across her chest. "What's your problem?"

I can't tell her about the note. She doesn't want to talk about personal shit at all. Not that I would let her in on that. It's far too dangerous. Especially because I knew what they were talking about leading up to this point. But now that they are directed at whatever my sister is doing, it's going too far. I could take the threats to me about keeping her safe, but now that they are about her doing something I'm pissed. Because I

know she is hiding something from me, and I can guarantee it has to do with my best friend.

“I don’t have a problem,” I tell Lake. Even though it’s the furthest thing from the truth.

“Really?” she asks, raising a brow at me. “Because you are sitting in a chair right now drinking straight from a bottle and giving me attitude. I would say you definitely have a problem.”

“Can you just leave?”

She rips the bottle from my hand. “No, I can’t.”

I clench my jaw in frustration. “What the hell, Lake? You said you don’t want to talk about personal shit, so I don’t know why you’re still standing there.”

She opens and closes her mouth a few times before she takes a shot from the bottle herself. “Well maybe it’s finally time that we did.”

I laugh at her. “Yeah, okay, Miss Heart of Stone. I don’t think so.”

“Seriously, Wilder, what is your problem?”

“Just get out of my room, Lake.”

She groans in frustration. I know I’m being a dick, but I’m halfway to drunk and also annoyed as shit with everything in my life.

But she does what I least expect. Which is walk over to the chair and straddle me, setting the bottle on the table next to me then pinning my arms down on the arm rests.

“I’ve spent the last two years working as a stripper.”

Now that clears the fog in my head. “What?”

“It’s a long story, and I’m willing to share it with you. But you need to share something with me.”

I don’t even know what to say. I feel like she just dropped a bomb on me. Of course the lower half of my body is turned on as fuck now. Not just because she is straddling me, but

because I know how those thighs got so toned. And how my dick would love for her to give me a lap dance.

Focus, Wilder.

“What happened? Is that why you aren’t a stylist?”

She nods. “I had a job. Maybe like six months after we hooked up that night I finally found a company that would hire me. I was so excited, my dream job. Unlike the one I have now. And I was good at it. I was an assistant to a junior stylist to one of the leading stylists in LA. I was going places. I didn’t feel like just a socialite anymore. I thought I was finally going to be something other than the platinum blond with nice tits that was just good for a laugh and a good time.”

“You do have nice tits,” I tease.

“Wilder,” she groans.

I pull my arms out from under her hands and hold them up in surrender. “Okay, okay.”

“I was so close to getting a coveted junior stylist position which still wasn’t where I wanted to be, but it was one step closer. And then my fucking brother went and screwed up everything.”

“What happened?”

“Unlike me, who wanted more than just the socialite life, he didn’t. He had no problem living off daddy’s money. Which is crazy because he got into law school and actually had something going for him. His was the path Dad wanted him to be on. But he got caught up in drugs. He moved to New Orleans at some point in the three months prior to my life falling apart. And I don’t know what he did, but he ended up stealing a bunch of money from our Dad. Dad ended up threatening to cut him off and put him back in rehab. I knew rehab was the best option for him. But if he was cut off, there is no way he would have stayed. So I took the fall. I told my dad I took the money to start my own business, that I thought the six months of experience I had was enough to make it on my own, and I lost the money to some asshole businessman who took it and ran. Dad lectured me for a week straight about

how I should have known better. He had taught me about business since high school. And when he heard what I did, he ended up disowning me. The sad thing is I'm not even sure if it was over the business or over the money."

"Holy shit, Lake. I'm so sorry."

"It's fine. I've managed to get through it all."

"You sure you are doing okay? That's a lot."

She shrugs. "I mean it hurt. A lot. I lost all my friends. My family. My trust fund. I was kinda just put out. Then of course the paps had to go and write an article about my fall from grace."

"And you lost your job?"

I nod. "I don't know how they found out about the lie I told my dad, but they saw it as sabotage and fired me. I couldn't really explain to them it was all a lie to save my brother's ass. Too many people are connected in that damn city."

"So why did you become a stripper?"

She looks down at her lap and twists her fingers together. "My dad said I had to pay him back for the money I took. It was over a hundred grand. I knew someone from high school that told me she could help me out. She was the one friend I didn't really lose. She was always the girl getting into trouble at our private school, and she kinda went through the same thing with her family. So she got me a job where she worked."

"Some classy place?"

"Hell no. Neither of us could risk running into the people who used to be in our social circles. Besides, I was living in a bad part of town so I could afford rent. And this place wasn't too far away. It wasn't terrible but definitely not classy. But it made me enough money that I was able to pay my dad back. Even though I literally was living off ramen noodles to do it."

I sit in thought as I process everything she told me. This beautiful, smart woman risked her whole life to save her brother.

“And where’s your brother at now?”

“Last I talked to him, he was trying to get back to LA and wanted me to buy him a first-class plane ticket from the Caymans.”

“What the hell is he doing in the Caymans?”

Her laugh comes out strained. “Living with our god-awful mother and husband number five.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah.”

I grab her hand and squeeze. “Did he ever apologize?”

She shakes her head. “No way. He takes after Mom too much.”

“I’m sorry you had to go through all that.”

“At this point I’m over it.”

I slide my hands from hers and grab her ass pulling her to move closer to me than my thighs. “At least you got this nice, luscious ass out of the deal.”

She rolls her eyes at me. “You’re such a dude.”

“A surfer dude.”

That gets her to smile. “My surfer dude.”

I wrap an arm around her neck and pull her in for a kiss. This was the first time she ever called me hers, and I know it’s a big move. This means that what we have is more than just sex. I don’t know what it is. But it’s definitely more.

When I pull away from her, I grab the whiskey bottle and offer her a drink. She takes it and pulls a long sip before handing it to me. I take another shot before opening up to her.

“I’m not convinced that Knox isn’t fucking Saylor.”

“You’re sure?” she says loudly.

I nod. “Yeah, I feel the same way. But things just weren’t adding up. And he took her to get a tattoo last night and things were awkward when I was talking to them.” I decide to omit

the whole thing about the note because that is something she doesn't need to know about.

“Did you ask them?”

“Yeah kinda. But they both denied anything. Said they are friends. And maybe they are, and my mind is going in all different directions. But I just have a feeling.”

“Are you going to ask Knox?”

I shake my head. “I think I want more proof before I say anything. Because if it isn't true, then I am definitely the bad friend for thinking it.”

“It doesn't make you a bad friend. It just means you worry about both of them. If it were true, and you are able to handle that, do you think it would work out for them?”

“I don't think I would be able to handle it. She's my baby sister. I've looked after her for years. Our parents were pretty absent, focused on their careers.”

“I get that.”

“But where your dad was mad that you apparently fucked up, my parents would have brushed it off. Not that any of that matters. But they just didn't really care about us. It was like they had us out of obligation. Well me anyway. I know that Saylor was a mistake.”

“Ouch. Does she know that?”

I nod. “Why do you think she acts the way she does? I guess you don't really know her. You don't know how she used to be. She's calmed down some, but she is still that wild child.”

“She reminds me of a hippie. At least from what I've seen of her.”

“God, she is. That girl wears tie-dye pants and smokes so much weed.”

Lake runs her hands up my chest and into my manbun, slowly pulling out my hair tie then shaking my hair loose with her fingers. “That's better.”

I can't help but pull her into me until her lips meet mine. I don't think I'll ever be able to get enough of this woman's lips. She pulls on my lower lip and sucks it into her mouth. I revel in the feeling of her full, soft lips on mine. I grab her hips and pull them down until she can feel what she does to me. She moans against my mouth, and I take advantage of her parted lips and slide my tongue inside until I can stroke hers with my own. Soft mewls come out of her, and she starts to grind into my hips. I know she can feel me getting harder by the second as she grinds into me.

I start to kiss her harder, my tongue more demanding as she gives me everything I never knew I wanted in a woman. Loyalty. Trust. This woman may as well be the death of me.

My dick becomes painful against my jeans, and I cannot take it anymore. I stand lifting her with me, she wraps her legs around my waist, locking her ankles together behind me. I move the ten steps until my thighs hit the bed then lay her down and crawl over her. My lips finally pull away from her mouth to make a path down her neck and over her collarbone. I swirl my tongue against the top of her breasts then pull her tank down and suck her pert nipples into my mouth through her bra.

“Wild,” she groans.

“I know, baby, I know.”

I pull her tank top over her head and toss it aside, then unclasp her bra and toss it wherever I threw her shirt.

I run a trail of kisses down her stomach until I come to the top of her jeans. I unbutton them and peel them over her legs until she is wearing nothing but a pair of black silk panties.

I run my finger along the edge of them. “These are new.”

“Far from it.”

“You always wear lace,” I say as I kneel on the ground.

“When I know that I am going to have sex with you.”

“Is that not why you came to my room tonight?” I ask her, suddenly very curious as to why she showed up.

She leans up onto her elbows and watches me from where I kneel on the ground at the side of the bed.

“I mean, I guess. I’m not really sure why I came over. I guess I was bored. I had a long day, and I just wanted to hang out with you. I mean I figured we would have sex, but I guess I just didn’t think about it.”

I grin against her thigh as I press a kiss to the inside of it. “I like spending time with you, Lake. I like talking to you.” I trail my kisses higher up her leg. “Which is saying a lot because I don’t really ever talk to the women I fuck. I kind of just fuck them and forget them. But I was never able to forget you. Maybe it’s kismet that you got a job on this tour.”

She freezes, and I fear I said the wrong thing, but instead of asking her or stopping, I continue my trail of kisses on her one thigh before moving on to the other.

“And one thing I know I’ll never forget, even when you get sick of me, is the taste of this pussy.”

I pull her panties down her legs and press a soft and gentle kiss to her core. She lets out an intense groan from my soft strokes, and I can’t stop myself. I eat her out until she comes twice and is begging me to stop.

My dick is raging at this point, and all I want to do is slide into her. Feel the comfort of her wrapped around me. My day was shit, yet somehow being with her made me forget about all the things that are pissing me off.

She sits up even though I know she is spent and pulls my shirt over my head. “I want to worship you like you worshiped me. I don’t want to forget you either, Wild.”

There is a sadness in her voice like she knows this will end at some point. Like we can’t keep going on like this. And I’m sure it’s true. We live in different cities. Even though I have a home in LA, I’m never there. Not anymore. I miss it, though. The warm salt air, the cooler nights, the ocean breeze. I miss feeling the waves against my skin as I surf. Maybe I should move back to LA. We can still be a band if we live in different cities. But would Lake want that?



I shake the thoughts because I am getting ahead of myself. We aren't even a couple.

"Did I lose you there?" she asks me as she undoes the belt on my pants.

I shake my head. "No, babe, you found me."

She pulls me down on top of her and then pushes me over so she can straddle me.

"I want to taste you, too, Wilder."

I groan at her words. She hasn't had her lips on my dick since that first night. She makes quick work of pulling my jeans off then slides my boxer briefs down my thighs. Her lips are soft against the head of my cock as she languidly kisses it. Her tongue is warm against me, and it feels almost as good as her pussy does. Almost.

She slowly starts to swallow me down, and I swear I'm going to die with how slowly she is moving.

"Lake, stop teasing me."

She pulls off me with a pop. "I'm not teasing you."

"Yeah, babe, you are."

Suddenly she swallows me as deep as I can go, the head of my cock hitting the back of her throat as her gag reflex kicks in and sucks me down further.

"Fuck," I scream.

I can tell she is smiling around my dick, but then she gets back to work sucking and pulling on me until I feel like I'm going to explode. Then her hands land on my balls, and with one pull, I come so hard down her throat.

She swallows me down, every last ounce of me then slowly crawls over my body. I waste no time flipping her over and kissing the hell out of her. This woman is going to be the literal death of me.

It doesn't take me long before I am hard again as she grinds her hips against mine. I waste no time sliding inside of her in one fluid stroke.

“Wilder,” she screams. “Fuck, I wasn’t expecting you to be ready so—”

I cut her off with another thrust of my hips and then grind my pelvis into hers.

“Oh my god.”

I repeat the movement again, knowing I am rubbing directly against her clit with every single thrust.

“I don’t think I am ever going to get enough of you,” I tell her.

“Same,” she moans. “Never enough.”

I fuck her hard then soft, changing up the tempo and pressure every few strokes until she is clawing at my back. She is so close. I know it. I can feel the way her pussy clamps down on me. And then she is coming, and I come with her.

I press my lips to hers, and her hands wrap around my neck, diving into my hair and playing with it like I love.

“I really didn’t come here to sleep with you, you know,” she finally admits.

“You mean tonight?”

Her words are breathless. “Tonight, the tour. None of it. I came here to see how you were doing because your sister said you were probably upset. And the tour. I just thought it would be a change of pace from stripping. A good opportunity.”

“It was the best opportunity,” I chuckle.

She punches me in the arm, and I roll over, taking her with me so I can run my hand down her back and over her plump ass.

“I’m glad you’re here, though. For both. The tour and tonight.”

We remain silent for several minutes as we just run our hands along each other. Soon her head settles into the crook of my shoulder.

“So why the tattoos?” I ask her.

“Hmm?” she sighs, so blissed out with pleasure as her fingers trace stars on my biceps.

“You’ve changed so much since the last time I saw you. Your hair is a more golden blonde, your thinner minus the amount of ass you now have.”

“Of course you would notice my ass.”

“It’s a great ass.”

“Well thank the stripper pole.”

I chuckle into her hair. “So why the tattoos? You didn’t have any when I first met you.”

She moves her hand back into my hair. “I guess I just wanted a change. After all the shit that I went through, I wanted to be a different person. I always like them, so I figured why not get one.”

“And let me guess, one turned into many.”

“No one is lying when they say that they are addictive.”

“They are.”

“I can tell. You are covered in them. You have more than I remember.”

“Like you said, they are addictive.”

Her hand flutters over the newest one on my chest. A lion roaring in the middle of a wave. “I like this one.”

“I just got that done a week or so before the tour started. I wanted something that showed my love of the ocean.”

She looks up at me from where she lays on my shoulder. “And the lion?”

“That’s me. ’Cause I’m so ferocious.”

She laughs into my neck. “Oh my god. I am going to pretend you didn’t just say that.”

“I’m kidding.” I adjust our position so I am sitting up more, giving me a better look at her. “I went on a safari a little over a year ago, before we started working on our last album. I

just felt this connection with the lions. Something about them just clicked with me.”

“You know it’s weird to have a lion in the water.”

“That’s what all the guys said when I got it done. But it’s over my heart. It’s like a love of the two things I like the most. Well mostly.”

“I get it. And I like it, even if it is strange.”

I smack her ass hard, and she yelps.

“Not fair. I wasn’t expecting that.”

I chuckle, “I know you weren’t.”

She pulls away from me and sits up, excusing herself to the bathroom. I shift the pillows around on the bed and wait for her.

When she comes back out she looks as beautiful as ever. A slight flush to her skin. A glow on her face. I pat the bed next to me, and she crawls over to me, squeezing into my side.

“Tell me more about your sister.”

“What do you want to know?”

“You said she’s been through a lot.”

I sigh. I don’t usually tell anyone about Saylor. I figure she would punch me in the face if I let anyone in on her secrets. It’s not like I even know them all. I know she hides things from me.

“She used to be this crazy teenager. She was thirteen when I started really looking after her. When she wasn’t in school, she would be on tour with us. I kind of hate myself for it because being on tour with us led her down a dark path. Eventually, she got kicked out of her private school. And then she started drinking and partying a lot. One night, when she was sixteen, she was raped. And after that, and really ever since then, she’s had a dark cloud over her head.”

Lake tenses up next to me. “Wow. That’s a lot. And I’m sure it messed her up.”

I nod. “I wish there was more that I did in hindsight. Forced her into therapy. Made her get the help she needed. Instead, I let her go live with our aunt. She did seem better after that, but I quickly learned she replaced the alcohol with weed. But what was I to say to that? I was doing a lot worse drugs at the time than she was. And I was twenty-six and stupid. I didn’t think much of it. It wasn’t until just before I met you that I decided to clean up my act a bit. I knew the band wasn’t going to make it long. All of us knew that. So we all kind of cut back on the drugs. Yeah, we still occasionally do shit, but not to the extent we did back then. It’s why I worry about Roan now. He is quickly falling back into old ways.

“I’m sure it’s just a phase. He is depressed over his divorce with Riot, and he is just looking for a coping mechanism, even though we all tell him he needs to stop.”

I look down at Lake, and her eyes are battling sleep.

“Am I boring you?”

She shakes her head. “Not at all. I’m just so comfortable right now. And the sound of your voice is lulling me to sleep.”

I bend down and press a kiss to her head then shift us so we’re both lying down. “Then go to sleep, babe.”

I cuddle into her from behind, wrapping my arm around her slim stomach, and she gently dozes off. I’m quick to follow, my mind ready to shut down for the day.

I wake up to Lake’s warm body against mine. It’s not lost on me this is the first night Lake slept the entire night in my bed.



# LAKE

I made love to Wilder last night. It was different from every other time we were together. This meant more. I could feel it. And if I'm entirely honest with myself, I know I'm falling. But with that honesty comes the fact that I've been lying to him. Or at least omitting a giant truth I should be telling him. Maybe if I opened up and told him it's been me leaving the notes, that I'm doing it to pay off my debts, he would be forgiving. But on the other hand, through all the truths we told each other last night, he didn't once mention the notes to me. Didn't hint at anything being wrong. So I guess we are both still lying to each other.

A sadness washes over me, one that I need to get rid of before I jump on the tour bus, and we head to Philadelphia.

I don't want to ruin him. Not anymore. I'm not sure if I ever did. I think I made a huge mistake coming on this tour. Not just because of the relationship I've rekindled with him, if you can even call it a rekindling, but because I am ruining myself along with him.

I step out of the shower and dry off before lathering lotion all over my body and getting ready for the day. We leave in a few hours. Wilder asked me to have breakfast with him this morning, but I told him I needed to get some work done before we headed to Philly.

I almost wanted to ask him if he wanted company on his bus today for the short drive, but I held back. Maybe because

deep down, I know I can't do this. I can't fall. Not when I know it's all going to end in heartbreak.

—

It's been a week since that night I spent in Wilder's bed, and I wish I could say I got my shit together. But I haven't. I've spent every night with him since then. Multiple orgasms and long talks about our future. I hate myself for it all because I am not being honest with him. I mean I am telling him more about me than I've ever told anyone, but he still doesn't know that I'm the one leaving the notes. Not that I've left one in a while. I didn't want to. I just want to keep this relationship we have going. I don't want to come out of our bubble. I feel the happiest I have in years. Yet somehow, I know it's all going to crash and burn soon.

“Lake!” I hear a girl shouting after me.

I turn around and see a bright, red head of hair. Shit. How am I supposed to confront her when I literally am going to be the reason her brother finds out she has been fucking his best friend.

That's another secret I haven't told Wilder. I've been watching them, her and Knox, and I know for a fact they are having a secret relationship. I caught them coming out of a private bathroom together, both looking thoroughly satisfied, at our last tour stop.

“Hey, Lake, wait up.”

I stop and spin around. “Oh hey, Saylor, I didn't realize you were shouting my name.”

“It's fine.” She looks around and then starts talking. “Okay, so I know you are sleeping with my brother, and I just wanted to let you know that his birthday is in two days. Since we'll be driving overnight to Raleigh, we won't be able to take him out. So since we have the night off, Riot and I decided we should celebrate his birthday tonight. One of his favorite restaurants is here in New York City, so we thought it would be the perfect time.”

“It's his birthday?”



“Yeah, did he not tell you?”

I shake my head.

“That’s strange. He usually tells everyone that.”

Shit, does that mean he doesn’t feel the same way about me that I do him? Is he not falling for me, too? Am I just another notch in his bedpost? Is he really just using me like we agreed upon? A distraction during the tour.

“I wouldn’t think too hard about it if I were you. He probably just doesn’t want to seem like he is into you more than he is.”

I really don’t want to be having this conversation with Saylor, not after the note I wrote her last night. I didn’t want to, and I hate what I wrote, but I was instructed to do so. But I was too preoccupied with Wilder to leave it for her to find. And now it sits burning a hole in my suitcase.

I shake the thoughts from my head and continue my conversation. “It’s fine. We are just... well, I don’t know what we are, but—”

“I know he likes you, Lake. He wouldn’t be sleeping with you still if he didn’t. I know my brother. I wish there were things I didn’t know about him, including his very active sex life. But since he only seems to be sleeping with you, I would imagine he likes you. A lot.”

I exhale at Saylor’s words, finding some comfort in them. “Well, let me know about dinner. I have some work I need to get back to, but I should be able to free up my schedule for tonight.

---

I didn’t free up my schedule for the night. Something was just eating away at me, and I couldn’t just go to dinner for Wilder’s birthday and pretend everything was okay. Because the closer I get to him, the more I hate myself. The more I fall into a depression I keep hidden from everyone. I don’t want to do this anymore. I don’t want to be leaving notes. I don’t want to

owe anyone anything. Because I am falling. I fall for Wilder more every single day, and it's breaking my damn heart.



# WILDER

I cannot believe that Saylor has decided to be a tattoo artist. I'm happy for her. I think she has always been an incredible artist, and I'm glad to see her getting back into art. But the thing that pisses me off is that Knox is there. Knox has been encouraging her. Have I been that far removed from my sister's life that she didn't want to share this with me? She accused me that I don't pay attention and that I've been spending too much time with Lake. Maybe that is true. Maybe I have been a shitty brother.

Knox claps me on the shoulder. "You okay, bro?"

I look over at him and nod. He agreed to get a nightcap with me, which makes me only feel slightly better about the situation. Maybe I am overreacting and thinking too far into this. Saylor was acting like her usual self when I was talking to them. Joking around and teasing. Maybe they really are just friends.

"You look like you have a lot on your mind," Knox asks me as we walk across the lobby to the hotel bar.

"Have I been a bad brother?" The question just falls out of my mouth before I even realize I'm saying it.

"What do you mean?"

"I feel like I haven't been around enough. I had no idea she was drawing again, or she was interested in tattooing."

"You've been busy, man. We both have. All of us. Touring is draining."

“But you’ve had the time to find all this out about her.”

We take a seat at the hotel bar and order drinks.

“You guys seem to only fight when you’re alone,” Knox tells me. “And I am not blaming you for that. Saylor has an attitude problem. So I think she just hasn’t been telling you things because she’s annoyed with you.”

“But she tells you things.”

Knox laughs. “I’m not her brother. And I just encouraged her to start drawing. She said she needed a hobby, and she said she wanted to get back into art. She brought up wanting to tattoo.”

“And you made it happen.”

Knox shrugs. “I did.”

I sip my gin and tonic. “I just can’t help that I feel like it should have been me. I should have encouraged her.”

“Don’t think about it too hard. And honestly if you were the one who encouraged her to get into tattooing, she probably wouldn’t have done it out of spite. You know how she is. She has such a bratty attitude sometimes.”

I study Knox. He seems so nonchalant about everything, yet he knows her better than he is letting on. “Are you fucking my sister?”

He chokes on his beer and looks at me with wide eyes. “What the fuck, man?”

“I just want to know.”

“No, I’m not.”

I curl my hand into a fist because I don’t believe him. “You better not be lying about this.”

He doesn’t say anything at first, and I want to punch him in the face. Because I know. I just know.

“Wilder, it’s not what you think. We’re friends. That’s all it is.”

I take a few deep breaths to calm myself, but it doesn't work. "Yeah okay, man. I'm gonna head upstairs."

I walk away without saying anything else because I know Knox. He's been my brother for over fifteen years. And I know when he's lying. And I could tell without a doubt that he was lying to my face.

They both denied it again. I asked if anything was going on between them because this time I felt the sexual tension between them. Last time I caught them together, it was nothing compared to now. And it pisses me the hell off. He's my best friend, and he is breaking the one rule that was always known between us. He somehow convinced her it would be a good idea to sleep with him, I just know it. There is no way Saylor would have broken her promise to me to leave Knox alone. She's my sister. She had a crush, but that came and went. There is no way they can be together and be happy. They are opposites. It can't work. And I don't want it to because it pisses me off.

I find myself pounding on Lake's hotel room door. I have nowhere else to go, and I just need to take my anger out somehow.

"Wilder, what are you doing here?" she asks as she pulls the door open.

"Let me in, Lake."

Panic strikes her features, and I immediately soften my tone, knowing I probably scared the shit out of her. "Sorry, babe, I just... I'm in a mood."

"It's fine. Let me just clean up a bit."

She pushes together a pile of paper on her desk and then shoves it into her bag. I swear she is always working.

She walks back over to me and brushes my hair out of my face. "What's going on?"

"Saylor has been spending time with Knox."

She nods. "We talked about this a week or so ago."

"Yeah, well I walked in on her and him."

“So it is true?” Lake gasps.

I shake my head. “I walked in on him with no pants on. But they weren’t doing anything. Saylor, I guess, has learned to tattoo, thanks to Knox encouraging her.”

Lake looks at me, confused. “So they aren’t sleeping together? Just hanging out?”

“I grabbed a drink with him after I found them, and he was adamantly denying it.”

“So nothing is going on?” Lake asks me.

I shake my head. “According to him.”

“You are not very straight with your answers. You think he’s lying to you?”

I nod. “I know him, Lake. He is my best friend. And I know he was lying to me.”

She frowns. “I’m sorry.”

“I don’t even know what to be more pissed about. The fact they are sleeping together or the fact they are lying to me.”

She runs her fingers down my arm and squeezes my hand. “What would hurt more? Them being together or them lying?”

I contemplate that because I am not really sure. “I guess the lying is worse than them being together.”

A sadness creeps over her face, and I wonder if she’s been keeping something from me. I shake it off. She probably just feels bad for me.

“You need to talk with them. Ask them to be honest with you. Let them know that you will be okay with them together if they just admit.”

I let out a frustrated groan. “But I’m not okay with that. I know about Knox’s past. I know how he is sexually. I just—I can’t let my sister be around that.”

Lake pulls me into her. “I don’t think you have a choice.”

“You think I will lose them both if I tell them they can’t be together?”

She nods. “And you don’t want to lose your best friend and your sister.”

“So how do I confront them?”

“Don’t.” She drags her fingers up my chest. “Wait until the truth comes out, and then be understanding.”

“That’s easier said than done.”

She pulls my head to hers. “It always is. But you need to figure out if you are going to accept this or lose both of them.”

I hate that she’s right. But I don’t want to think about it because she is so close to me now, and all I want is to lose myself in her.

“Take off your clothes.”

She looks at me, perplexed. “Excuse me?”

“I just want to get lost in you, Lake. So take off your damn clothes.”

She looks at me hesitantly, then rips her shirt over her head. I don’t even wait for her to finish taking her shirt off before I am leaning down and sucking a nipple into my mouth.

“Fuck, Wilder.”

I pop the rosy pink bud out of my mouth. “That’s exactly what I want to do. Fuck you.”

I grip her arms behind her back and walk her backward until her ass bumps into the desk she was working at. I spin her around and pin her chest to the desk. I don’t care one bit that I am being rough with her because I know she likes it.

She moans as I shove her shorts down with one hand, happy to find her not wearing any panties. I don’t waste any time undoing the button on my jeans and shoving my own pants down. I grip my cock that came to life so quickly by just being in her presence.

I lean over the desk and whisper in her ear. “I’m going to fuck you fast and hard, and I want you screaming my name.”



She whimpers at my words, and then I am slamming into her, forcefully. I take and take, letting out my anger on her pussy. I know I'm being rough. And she'll probably have bruises on her hip bones from the force I'm thrusting her into the desk, but I don't care. I need her and this erasing of all the thoughts that were fluttering through my mind.

I pump into her over and over, as she starts to meet my thrusts. I keep her arms pinned back as I fuck her, not giving her any kind of freedom, and it works the anger out of me. I don't care if I shouldn't be taking it out on her. I need this. I need this so bad.

I feel her pussy clenching my dick so hard that I know she is about to come.

“That's it, baby, come for me.”

She screams my name as I find my own release and then slump over her body.

“So perfect,” I mutter in her ear.

“Happy birthday, Wilder.”

“Who told you?” I ask, surprised.

“Does it matter?”

I guess it doesn't. I was a little hurt when she didn't show up to the birthday dinner Riot and Saylor threw for me last night. But tonight is making up for it.

She groans against the desk as I pull back and lift her up.

“Did I hurt you?”

She shakes her head. “No, you didn't. But I think that was the perfect birthday sex for you. And I kind of want more.”

“Perfect fucking woman,” I growl as I pick her up and toss her on the bed.



# LAKE

I need to end this all before it goes any further. Wilder walked in on me last night while I was in the middle of writing another threatening note to him. Then he talked about how lying would hurt him more than anything when it came to Knox and Saylor. And my heart literally broke in front of him. I know I am going to hurt him when he finds out the truth. And I know it's inevitable.

The feelings I have for him are too strong, and I think he feels the same way about me. There are less than two weeks left on the tour, and I know without a shadow of a doubt he is going to want to see me after this is over. Our feelings have just grown too deep. Or maybe I just want something to continue after the tour. I just don't know what I am going to do without him in my life.

Maybe I can find a way so that it's never even known who is leaving him the notes. Maybe it can all be blamed on the woman that is telling me to write them. But I know he will find out it's me. Somehow, the truth will come out, and it will destroy us.

I try to focus on work rather than thoughts of Wilder and me as I sit through a video call with the management company. I hardly even know what they are talking about. My mind is so lost in thought that I only pick up glimpses of the conversation.

By the time the call is over, I feel like an absolute wreck. I could use a drink to calm the thoughts in my head. But I have

a busy day ahead of me, prepping for the last few stops on the tour. Merch sales continue to be amazing, and I need to make sure we can get enough merch for the Florida shows, Atlanta, and St. Louis.

My phone buzzes next to me, and I see a text from Wilder asking what I'm doing, but I ignore it. I can't face the temptation anymore than it already is in my life.

---

We arrived in Tampa last night, and I am absolutely exhausted. The Charleston and Miami shows went off without a hitch.

I make my way through the buses in the parking lot and find Wilder playing another game of basketball with Roan. They've been doing it at almost every tour stop.

He isn't wearing a shirt in this sweltering August heat in Florida. I ogle him. He really is perfection. Even with that puka shell necklace around his neck.

"Lake!" he shouts at me.

I walk over to him because I can't help it. The pull to him is like a magnet. I just feel like I always need to be near him.

"Hey, babe." He pulls me into his sweaty body, and I inhale his citrusy and salty air scent. A scent that reminds me so much of home.

"How are you guys playing out in this heat?" I ask him.

"I have no choice. Roan is beating me eight games to my five on this damn tour, and I will not let him win."

I laugh. "Then maybe I should let you get back to work."

"Or you could watch me. I know how much you like looking at this gorgeous body."

I roll my eyes at him and try to walk away, but he stops me. "You free tonight?"

I want to say no. I should say no, but the pull to him is too great. "I should be."

“We all plan on hitting a club for some drinks, and then I figured I could tie you up and fuck your brains out.”

Roan groans from where he is standing five feet away from us.

I look over at him before turning my gaze back to Wilder. “Maybe.”

“Maybe?” he asks. “That is not the answer I was expecting.”

I run my hands down his sweaty chest. “I am already tired. I may not be up for drinks tonight.”

“Then I’ll pass on the drinks.”

“You have a one-track mind.”

“Need I remind you that you have a magical fucking pussy.”

My cheeks flame as I glance back over at Roan, who starts to walk away, clearly not wanting to listen to this conversation. “You are incorrigible.”

“What can I say? I like what I like.”

I shake my head at him and start to walk away.

“Tonight, Lake.”

“We’ll see, surfer boy.”

“You wound me.”

“You’ll live,” I laugh as I walk away and head into the arena.



# WILDER

I'm talking to one of the crew guys when I see my sister running past me, and I swear I saw tears in her eyes.

"Saylor!"

She doesn't stop, but she does slow down. I jog the few feet to catch up to her, and when she turns around, I know exactly what this is about. I can see the heartbreak written all over her face.

"Why are you crying?" I ask her.

She looks down at her feet and shrugs. "It doesn't matter."

I look at where she came from and then know all my suspicions are true. Fuck.

"Were you just on Knox's bus?" I ask her, trying to keep the anger out of my voice.

She doesn't say anything, but I can tell from that one look of sadness on her face.

"You're fucking him, aren't you?" She doesn't say anything to me, and rage takes over. "You two lied to me!"

Her voice is soft, "Because I knew you would get like this."

I clench my fists at my side, ready to beat the living shit out of Knox. "I told you to stay away from him."

"So this is my fault?" Her attitude starts to break free from the sadness lacing her voice.

I don't even know why I keep arguing with her. I should be comforting her because she is obviously heartbroken, and instead I am here making it worse. She eventually runs off before we can have any sort of civilized conversation about what just happened. And I find myself storming over to Knox's bus.

Knox is holding a drink in his hand as I stomp up the stairs and deck him in the face. My argument with him is all a blur, rage overtaking me for most of it. I am not even sure what I say. By the time I am storming off the bus, my vision is black, and my anger palpable. I walk back to my bus and slam the door behind me. Glad that Saylor isn't here so I don't tear into her even more than I already did.

I text Lake because I don't know what else to do. I'm absolutely livid, and I know she is the only person that can calm me down.

It takes her about five minutes before she is walking onto my bus.

"What happened?" she asks me. She must take in my disheveled appearance because she instantly knows what's wrong. "I'm guessing it's true, and you found out."

I nod with a clenched jaw. I'm absolutely livid.

She takes a seat next to me and grabs my hand, noticing the raw, red skin from punching Knox in the face.

"I see that you didn't take it so well."

I shoot her a glare. "That's my baby sister. Knox isn't good enough for her."

"Would anyone be good enough for her?"

I groan, hating that she has a point. "Why do you have to be right?"

"I'm not saying I am." She rubs the tender skin of my knuckles. "But... and don't hate me for saying this... but I think you need to accept it. If there is anyone that would be good enough for your sister, wouldn't it be your best friend?"



“No,” I mutter, even though I get what she is saying. And she is probably right.

“Well, I think you just need some time. So do they. And then maybe have a discussion with them both, like adults.”

I clench and unclench my jaw but don't say anything.

“How about I clean up these knuckles?” she asks me.

“They're fine.”

“Is Knox fine?”

I shrug. “Who knows. I decked him pretty hard.”

“Did it make you feel any better?”

I meet her eyes and tell her the truth. “No. It made me feel worse.”

She nods like she understands me completely. Which is crazy to think that someone would ever be that way with me. I never thought I would find someone who balances me out the way she does.

She presses a kiss to my bruising hand, then stands and grabs a towel in the kitchenette and dampens it. “Do you have any bandages?”

I sigh. “There should be some in the bathroom.”

She makes herself busy gathering things for my hand while I stew on all the things I just found out. My sister and my best friend. Fucking hell. What has my life become? How did I not notice this? Why didn't I say something before like I wanted to. Oh wait. I did, and Knox lied to my face.

I clench my fist causing pain to shoot through my knuckles as the skin stretches and splits.

Lake walks back over and grabs my hand, wiping away the dried and fresh blood. “You need some time to think this over, Wild. Then you need to have that discussion with them. And don't get overly emotional about it.”

“How can I not?”

“You just need to.”

“I think what I hate the most is that they lied to me. I asked him for the truth, and he flat-out lied to me.”

“Maybe he was trying to protect Saylor. If he really cares for her, he probably just wanted to make sure she was okay.”

Again, she has a point. “Why are you so good at this?”

“At what?”

“Calming me down.”

She shrugs, “I don’t know.”

I want to tell her I love her because these damn feelings I have for her are so strong, but I worry that my saying those three words will be too much. Because despite everything I feel for her, I still think she is hiding something from me.



# LAKE

I finally am alone, relaxing in my bed after a long day of setting up for the newest tour stop in Atlanta. It was one of the longest days so far on the tour, and all I want to do is relax in my bed and read a book. After all the drama that happened in Tampa between Knox, Wilder, and Saylor, I just want a break.

But the shrill sound of my phone ringing has me groaning. I reach onto the nightstand and see the damn blocked number calling me. I know this can't be good.

"Hello?"

"What is taking so long?" The woman's voice is harsh on the other end of the phone.

"What do you mean?" Because through all of this, I still have no idea why I am leaving these notes.

"He still hasn't caved and admitted the truth. I need you to ruin him."

"Why?" I ask curiously. She has never given me any information except what to write in the notes.

"That's none of your business." Her tone clipped.

"I don't see what he could have done that would be so bad." Maybe because I don't want to believe this man I'm falling for is a bad guy.

"You don't need to know."

“Maybe if I did, then I could get you the information you’re looking for.”

A frustrated scream comes through the phone, and I am beginning to question the sanity of this woman. “Just find something out.”

“Like what?”

“I need him to admit the truth,” she grits.

“I can’t get someone to admit the truth when I don’t even know what it is I’m supposed to be looking for.” Frustration laces my voice.

“He’s a bad man.”

I know I’m not going to get anything out of this woman. But she’s wrong about him. Wilder isn’t bad. A flirt absolutely. A bit of a manwhore, for sure. Maybe she is an ex. But he told me he never dates, unless that was a lie.

“One week, or I’ll make sure those problems that disappeared come back. Or worse. Daddy dearest can find out how twisted his exiled daughter really is.”

She hangs up on me, and I stare at the phone. What the actual fuck? What the hell does she know about me? And what could she possibly tell my dad that he doesn’t already know? More twisted lies would be my best bet.

But I am not going to let her get to me. Maybe I just need to find out more from Wilder. Maybe if I can get him to admit his secrets to me, I can tell the woman and then just stop writing these damn notes. Maybe then everything will be okay with me and him, and I won’t have to live this double life anymore.

I make my way to the desk and cry as I write this note. I don’t even know what it means, but it hurts. This threat I was told to leave goes beyond anything I’ve ever written. And I know if Wilder ever finds out it is me leaving him these notes, our relationship will be ruined.

I wipe my tears before they have a chance to hit the paper. I seal the envelope and leave it on my desk before crawling

into bed. Somehow I know this is going to be the end of it all.

---

I find Wilder after the show and pull him into a hall closet at the Atlanta arena.

“Lake, what is going on with you?”

“I just need you right now.”

He grins at me with that charming grin that makes my panties wet. “Well then, by all means.”

I hate that I am doing this right now. But I just know this next note I left him is going to be the end of us. Not that he’ll know it’s me, but that he will finally stop fucking around with me and focus on his sister and the threats. And I hate that I am forcing him to fuck me right now, but I just need him one last time.

I push him up against the wall and shove my panties off from underneath the skirt I have on.

“Damn, Lake, what got you in the mood?”

“I was watching you tonight, and I just... fuck, Wilder, you do something to me. You are just so sexy on that stage, and I...”

“Does it turn you on to watch thousands of people screaming my name?”

“Yes, because those thousands of people don’t get to have you the way I do.”

“Fuck yeah, baby.”

He pushes his jeans down and then slams me against the door, hooking my leg over his hip. “Fuck, I need you so bad right now. Just knowing you were watching me turns me on.”

“I need you, too.”

He doesn’t waste any time, sliding inside of me with one hard thrust.

I pull his head into mine and kiss the hell out of him. I just want us to be as close as possible. I need to treasure the moments I have with him because I know soon they will all be gone.

“Goddamn, Lake, you’re so tight. I need to be deeper.” He pulls out of me and spins me around, grabbing my hands and placing them against the door. Then he is suddenly inside of me, pounding into me so hard I swear I am going to black out.

“God, don’t stop,” I mutter against the door as he takes advantage of me in the best way possible.

Within minutes, I’m on the precipice waiting to fall. He comes after me resting his head between my shoulder blades.

“Fuck, I needed that.” He presses a kiss to my back.

I needed it, too. I hold back tears because I can’t let him see how much this is breaking me.





# WILDER

**M**y dick is hard as a rock as I suck Lake's tits into my mouth. I needed the distraction tonight after I found a note on my bus earlier this afternoon. I don't know how long it had been there, but the note not only threatened Saylor, but also let me know whoever is leaving them knows that I killed someone ten years ago.

"Wilder," she moans as I pulse my fingers inside of her.

I am about to rip my pants off and fuck the hell out of this woman when there is a knock at the door.

"What the fuck?" I mumble.

"Just ignore it," Lake groans as I run my thumb over her clit.

The knock is stronger this time, and I groan. "Give me a minute."

"I'm gonna get myself off in a minute if you take longer than that," she says with a laugh.

I am half tempted to say fuck the door, but I go to answer it anyway. I'm surprised as hell to see my sister and Knox on the other side.

They push past me into my room. "What the hell is going on?"

Lake throws on one of my shirts quickly to cover up her naked body.

"I think you need to ask her," Saylor says.

I look back and forth between the two completely confused. I have no idea what the hell Saylor is talking about, and Lake looks, well shit, she looks like she knows exactly what Saylor is about to say.

“It’s her. She’s the one that’s been leaving the notes.”

I look at my sister in disbelief. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“It’s her handwriting on those notes!” Saylor accuses Lake.

I turn toward Lake confused as fuck. “What is she talking about?”

Lake wrings her hands in my T-shirt while she looks between Saylor, Knox, and me. “I... um...”

I’m in shock as Saylor storms over to Lake and slaps her across the face. It takes me a few seconds to register what the hell just happened as I pull my sister off my girl.

“It’s your handwriting!” Saylor shouts again.

“What the hell are you guys talking about? There is no way it’s her.”

I look at Lake ready to defend her for whatever she is going to say to prove my sister and Knox’s little conspiracy theory wrong, but then Lake says, “I’m sorry... I was in trouble. I got tied up with the wrong people. I was paid to leave the notes. I have no idea what they mean. I swear.”

I step away from her in anger, frustration, and disappointment. “You? This whole time?” I start to pace the room and pull at my hair. I was falling for this girl. Hell, part of me thinks I am in love with her, and she played me for a fool.

I get up in her face. “I was falling in love with you.”

Lake is quiet as she speaks so only I can hear her. She toys with the top of my jeans, and I let her because it feels so natural, so normal, for her to be touching me. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for things to get this way. I needed the money. I told you about my past. I don’t even know who this person is. I just followed instructions.”

I don't believe a word she is saying as I pull away from her, but she stops me by grabbing my arm. "I am falling for you, too. I didn't mean for this to happen. I just... please don't ruin what we have."

I shake my head because I can't do this. I can't be with someone who set out to expose my secrets.

"Get away from my brother," my sister shouts.

When I turn to look at her I see her holding a gun. Out of instinct I step in front of Lake to block her from my sister. She has no idea how to use a gun, and I don't even know why she has one. Even if I was lied to and betrayed by Lake, I am not letting my sister shoot her.

Knox wraps his arms around Saylor and hauls her away from Lake. When I know he has her secured, I grab the gun from her hands. "Have you lost your mind?"

"Have you lost yours?" she barks. "That woman is responsible for everything. Or do you not remember how someone tried to push me in front of a car?"

"I-I didn't do that," Lake says with a shaky voice.

"Then who the fuck did?" Saylor asks with acid on her tongue.

Knox pulls Saylor behind him. "Look, we know it was you. We were tipped off. We compared your handwriting to the notes. So you better start explaining."

"I told you. I don't know who is behind it. I just took the money because I needed it. I had no idea what the notes meant. I just—"

I can't take this anymore. I can't take the lies, the betrayal. "You wrote notes threatening me and my family, all at the same time you were fucking me!" I pace the room and then explode. "Get the fuck out! Out of this hotel, out of the tour, out of my life!"

Lake walks up to me and grabs my arm. "Please understand—"

I don't know what comes over me, but my anger is at an all-time high. I lift the gun to her face causing Saylor to gasp, and Lake to turn as pale as a ghost.

"I said get the fuck out."

Lake doesn't hesitate and grabs her clothes from the floor and runs out the door.

I try to gather myself together as best I can before turning on my sister and best friend. "What the fuck? You found this out and didn't think to come to me with the information. I could have asked her. I wouldn't have threatened her with a fucking gun."

"Are you defending her?" my sister accuses me. "She is working for whoever tried to kill me."

I set the gun on the desk and rub my fingers between my eyes. "Fuck!" I yell out because I don't know what else to do. I don't know what to think. The woman I was falling for was lying to me the entire time we were together.

"Hey, man, I get it. We fucking ambushed you, but Saylor's right," Knox says.

I want to rip my hair out. "When did you find out?"

"Last night. I talked to West."

"Goddamn it" I punch my fist into a wall as my anger explodes out of me. "She was playing me this whole time?"

Knox gives me a slight nod, and I want to fucking murder someone all over again. My anger is palpable. I can tell by the way Saylor keeps her distance from me.

"What else do you know?"

"That's it. West didn't say much."

Of course, West would only give us tidbits of information. The man plays with us just as much as Lake played me.

I look over at Saylor. "I can't believe you pulled a gun on her."

“And I can’t believe you killed someone.” Her voice is covered with spite.

I look over at Knox in shock that he would let out the biggest secret I keep from Saylor. “You told her.”

He runs a hand through his beard. “She needed to know, man. This is all connected.”

“Can you two leave?” I ask, so many thoughts running through my head.

They both agree, and Knox lets me know he’s there to talk with me whenever. But I don’t want to talk with him. Not only did he go behind my back and fuck my sister, he told her my darkest secret, then came in here and accused Lake of shit.

I don’t care if the shit was true. They fucking ambushed me, and I was not ready for that. Not after I already had to deal with the fact they are together.

And Lake knew. She had to have known they were together based on those notes she left, and she never told me. She also knew how much I hated the fact they were lying to me. She could have come clean with me. She could have told me the truth about what she was doing, about my sister and Knox, and maybe things would have gone differently. Maybe then I wouldn’t feel like everything in my life is falling apart.

Maybe then I wouldn’t feel like I just lost the woman I was falling madly in love with.



# LAKE

I've never run faster in my life as I fly down the four flights of stairs in the hotel, not wanting to wait for the elevator. I get to my room, grab all my stuff, and pack up faster than I've ever packed before. There is still one more stop on the tour before *As The Angels Fall* are done, but I can't stay here any longer. Now that he knows.

I make a quick call to the tour company and tell them I quit. Then I grab my things and call an Uber. I need to get to the airport. I need to get out of here as fast as I can before Wilder comes knocking on my door, armed and ready to yell at me again. I think I am in the clear when I pull open the door, and he is standing there on the other side, his arms crossed and anger flooding his face.

"Where are you going?" His voice is like nails.

"I'm leaving. Just like you told me to." I try to get past him, but he blocks me in. Then I worry he came with that gun.

"Oh, so now you think you should leave after the truth finally comes out. You should have done it sooner."

I know he is not going to let me by, so I hang my head in sorrow. "Yes I-I... I'm sorry, Wilder. This isn't how I wanted this to happen."

"Ha, I highly doubt that. The notes, the lies. Fuck, I trusted you. I thought we had something special, Lake, and it turns out we had nothing but a pile of wicked lies. You used me. Tricked me into falling for you so you could threaten my life and my family all for some sick, twisted game of yours."

“I wasn’t lying to you when I said someone paid me to do this.”

“Bullshit,” he yells.

A couple walking down the hall turn to look at us, and Wilder pushes me inside my room.

“I don’t believe for one second that this wasn’t all some ploy. So tell me Lake what the hell revenge are you trying to get?”

“I’m not after revenge,” I say, exasperated. “I’m telling you the truth.”

“If that’s the truth, then you should have been honest with me from the beginning! When you started feeling something for me, if you ever even did, you should have told me. Been honest with me, and then maybe I would have believed you.”

“You should be one to talk! I was only told to put those notes everywhere because of something you did. And you never told me. After everything we’ve shared, you never thought to share with me your darkest secret. Maybe then I would have told you the truth.” That was a low blow. I shouldn’t be blaming him for my wrongdoings.

His anger is palpable as he clenches his jaw. “And you didn’t share yours, so I guess we’re even.”

“I guess we are,” I say, exhausted from this argument, knowing there is never going to be a good outcome from this.

Wilder laughs, the kind of laugh that makes you cringe. “You know, Lake, I really thought... you know what, never mind. It’s not even worth me saying. Because you’re not even worth my time anymore.”

“Wilder,” I say softly. Although, I don’t know what to say. I want to apologize a thousand times, grovel at his feet, do anything to make him understand how sorry I am. But I can’t. I know there is no coming back from this. Any hope I had of us ever making this work is over. All because I should have been honest with him. From the beginning. From that first time we ran into each other in the stadium in Chicago.



Wilder studies me for a few moments then shakes his head as he opens the door. “I hope you get what’s coming to you, Lake. You deserve it.”

I watch as the door slams in my face, my heart shattering. I ruined everything. And there is no coming back from my mistakes this time.

I wipe the tears that I didn’t realize were falling down my face and grab my luggage. I try to hold my head high, but it’s no use. I’m broken. This whole thing broke me. And I don’t think there is a chance I can come back from this.

Because I know without a doubt, I love Wilder Reed. And there is no way he will ever let me into his heart again.

**AFTER**



## WILDER

I'm on my third gin and tonic of the night. I'm sitting at Talisman, Charlie's bar in the Marigny, ready to get shit-faced for the fifth time this week since we've been back home. Which has been a total of five days. I managed to make it through the Atlanta and St. Louis shows without falling apart after Lake left. Guilt eats at me for that. For the way I treated her, for not listening, for just getting angry and blaming her. I should have listened. I should have let her explain. Because from what little she did explain, I know I owe her as much.

Somehow after the Atlanta shows, when I barely made it through a set, Riot tried to find out what happened to Lake. But no one on Lake's management team had heard from her after she quit. When we got back here, I almost flew out to LA to see if I could find her but knew it was pointless since I didn't even know where she lived or the strip club she used to work at.

It's like she's just disappeared. Not even West can find her. Or so he says. I'm beginning to think he knows a lot more than he's letting on, which wouldn't surprise me. He never liked it when we started making it big. When we tried to get out of his grasp. He's done everything in his power to keep us tied up with him.

"Drowning yourself again, I see," Charlie says as she walks behind the bar.

I look up at her and shrug, "Not much else to do."

She laughs. “Yeah, okay, Wild. Jackson told me he wanted to work on some new music tonight, and you turned him down.”

“Not in the mood.”

“He’s worried about you, you know.”

I finish my drink and push the glass toward her. “He shouldn’t be. I’m fine.”

She grabs my empty glass. “You don’t look fine.”

“Yeah, well, how would you feel if you find out your best friend is fucking your sister, and you lose the girl that you were falling for because it turns out she was a lying bitch.”

Charlie hands me a new drink. “I know it isn’t easy, but—”

“Please don’t try to give me advice. I already hear enough of it from Riot.”

“She’s right, though, Wild. You need to find a way to move on or at least bury this pain for a bit. You need to get through the rest of the tour. Then you can wallow.”

“I’m not wallowing. And for sure I am not waiting until the end of the damn European tour to face my feelings.”

Charlie sighs. “I know it sucks. But you need to think of the band. You need to know what this is doing to them, too.”

“You think I don’t think about them. I know what it’s doing, just like how Silas was at the beginning of the tour. But no one gave him shit for it. He was a fucking wreck for nearly six weeks. Yet because he’s Silas, everyone just let him be, but when it comes to me, everyone is breathing down my fucking neck.”

She leans her elbows on the bar to get closer to me. “Look, I know this isn’t what you want to hear, but you need to listen. You are the backbone of this band. You keep everyone together; without you, I don’t think the band would be where they are. They’ve gotten through everything because of you, Wilder, and without you, they will fall apart.”

I know I am the one that keeps us together. My sparkling personality, as some would call it, but it just feels like a dark cloud hovering over me now. “I get it.”

“I’m not saying you need to just snap out of it and pretend nothing happened. But at least try to put up some kind of front.”

I hate that she’s right, but I know I need to do that. So I just nod.

“So how are you really feeling about Lake?”

I cringe at her name. “Don’t say her name, please.”

“You know the whole Lake thing is not your fault. You had no idea.”

Of course it’s not. I had no idea that she was the one threatening my sister. Leaving notes. She could have killed her. “I know.”

“But really, Wild, how are you doing? How are you holding up? I know what I hear from Jackson, but I want to hear it from you.”

I take a long sip of my drink. “Fucking fantastic.”

The truth is I’m falling apart. No one knows the feelings I was developing for Lake. Hell, Lake didn’t even really know. But she betrayed us. Betrayed me. And I can’t forgive her for that. The band somehow came to the conclusion that if she ever showed her face again, they would let her talk. Let her explain herself. I just need to know the full truth. I need to know why she did this. I have my hunches based on the information she told me about her past, but I need to hear the words from her.

“You know I’m here if you need someone to talk to. And thank you for listening to me. Not because I am not one to judge you and your newly founded alcoholic tendencies, how about a shot of tequila?”

That gets a smile out of me. “You don’t have to ask me twice.”

“Good,” she says with a grin as she turns to grab a bottle and two shot glasses.

“You better be pouring one of those for me,” Roan says as he slides into the chair next to me.

“Hey, Roan.”

“What’s up, man?” I ask him.

“I’m just so glad you are letting me crash with you because I’m sick of walking in on Knox and Saylor.”

“Please don’t say that ever again. I don’t need the visual.”

Charlie chuckles as she sets the tequila shots in front of us. “Also a visual I don’t want to think about.”

“Seriously,” I say.

We all throw back our shots, and Charlie grabs Roan his usual drink of whiskey on the rocks then heads down the bar to check on the other patrons.

“How are you feeling about it?” Roan asks. “About them in general.”

“I’m trying to get used to it.” Which is the truth. I had a long talk with Saylor after everything that happened in Atlanta with Lake. I wanted to hear her side of things about her relationship with Knox. And while I still hate to think about them together, I know she’s happy. I know this is what she wants.

“It’s really not that bad. You know he would never hurt her,” Roan says as if he can hear my thoughts.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t make it easier.”

Roan nods. “I get it, man. I think Riot is dating someone.”

“Who?” I ask because this definitely comes as a surprise.

He shrugs. “No fucking clue. But she’s been acting weird. Getting pissed at me more than usual.”

I don’t say anything, but I am pretty sure Riot is pissed at him because of his drinking and drug use.

“You still love her, so it’s going to hurt,” I tell him.

He sips on his drink and stares at the bar. “Let’s not talk about me.”

“You brought it up.”

He flips me off then tosses back the rest of his whiskey.

Charlie walks over and refills it.

“So did you get all your shit moved in?”

“Yeah, I didn’t have much, so it didn’t take long at all. No thanks to you helping me by the way.”

I look over at him. “I fucking hate moving. And, dude, you could have hired someone. It’s not like the old days when we had to do everything ourselves.”

“I wasn’t going to hire someone to move a closet full of clothes and a handful of boxes.”

“Still too much work for me.”

“Lazy asshole,” he teases.

I roll my eyes at him and take another sip of my drink knowing this is going to be another long night of heavy drinking.





# WILDER

I wake up sprawled across the bed in a pile of drool. My head is pounding. You would think with the copious amounts of alcohol I've been drinking since I kicked Lake out of my life that my body would be used to it by now.

I groan as I roll over. I never even took my shoes off last night. Roan and I stayed at Talisman until they closed a little after three a.m., then had the brilliant idea of hitting up one of the best twenty-four-hour bars in the quarter. I think we finally stumbled in the door around eight this morning where I barely made it up the stairs and into my bed. At least from what I remember of last night.

I kick my shoes off and attempt to get my jeans off while lying down, but it's too much work. I close my eyes trying to get back to sleep, but all I see when I close them is Lake. Her golden hair, her sapphire blue eyes, that full-mouth smile of hers that I love, and that damn sinful body. And now all I can picture is her naked in my bed, tied to the headboard begging for me to make her come.

Fuck me.

This is why I drink so much. I want to get that damn image out of my mind. I don't want to think about her twenty hours out of the day. I want her out of my head. I know I'll never see her again. But my body is craving just one more touch, one more kiss, one more fuck.

Damn it. Now I'm hard.

I slide my hand into my briefs and stroke my thickening cock. I squeeze the head as I picture Lake's lips on me. The way her magical mouth would devour my dick, sucking me down so far I felt like I was going to suffocate her with my cock. I pump harder as I think about those lips wrapped around me, her tongue swirling up and down my dick. The way she would gag but keep going as I felt how tight her throat was around me. I cannot get those images out of my mind, and before I know it, I am coming all over myself.

*You need to get it together, man. You'll never get over her if you keep jacking off to memories of her.*

I wipe my hand on my shirt and manage to sit up, my head throbbing as I do it. I look over at the clock on my nightstand and see it's nearly two in the afternoon. I groan as I stand and kick my pants off the rest of the way before making my way over to the shower. Hopefully a nice cold one will get the thoughts of her out of my damn head.

After freezing myself to death in an ice-cold shower, I head downstairs. I walk toward the kitchen but see Roan in the pool sitting in a floatie with a beer in his hand and his eyes closed.

I walk outside and take in the heat of a late New Orleans summer. It's fucking god-awful out here, probably a hundred degrees.

"Already back at it?" I ask him.

He opens his eyes and looks at me. "Dude, I'm trying the ol' hair of the dog to nurse this fucking hangover."

"You feeling just as bad as I do?"

He nods. "What the fuck did we even drink last night?"

I shrug. "I'm guessing the entire bar."

He snorts. "I don't doubt that. I feel like Satan's asshole right now."

"The beer not helping?"

"It's only my first one. I may need a few more to feel normal again."

“Probably a good plan. I swear to God my brain was about to burst out of my head when I woke up.”

He takes a sip of his beer and smacks the water. “You coming in? It feels good in this heat.”

“Really? The water doesn’t feel like bathwater?”

“Close enough. But still it’s better than nothing. I’m this close to calling some ice delivery in to fill this pool, though.”

I laugh because we’ve done it before. Luckily, the pool doesn’t get as scalding as Silas’s pool which is completely out in the open. My backyard is covered in trees that shade most of the pool to keep it a little cooler than most in this city. I also live in a house that is L-shaped, the left side of the house blocking some of the southern sun. There is also a pool house off the back of the house that Roan has now taken over.

“Let me go grab some beers then.”

“Maybe a bottle of whiskey, too,” he tells me.

Now that will definitely cure this hangover.

I head back into the house and climb the stairs to grab my swim trunks before I head back down and grab a few beers out of the fridge and a bottle of whiskey from the bar.

I make my way back outside and toss a beer to Roan, who completely misses catching it, and it lands next to him in the pool, splashing him in the face.

“Jackass.”

“You took my damn floatie.”

“There are more.”

“Yeah, but I need to inflate them, and that sounds like way too much fucking work.”

“It’s not my fault you don’t have an air compressor.”

He has a point. I head over to the outdoor kitchen and put the rest of the beers I grabbed in the minifridge. Snatching the whiskey off the outdoor dining table, I walk toward the steps of the pool and kick my flip-flops off before sinking into the

mildly warm water. It's not nearly as bad as I thought it would be.

Roan flicks his beer cap at me, hitting me directly in the forehead. Fucking asswipe.

I open my own beer and down half of it before taking a shot of whiskey and handing the bottle over to Roan.

"Now that is going to cure this hangover," he says after taking a swig.

"How about you inflate one of my other floaties so I can relax."

He gives me a side-eye, but then slides off the one he is using and heads out of the pool into the pool house to grab another.

I take the one he was using and jump into it, relaxing in the water and sipping my beer. Glad we have this break from tour so I can try to get my head on straight. I know the band needs me to get my shit together. Hell, we have been a mess since this tour started. Luckily, we manage to pull it together on stage, but off stage, we are a train wreck if I've ever seen one. At least Silas is back to normal now that Marley is a permanent fixture in his life again.

Roan makes his way back outside with an inflated pool floatie and tosses it into the pool before cannonballing into the water.

"Asshole," I mutter.

He comes up holding his head. "Fuck, that was a bad idea. I think I just made my hangover worse."

I snort. "Yeah, jackass, I bet."

He swims over to the edge and grabs the whiskey, throwing back another swig before handing it off to me.

"So, man, you feeling any better after letting off all that steam last night about Lake?"

"What?"

He laughs. “I knew you wouldn’t remember. Shit, I barely remember, but you were going off about her last night, or was it this morning? I don’t remember. It was long into the night.”

“What did I say?”

“Something along the lines of how you wish you could get your hands on her and punish her for the shit she did. I think you mentioned something about spanking and rope. Then you went on spewing about how she made you fall in love with her just for her to stab you in the back.”

Fuck.

“You were going off for like thirty minutes. Until some blonde chick walked into the bar and took interest in you.”

“What?”

“You seriously don’t remember that?”

I shake my head.

“Yeah, she looked kind of like Lake but definitely was nowhere near as hot as her.”

I clench my fists at his words. I don’t want to think about him thinking Lake is attractive. Then I curse myself because it’s not like he would make a move on Lake since she will never be around again.

“The two of you made out at the bar until the bartender yelled at you, then she asked you to meet her in the bathroom.”

“The fuck?”

“I swear, bro. But you didn’t. You were actually a dick and just made her wait. She came storming out like fifteen minutes later, slapped you across the face, then left.”

“You’re making this shit up, that did not happen.”

He starts cracking up but never tells me if that’s the truth or not. I dig around in my head for any kind of memory I can think of. But once we had a drink at High Grace, everything started to become fuzzy.

Instead of letting it go, I decide to be a jackass to him. “Just taking after you.”

“That was a low blow.”

I shrug. I hate to be a dick, but the man had trouble keeping it in his pants at the end of his and Riot’s marriage. I’m assuming one of the reasons they got a divorce. He’s pretty close-lipped about the whole divorce.

“I know I fucked up,” he says, looking down at his now-empty beer. “I did a lot of things in my marriage I shouldn’t have done.”

“Hey, man, I didn’t mean to bring it up.”

“But you did.”

“We don’t have to talk about it.”

He tosses the beer bottle onto the deck, then heads out of the pool and grabs two more.

“I am beginning to think Riot is right about everything,” he concedes. “Maybe I do need to talk to someone about everything.”

“She probably meant a therapist, not some asshole like me.”

“No shit, man.” He laughs. “But I’d rather talk to you about it than some shrink who wants to psychoanalyze me and could end up selling my story to the press.”

I purse my lips and nod. He has a point.

“I just didn’t know what to do, man. I fucked up, big time. And I’m not talking about me cheating on her. I fucked up before that. And the guilt ate at me. I hated myself for what I did. And then I just turned to drinking heavily and doing fucking drugs again. And drugs fuck my head up and make me do stupid shit I know I shouldn’t be doing, but do anyway.”

“The cheating?”

He nods. “God, I never wanted to cheat on her. And I hate that I did. But when I was high as fuck all I wanted was fucking pussy. And she wasn’t always around. I guess I wasn’t

either.” He lets out a pained laugh. “For so long, we made it work. We made our crazy schedule demands work with each other and we were happy. So damn happy. But then things got so demanding. We were flying all over the world, and she couldn’t always be there because she was building her own business. I spent less time with my kids and more time doing shit I regret. And then I fucked up big time, and she started to pull away.”

“You never told any of us what happened.”

He looks at me with a dark sadness in his eyes. “I—”

“There you fuckers are!” Silas shouts as he walks into the backyard.

“Where else would we be?” I ask.

“Well, neither one of you cocksuckers were answering your phones. I figured you both secretly admitted you were in love with each other and were getting it on, or you were passed out drunk still.”

I fling my empty beer bottle at him. “Our love affair is supposed to be a secret,” I tease.

Roan actually laughs at that. Whatever dark path he was headed down quickly dissipates. “Why don’t you be useful and get us another beer?”

“You two sharing?”

I flip him off. “Only if you find two straws for us.”

The sound of a woman’s laughter has me looking through the french doors to my house as I see Marley walking out. “I would actually love to see that.”

“So why are you guys here?”

“Well everyone was trying to get a hold of you, and neither of you were answering. So I decided we should just come over. Plus Marley really wanted a pool that wasn’t a hundred degrees,” Silas comments.

“Hope that is okay with you?” she asks me innocently.



“Mar, you are always welcome at my house. That fucker”—I point to Silas—“is a different story.”

She laughs. “Well, we kind of are a package deal.”

“Unfortunately.”

Silas walks over to the pool and hands Knox one of the beers, and I take the other, but because I like to be a dick, I pull him firmly. He loses his balance and bellyflops into the pool next to me. Marley lets out the biggest cackle while I grin.

“He’s gonna kill you.” Roan laughs.

“Fucking dick!” Silas says as he pulls himself out of the pool, searching his pockets and pulling out his wallet, keys, and phone. He curses under his breath as he pulls his wet T-shirt off.

“Babe,” Marley says as she reaches for him. “Relax, it was funny.”

“It wasn’t.”

“Oh lighten up, you big turd.”

He gets a look in his eye as Roan mutters, “Oh shit.”

“You want me to lighten up. I can do that.” He pulls Marley into him and rips off the swimsuit cover-up she has on before picking her up and tossing her in the pool.

She screams as she lands in the water next to me.

I swim over to her to make sure she’s okay, but she comes out of the water laughing.

“I don’t think your plan worked, man,” I tell him.

“Whatever. I’m going to change and make us some drinks. Y’all good?”

Roan and I both nod as Silas turns and walks into the house.

“So Marlene, how’s it going?” I tease.

“Please don’t call me that.”

“I’m kidding. But for real, how are you? How are you guys... ah... holding up?”

A sad smile crosses her face for a second before she replaces it with a real one. “It’s been hard, especially being back in his house that holds so many memories, but I’m just glad to have him back in my life. It was stupid of me to run.”

I can’t help but think of Lake and wonder if she feels the same way. If she regrets running away from me. I guess even if she does, it doesn’t matter. I was the one who made her. Unlike Silas and Marley, I pushed Lake out the door. Told her to get out of my life. And I do regret that.

“Hey, I don’t really know everything that happened with you and Lake, but if she’s worth it, just know that she will come back. It’s funny how fate works that way,” Marley chimes in as if she is reading my mind.

“And how about a new subject,” Roan cuts in. “I don’t want to hear him wallowing over Lake again. I heard enough last night.”

I ignore Roan’s comment because I don’t want to talk about Lake. And I wasn’t wallowing last night. At least I don’t think I was.

“Well, I’m sure things will work out for you.”

“How can you be so sure?” I ask her.

She shrugs. “Just a feeling I have. Maybe you should ask your sister to read your cards. She can probably put a lot into perspective.”

“Yeah, not happening.”

My sister is obsessed with reading tarot cards and thinking she knows what is to come in everyone’s future. I blame Janae, Riot’s best friend, who owns a voodoo shop in the Garden District. Saylor likes to spend a lot of time there.

“Just a suggestion,” she adds.

Silas comes out in his swim trunks and two cocktails. He hands one to Marley before sliding into the pool next to her.

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Silas must have texted Jackson and Knox because they both show up an hour later. Charlie is with Jackson, and to my dismay, my sister is with Knox. It doesn't help that they walk in holding hands. But I take a deep breath and try to relax. I need to get used to the two of them because I know that there is nothing I can do to stop them from being together. I told Knox as much when we were on tour. No matter how much I hate them being together, I can tell my sister is happy.

Jackson pulls steaks out of a bag, and I am grateful the bastard came because I am starving. I haven't eaten shit since I woke up, and I'm already down at least six beers, and that's not counting the half a bottle of whiskey Roan and I threw back.

My mind filters away from Lake when I talk to the guys, and I'm grateful they are here. I don't know what I would do without them. We all went through a lot of shit when we were younger, the others were worse off than me, but we all got through it, thanks to each other.

"You owe me, Wilder," Jackson tells me as he fires up the grill as the sun begins to set.

"I've provided dinner for you countless times," I retort.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever."

"Is that a charcuterie board?" Silas asks as Charlie brings a good-sized wooden board from the kitchen.

"It is."

"You make it?" he asks her.

She laughs. "Not a chance. Ask the grill master over there where it came from."

Jackson flips her off.

"I have a feeling we're missing something," I mutter over my beer bottle to Knox, who is sitting next to me in one of the lounge chairs.

“We usually are with those two.”

Charlie looks over at Jackson, then opens her mouth. “Jax has a secret.”

“There is no way he made that,” I say as I get up and head to the outdoor dining table where she set it down.

“He sure did.”

“Dude, when the hell did you start doing this?” I ask him.

He shrugs. “I got bored. And I like cheese.”

I grab a slice of prosciutto and some white cheese off the board and shove it in my mouth. “Well thanks for not sharing this with us earlier. Fucking delicious.”

He rolls his eyes at me and goes back to prepping the steaks next to the grill.

Knox walks up and swipes some cheese off the board. “This is impressive.”

“He is rather impressive,” Charlie says as she walks up to Jackson with a suggestive look and then gives him a kiss.

“Gag me with a spoon. I don’t need to hear how he’s impressive in other departments.”

“Like you wouldn’t want to watch,” she teases.

“Ew, can we not talk about that,” Saylor says as she climbs out of the pool. “I don’t want to hear about my brother watching someone have sex.”

Marley giggles from where she is sitting at the table. “But didn’t he used to have sex with—”

“I know where you’re going with that sentence, and I’m cutting you off there. I don’t like to think about that either,” Saylor says.

Everyone starts cracking up except for Knox and me as we share a secret smile. We all know Marley was going to bring up how Knox and I used to share. Silas told her once, and the two of them watched us at a party together before we left on

tour. So she has no room to talk. Silas told us how much it turned her on.

“How about we just change the subject,” Roan groans.

“Good idea,” Knox agrees.

“I’m going to get another drink. Anyone need anything?” I say after I watch Saylor sit down in Knox’s lap.

After listening to the long list of drinks everyone wants, I head inside to grab them.

I’m making a few cocktails when I see Saylor walk in.

“Hey, can we talk?” Saylor asks me as I stand alone in my kitchen.

“Yeah, Say, you know I’ll always talk to you.”

She snorts. “Yeah, sure, Wild. You have barely said more than ten words to me in the last week since we’ve been home.”

“It’s hard, you know that.”

“I know, but it’s not going to get easier if we don’t talk about it.”

“God, you sound like the older sibling now.”

She shrugs. “I just want us to be okay. I miss you. And I never thought I would miss you.”

I sigh. “I’ve been an asshole. And I’m sorry.”

“Thank you.”

“But it’s hard to watch you with him. He’s my best friend. He knew to never touch you. And he went behind my back.”

“You know if we told you upfront, you would never have allowed it.”

“That doesn’t make it easier.”

“Wild.” She walks around the island and grabs my hand. “It never would have happened if we didn’t do it this way.”

“Then maybe you shouldn’t have,” I say sharply.

“Do you not want me to be happy?”

“Of course I do.”

“Just not with him?” she asks with a frown.

“That’s not it either.” I rub my face, trying to find the right words. “It’s just hard to watch you two together. But I know that you are both happy. And I want to be happy for you. It’s just going to take time.”

“I want you to be happy, too.”

“It’s going to take a while for me to get there.”

“I know she hurt you. She hurt me, too. But you can’t keep drinking your life away.”

I frown. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh come on, Wild, I know you’ve been going out like every night with Roan. And the two of you were drunk when we showed up.”

“I wasn’t drunk.”

“Yet you are now.”

“I’m fine, Saylor.” I don’t look at her as I finish pouring myself a rather heavy gin and tonic.

She puts her hand over my drink as I go to take a sip. “You’re not fine.”

“Can we not talk about this?”

“You need to talk about it, though. I know you still have feelings for her. She tried to destroy us, destroy our family. She could have got you killed.”

“But she didn’t.”

“Not yet.”

I finally look over at her. “If someone wanted to kill me for what I did, they would have already done it.”

“But what about Lake? What if she comes back? Are you just going to let her into your life?”

I sigh. Because I don’t know what I would do if I saw her. I could either fuck her or yell at her, and I’m not sure I could

stop myself from doing the former. “She’s not coming back.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Well if she does, she won’t be leaving notes.”

“Aren’t you worried? What if something happens to you?”  
She pauses. “Or me?”

I set my drink down and look at my sister. “I won’t let anything happen to you. You have to know that.”

“You can’t always protect me.”

“Knox will.” I hate that I said it, but it’s true. I know the man loves her and would lay down his life for her.

“And what if something happens to him? Could you live with that? With something happening to your best friend?”

She knows she has me. She knows I won’t let anything happen to either of them. “We’ll figure it out when the time comes. But for now, I just want to enjoy my time with my friends and get drunk. I don’t want to think about Lake. Or the notes. Or whoever it was that was threatening us.”

“That’s the problem, Wilder, you still think it wasn’t her. But what if she was lying.”

“She wasn’t.”

“She was lying to you the whole time.”

I don’t have anything else to say to my sister. I know Lake was lying about the notes. But everything we shared, I know that was all the truth.

I excuse myself and walk past my sister, grabbing the drinks as I go. I am definitely getting drunk tonight.





# WILDER

We still have ten days before the tour starts back up for the final leg. So the guys decided we needed to get in a few practices in order to make sure we don't sound like shit at our first show here in New Orleans. It's our hometown show, and we want to sound the best we ever have. We've only been off for a week, so we don't sound bad at all. I may be the one that needs to practice the most, though, because I am still stuck in my head over Lake.

"We need to talk," Jackson says as we all set our instruments down after practice.

"If this is about me, I'm leaving," I tell him.

"Wilder, come on. You know we need to talk about this."

"I don't know what there is to say."

Jackson sinks into the worn leather couch in the rehearsal space. "You're fucked up, man. Over the whole Lake thing, and you need to get your head on straight."

I look over at the rest of the band, and they all nod in agreement, even Roan, who has had my back through all this. "You let Silas get away with being a grumpy ass for the first month of the tour."

"I take offense to that," Silas counters.

"You were, man. You were a wreck for an entire month, yet none of us had a come to Jesus moment with you."

“And for the last ten days, you’ve been shit-faced,” Knox says. “Our last show was a wreck because you were drunk.”

“I did just fine.”

“Fine enough, but that is not the level we play at now,” Jackson says. “You need to get your head on straight, man. You are letting that bitch get to you.”

I clench my fists at him calling her a bitch. No matter how much I want to hate her for what she did. “Are you forgetting how we all agreed in St. Louis that you would let her have a chance to talk?”

“That was if she showed up to that final show with As The Angels Fall. And she didn’t. And the whole situation is fucked up. Yeah, we let Silas get away with being an asshole, but it wasn’t over someone that tried to destroy you and the band.”

“She tried to explain herself to me,” I say through gritted teeth.

“But you knew deep down that she was lying, or else you wouldn’t have told her to leave.”

He has a point, but it’s a point I wouldn’t like to bring up.

Roan clears his throat. “We just need to come to an agreement when it comes to her. Are we going to give her the time of day, or are we going to tell her to get the fuck out if she shows up again?”

“I highly doubt she’s going to show up,” I mutter. “She’s MIA. I tried looking for her. I had friends out in LA trying to find her. She’s gone, man. No trace of her on socials, nothing.”

“Then you need to let her go,” Knox finally opens his mouth after keeping his silence.

I know how he feels. And I fucking hate it. Mostly because of how wrapped up he is with my sister. Another thing I hate. Another thing that’s causing me to drink so much. It’s like I got hit with two rivaling storms at the same time. And I don’t know what’s worse. The fact my sister is fucking and in love with my best friend, or the girl I was falling for lied to me and tried to destroy me. Hell, I don’t know why she did it. Or if

she was telling the truth and why the person telling her to leave the notes wanted her to do it. Maybe they just wanted me to admit I killed that man ten years ago, or maybe they were going to go to the press.

“That last note,” I grit out. “It said something about making me bleed the way my brother bled. You don’t think that maybe the man I killed had a sister?”

“It’s possible, but that still doesn’t mean Lake wasn’t lying,” Jackson answers. “For all we know, it could have been her brother.”

“It wasn’t. Her brother is alive.”

“A brother. How do you know she didn’t have two?”

“Because she isn’t some random chick,” I shout. “She’s the daughter of a goddamn entertainment lawyer that is one of the best in California. She was a damn socialite before her life fell apart.”

Jackson sighs. “Look, man, I get it. Things don’t add up, but we need to face the facts. Lake was behind all of those notes. You do remember Silas was getting notes, too.”

“Yeah, I know, but Lake never even mentioned that. I don’t think she had anything to do with—”

“Stop standing up for her, Wilder,” Knox yells. “We need to come up with an agreement when it comes to her as a band. We either give her the time of day, or we don’t.”

“I say no,” Silas says.

“I’m with Silas,” Jackson agrees.

Knox looks at me. “You know my vote.”

“Then it’s settled,” Silas confirms. “If she ever shows up, you tell her to get the fuck out.”

I look over at Roan, and he shrugs. I know he has my back. But his vote means shit since the others agreed.

“Whatever,” I mutter as I stand. “You all think you can control how this is making me feel, so fuck you.”

I storm out of the practice space, pissed off. I know I should listen to the guys, they are my best friends, but they don't know the turmoil I am going through. Of course I've thought about telling Lake to fuck off if she ever came back into my life. But there is also a part of me that wants her back, wants to give her the time of day so she can explain herself. Because all I want is the truth.

---

I haven't spoken to anyone since practice yesterday. Even Roan has left me alone, keeping to himself in the pool house while I got shit-faced in my house last night. I'm still nursing a hangover, and it's nearly nine o'clock.

I hate the fact that I'm pissed at the guys, too. I know they are just looking out for me, but I need to be able to make my own decisions on this entire Lake situation. And I've come to the conclusion all I want is the truth. At least I think that's what I want. I'm not really sure how I would react if I saw her again.

I decide this hangover is too much to deal with, so I make my way to the bar in the corner of the living room and pour myself a drink just as a knock comes on my door.

I don't know who the fuck it could be. Probably Saylor, since she continuously texts me asking me if I'm okay. But I ignore her just like everyone else in my life right now.

I down my entire drink in hopes it will chill me out enough if it's my sister at the door. Of course knowing her, she would just barge right in.

The knocking happens again as I make my way down the hall to the door.

The incessant knocking is doing nothing for my head. "Okay, okay, I'm coming. Jesus Christ."

I open the door, and I nearly fall backward in shock to see Lake on the other side.

"What the fuck?"

“Wilder.”

“What are you doing here?” I ask her angrily. I don’t even know why I’m angry. Just yesterday, I was begging the guys to give her a chance.

“We need to talk.”

“Like hell we do.” The words are a surprise as they come out of my mouth.

“Wild.”

“No, Lake. Just no. How the hell did you even find me?”

She wrings her hands together. “The internet. Now, are you going to give me a chance to talk?”

“Why the hell should I?” I ask her because honestly now that I see her, all I feel is anger. Maybe my hangover is fueling it, but it’s true. Seeing her stand here in my doorway makes me feel nothing like what I thought I would. The pining I secretly was doing for nearly two weeks is over, and all I want is for her to be gone. Out of my life for good.

“You know that I left without explaining myself.”

“I told you to get the fuck out for good reason. And I’m about to tell you that again.”

“I just want you to know the truth,” she pleads. “Please.”

I almost break at that. At her begging. But I know I can’t. I need to be stronger than what my heart wants. I need to let her go for good. Because how am I supposed to let her into my life when she ruined things and ruined me. She broke my goddamn heart.

“No.”

“Wilder.”

I sigh. “I said no, Lake. I mean it. I’m done. I can’t—” My voice breaks as my heart battles to take control.

“I care about you. I want you to know that wasn’t me. That wasn’t the person that I am.”

“Then I have no idea who you are.”

“There was truth to my words. When we were together, it was real. I promise you that.”

I scoff. “Your promises mean nothing to me now.”

“Just give me a chance to—”

“Get the fuck out, Lake.” I somehow find the strength to listen to my head. “Leave. Don’t come back.”

“Wilder.”

“*Get the fuck out!*”

Her sapphire blue eyes sadden before she hangs her head. “I still care about you.”

“And I don’t.”

She nods like she is finally getting it through her beautiful, thick skull that I want nothing to do with her. Which is a lie. I wish I could have her. But I can’t. I need to listen to the band, my brothers. The ones who have been with me through thick and thin for over twelve years.

I watch as she walks away. Her head still hung low in shame.

I slam the door once she makes it to the sidewalk and lock it behind me. I turn and lean my back against the door, scrubbing my face trying to piece together what just happened. But I’m at a loss. I didn’t think she would come back. I never expected that. And even though my heart is telling me one thing, I know I did the right thing.



# WILDER

I'm at Talisman again. I know, surprising. But after Lake came to my house last night, I wanted nothing more than to bury myself in a shit ton of booze.

So I did. And now I'm here nursing another damn hangover.

Charlie eyes me cautiously. I know she's worried about me. Everyone is. But I don't really care. And I haven't told a soul that Lake showed up last night. I know they said weeks ago that they would give her a chance to explain herself, but I know that's not the case anymore. I'm also worried about what the hell I will do when I actually let her explain herself. Because I can't guarantee I'm going to be a nice guy.

"Need another?" Charlie asks me.

I look down and realize my glass is empty.

"Yeah, I'll take another."

She gives me a sad smile but takes my drink and pours me another gin and tonic.

I'm scrolling through social media on my phone when someone sits on the chair next to me.

"Hey," Knox says as I look over at him.

"Hey."

"How are you doing?"



I could tell him I am an absolute emotional wreck with Lake showing up last night, but I am not sure I want anyone to even know about that yet.

“Oh, just one drink away from having another,” I joke.

“So you’re doing shitty.”

I laugh. “I guess I am.”

He sighs. “Look, I hate that you are going through all this right now. It’s kinda like what Silas went through but—”

“It’s entirely different. I told her to leave. I told her to get the fuck out even when she was trying to explain herself to me. I wouldn’t listen. I wanted nothing to do with any of it.”

He nods. “You were emotional then. I get it. I would have done the exact same thing.”

“Yeah, well, it still fucking sucks.”

“I’m sure it does.”

Charlie drops him off a beer, and he takes it.

“So did you come here just to talk about my feelings or for some other reason? ’Cause we haven’t talked much since I found out you are with my sister.”

He leans on the bar and pinches the bridge of his nose. “I know. And we really do need to sit down and have a talk. I miss my best friend.”

“But?”

“I talked to West.”

“Oh.”

“He wants to meet tonight. In like twenty minutes actually.”

“Is this about the notes? Did you finally get him to look into it ’cause he wouldn’t listen to me?”

He nods. “Yeah, I think so anyway. Not really sure what this meeting is about, but he asked for you to come along.”

“Okay.”

An awkward silence forms between the two of us, and I don't really know what to say. It used to be so easy for us to have a conversation, but it suddenly doesn't come easy since my sister got between us.

I'm looking for something to say to him when I see a girl with blonde hair walk into the bar. And I'm speechless. How the hell did she find me here?

Knox must see some look on my face because he turns to the door and sees Lake. "What the fuck is she doing here?"

I take a deep breath. "I don't know. She came to my house last night. Said she wanted to talk, but I wasn't in the mood, and I turned her away."

"She's been in New Orleans this whole time?"

"I have no idea."

I watch her as she cautiously walks over to me, her eyes never leaving mine. And that damn feeling hits me in my chest. The longing, the need. But I push it as far down as I can. Because I can't let her get to me. Even if I told myself I would let her explain herself. I know that my heart will just forgive her, but I need my head to be on straight for this conversation, and I'm already three drinks in.

She walks up to me and manages to squeeze her way in between Knox and me. She's so close I can smell her vanilla and salty air scent. She looks thinner than she did before, though. And she has bags under her eyes. Maybe this has been as hard for her as it has been for me.

And there goes my damn heart getting into the middle of this.

"Hey." Her voice is soft.

"Lake, what the hell are you doing here?"

"We need to talk."

I take a deep breath to hold in the anger I know would explode if I didn't. "I know we do, but this isn't really the time or place."

“I can’t keep doing this, Wilder. I can’t keep holding everything in. I’m literally falling apart over here without you in my life.”

“Maybe you should have thought of that before you threatened him and his sister and put the entire band at risk,” Knox snaps.

I look up at him, surprised he got so defensive, probably because of Saylor.

“Please, Wild,” she begs.

I look around the bar and see that it’s starting to fill up, and sooner or later, someone will recognize me and Knox. And I don’t want the drama being slapped across some magazine.

“Fine, but not here.”

“Wilder,” Knox says, looking at me and tapping his watch.

“Shit.”

“This can’t happen now, Lake. I’m not even sure how you found me here, but Knox and I need to go.”

“Then take me with you. I am not leaving until we have this conversation.”

“Lake,” I sigh. My chest aches for her. Because I can see that guilt on her face, see the need that she has to have this conversation because she is doing about just as well as I am.

“Please, Wilder. I just... I need to talk to you.”

I look at Knox, and I can tell he isn’t happy about the expression on my face, but eventually he agrees.

“Fine. You can come with us. We need to run an errand.”

She turns and looks at Knox and nods her head. “Okay.”

“Charlie,” I yell, grabbing her attention. “I need to close out.”

She looks between Knox, Lake, and me and frowns. “On the house tonight.”

“Thank you,” I say as I throw a twenty on the bar for her and stand up from my chair.

I grab Lake's hand out of habit and pull her out of the bar, with Knox following behind us.

I walked here tonight, so I drag Lake to Knox's SUV that is parked a block away. I open the back door for her, and she climbs in. I want to say something, but I'm at a loss for words. There is nothing I could say that would fix us at this point. Nothing that would be short. It's going to be a long conversation that we have.

Knox pulls me aside before I can climb into the car.

"You are really going to have this conversation with her?" he asks me.

"I need to."

"I thought we finally agreed as a band to forget about her."

"Because I thought she was never going to show her face again. But she's here, Knox. She's here, and I just... I don't know. I feel like I need to talk to her."

He sighs but nods his head. "I get it. I do. And I know you don't want to hear this, but if it was me in this situation with Saylor, I would feel the same way you do right now."

"Thanks, man. Please don't tell the guys yet, though. Not until I talk to her."

"I won't. I know what this means to you."

I go to get in the car, but he grabs my arm. "What about West?"

I hate bringing her to wherever we are meeting him, but I don't want to let her out of my sight either. "She can stay in the car."

"She'll ask questions."

"And I won't tell her the truth," I tell him quietly. "I promise you that."

He clenches his jaw but agrees. "Let's make this quick."

We both get into the car and drive a few minutes north to one of the bars that West has on his payroll. Knox pulls down

a dark side street and parks the car. West is already here leaning against his Rolls Royce under the barely lit streetlight.

I turn in my seat and look at Lake. “Stay here. Don’t move. Don’t make yourself known to anyone that you’re in the back seat of this car.”

“What are you doing?” she asks me.

Knox gets out of the driver’s seat and shuts his door.

“I’ll tell you later.” I don’t give her anything else as I climb out and follow Knox over to meet with Carter West.

“So glad you guys decided to show up,” he says sarcastically.

We’re late. I know that. But Lake kind of put a damper on our plans. The thing is West hates when people are late.

“We got tied up with fans,” Knox lies.

“Oh the pains of being famous.”

“Look, we’re here now. So just tell us what you found out.”

He unfolds his legs that were crossed and takes a step toward us. “Not much. I traced her phone records. It seems she was getting calls from a blocked number.” He pulls a piece of paper out of his pocket and hands it to me. “Here are the dates and times of the calls. See if they match up with your notes.”

“That’s it?” I ask him.

“That’s all I got.”

Knox clenches his fist. “You said you had answers.”

West shrugs. “I had some answers, yes. And I gave them to you. Do with that as you wish.”

“Are you going to keep looking into this?” Knox grits out.

West gives him a diabolical smile. “I can, but it will cost you.”

“I’ll do whatever you need me to do.”

“Knox,” I say, but I know there is nothing I can do to stop him. He has his mind set on making sure my sister is safe. And I hate that he offers West favors so willingly.

“We’ll be in touch,” West says before turning and getting into the back of his car without another word.

“Fucking asshole,” Knox mutters under his breath.

I turn and head back to the car. Pissed that we got shit from West yet again, yet here we are owing him another favor for nothing. I hate how this man has us wrapped around his finger. Even after all these years.

I climb into the SUV at the same time as Knox. I wait until West pulls away before turning to Lake.

But what I see is not what I expect at all. She’s visibly shaking, and her face is pale.

“What the fuck?” I ask her.

She looks at me with fear in her eyes. “Who was that man?”

“No one you need to worry about,” I tell her.

“No. But I do,” she says.

“Why?”

“It’s him. The man who approached me in the club.”



# LAKE

I try not to panic. But I am. I'm panicking. I feel like my heart is in my throat as I look at that man. He looks all too familiar. A face I would never forget.

I barely even know what I am telling Wilder and Knox as they question me, and eventually they stop when I think the only words coming out of my mouth are gibberish.

"I'm taking her home."

I barely listen to what Wilder is telling Knox as he pulls out of the side street we're on.

I wring my hands together, trying to piece together all of this information, but I can't think straight for the life of me. Fear has me in a chokehold.

---

Wilder slams the door behind me as he storms into his house. He's pissed, and I'm not really sure why. I mean, it could be over me showing up, or that meeting with that man, or the fact he brought me to his house.

I follow him into his home, taking in all the details as I try to pull myself together. Knox dropped us off, muttering something I couldn't hear as Wilder pulled me out of the car.

His foyer is painted black and is covered with macabre artwork and framed dead moths and butterflies. The hall of the foyer opens up into one giant great room. I know that he must



have had it remodeled. It's a completely open space, unlike most older homes here with each room sectioned off.

He leans against the kitchen island and studies me. I don't even know where to start or what to say. Does he want me to explain myself, or did he bring me here for a different reason?

"How often have you been in contact with him?" he asks me in a serious tone.

"Who?"

"The man I was meeting with in the alley."

I swallow. "I've only ever spoken to him once in my life."

"When was that?" he asks me.

"Umm... a few months ago," I say as I try to calm down. "Before the tour. He came to the strip club I worked at and offered to pay off my ex's debt if I made a phone call to some woman. She was the one who got me the job on the tour."

His eyes widen in surprise. "The one who asked you to leave the notes?"

I nod.

"Damn it. I fucking knew it."

"Knew what?" I ask nervously.

"That he was behind this entire damn thing." He pauses as he thinks things over in his head. "He can't know you know I met with him tonight. He can't know you know that we talk with him at all."

"Why?"

Wilder sighs as unfolds his arms from his chest. "He'll kill you."

I take a deep breath at those words. Why would this man want to kill me if I knew that he and Wilder talk? "Who is he?"

Wilder clenches his jaw like he doesn't want to even say the next words that are going to come out of his mouth. "The

crime lord of this city, the state, and pretty soon half the south.”

I gasp. “H-How do you know him?”

He remains silent, and I know it’s bad news.

I take a cautious step toward him until we’re only a few feet apart. “Wilder, how do you know him?” I ask.

“You don’t want to know,” he grits out.

“So now we aren’t going to be honest with each other?” After saying the words, I regret them because I know he thinks I’m still lying to him about everything.

“Don’t even go there, Lake.”

“I told you the truth,” I admit to him.

“Because you got cornered into it. If Saylor hadn’t realized it was you leaving those notes, everything would be completely different. You fucked with my life and with my sister’s life.”

“You know I never wanted to hurt her.” Which is the honest-to-God truth. I didn’t want to hurt anyone. I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

“But you did.”

“That wasn’t me.”

“But you brought it on,” he grits out.

“Maybe this was a bad idea telling you the truth. Coming back into your life. You clearly don’t want to listen to what I have to say.” My fear quickly turns into anger.

“Maybe it was a mistake. All of it.”

Those words hurt me more than I thought they would. I don’t want to be his mistake. But instead of trying to explain myself, I just get pissed and head to the front door.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m leaving.”

“Lake, if any of his men see you leave my house—”

“What? They’ll kill me? Well look what my life has turned into. It’s probably better off if—”

“Don’t even finish that fucking sentence,” he growls.

“So you care about me so much so that it would hurt if you lost me, but yet you can’t tell me the truth about how you know that man.”

His silence speaks volumes.

“I hate you,” I tell him, which is far from the truth. But if we can’t be honest with each other, this will never work out.

“Feeling’s mutual,” he says with such a casual tone I want to slap him across the face.

“Fuck you!”

I make it to his front door when he stops me with the tone of his voice. “Get your ass back in here, Lake. I wasn’t done.”

“You don’t control me.”

“Yes, I do.”

I scoff, “In what world?”

“Get your ass over here, and get on your knees,” he growls.

“Oh, so what you’re going to make me suck you off? Thanks, but no thanks. I’m not your whore.”

I make it to the front door, but before I can even put my hand on the doorknob, Wilder is spinning me around, his hand wrapped around my throat.

“I thought I loved you, you know. That’s what’s so fucked up.”

“Sure is,” I tell him.

“Yet I can’t let you go.”

“Because you’re worried I’ll get killed?”

“No because I want to love you. God, what the fuck is wrong with me?”

“You want to love me?” I ask, getting my hopes up for the first time in weeks.

“I should hate you. But I fucking can’t, Lake. I can’t hate you.”

Before I can even think twice about what I’m doing, I’m wrapping my arms around him.

“I hate that I kind of love you, too.”

He picks me up and slams my back against the front door. “I think I hate you more than love you.”

“Then fuck me like you hate me,” I nearly moan as the words fall from my mouth.

“With pleasure.”

He doesn’t waste a second before his lips are on mine. They’re rough as he parts my mouth, forcing his tongue inside. But I meet his angry kiss with a need that I didn’t even know I had. I dig my nails into his back as he assaults my mouth.

His hands drop to the button of my shorts as he uses his hips to keep me pinned against the door. He makes quick work of the zipper and shoves my shorts down, then moves to his own jeans.

“I hate what you did,” he growls.

He grabs his cock, and within seconds, he slams inside of me. I wasn’t entirely ready for the force of it, and I scream at the intrusion.

“Fuck, Lake,” he mutters into my neck. “I fucking hate you.”

“I hate you, too,” I lie. I could never hate him, but right now, I hate what he is doing to me.

He grips my hip with one hand as his other comes up to my neck, choking me as his lips land back on mine. I let him attack my mouth as I can barely breathe from the force he is using on me as he takes and takes from my body.

He grunts as he pounds into me. “God, this pussy. I fucking hate that I missed it.”

I can only let out a groan as he continues to bring me so close to the edge.

His hand drops from my throat, and then both hands are on my hips, picking me up, causing him to drive even deeper into me as he thrusts.

“Wild,” I moan.

He growls at the sound of his name on my lips. He moves away from the door and starts to carry me down the hall with him still inside of me, but he stops against the wall of his kitchen and drops me, spinning me around and slamming my chest into the wall.

Within seconds, he is back inside of me, pounding away with so much anger I can feel it pulsating from his body. I try to grip the wall for purchase as he makes me fall apart in his hands.

I scream as the orgasm takes over, but he doesn't slow down his momentum. He gets so deep I'm barely standing on my toes.

“How does it feel to be used, Lake?”

“Just don't stop,” I mumble into the wall. “Don't stop.”

Another orgasm is creeping down my spine as he jerks into me harder and harder before finally screaming out his own orgasm as he comes at the same time I do.

He pulls out of me so quickly I stumble backward. He barely catches me as I fall to the ground.

“Fuck,” he mutters as he sets me down. “Shit, Lake. I'm sorry. I don't know what got into me.”

I manage to pull myself to my knees and look around for my shorts, but they must have come off somewhere near the front door before he lifted me up.

“It's fine. I'm fine,” I tell him.

He leans down and scoops me up, his arm coming under my knees while the other wraps around my shoulder. “It's not fine. I just, damn it, I fucking attacked you.”

I look up at him and take in the worry in those crystal-blue eyes. “I-I didn’t mind.”

“Shit. We need to talk about this. Not the sex. We just... we need to talk.”

“I know.”

“But I also want to carry you upstairs and fuck you all night long.”

I press my palm against his cheek. “I’m not leaving, Wilder. I do want to talk. I want to tell you everything. I want you to listen and decide for yourself if you still want me in your life. Because I want you in mine. I need you in mine. My life has been shit since I ran away, and...”

“I get it, baby.”

My heart clenches at him calling me baby. I don’t waste a second before I pull his head down so his lips can meet mine. Because maybe we can make this work. Maybe he will listen to me and understand, and we can put the past behind us and just move on.

He pulls his lips from mine and carries me up the stairs. I want to laugh at the gesture, but I feel like things are so on edge between us, like everything could fall apart at any second. I mean, I just came back into his life. I searched for him for hours tonight when he didn’t answer his door earlier. I thought maybe he was ignoring me after I showed up last night, but then I came to the conclusion he wasn’t home. I finally remembered that Charlie owned a bar and figured my last option was to try and see if maybe he was there. And I am just happy I was right.

He brings me into his bedroom and sets me down on the bed. I take in the space as he strips off his clothes and heads to an en suite bathroom. Unlike the downstairs of his home that has dark, rock-star vibes to it, his bedroom is light and airy. I stand up from the bed and walk around the space. A soft gray paint on the walls, massive windows that look out over his back courtyard and pool. Ambient lights light up the pool and

the deck, giving me a view of the perfect outdoor oasis covered in palms and elephant ear plants.

I run my fingers along his dresser as I look at the artwork on the walls. Paintings of the ocean and waves take over the space. He really is a surfer boy. I laugh internally at the thought. It's been weeks since things were normal between us, or at least as normal as they could be. Back when I would call him my surfer boy because just weeks ago he felt like mine, and now he feels like a stranger. An all too familiar stranger.

“What are you doing?”

I look over and find him standing in the doorway of the bathroom, completely naked, his toned physique on display, and I want nothing more than to go back to the way things were before. When I could call him mine.

I want him. I want him more than I think I even realized. But I know there are a lot of walls that need to come down in order for him to become mine, and I am willing to let them all fall if it means I can be with him.

I walk over to him, stripping off my T-shirt as I go. I didn't wear a bra today, so I am completely nude as I stand in front of him. I run my fingers along the grooves of his abdomen then slowly trace them up to his pecs. I don't look at him, though. I am too focused on the lines of his body and too worried I will see something on his face I don't want to see. Anger, pain, hate, disappointment.

His hand finds my chin, forcing my gaze to meet his. And when I do, I don't see any of those emotions I thought I would see. Instead I see need, want, and maybe even a tinge of sadness.

“Lake,” he whispers.

“I missed this, Wilder. I missed you. I never wanted to do what I did. You need to know that. I never wanted to hurt you or your family. I didn't know what I was signing up for. I didn't realize the lengths this woman would go to. I still don't even know what any of it meant. All I know is that I hurt you. And I knew that I would. So many times I wanted to stop what

we were doing because when the truth came out, I knew you would hate me. But I was selfish. I wanted you. I still want you. And maybe that makes me a terrible person. I just need you to know that I'm sorry. That I never meant to hurt you. And if I could do it all over again, I would have told you the truth from the beginning."

He doesn't say anything in response, and I fear that I lost him. That time and an apology could never fix what we had. But then he leans down and brings his lips to mine in the gentlest kiss.

So much emotion runs through me I shudder, goose bumps taking over my body. Then the tears start. Tears I've held back since that night when everything fell apart.

Wilder's arms are around me in an instant. "Lake, baby, don't cry." He pulls back and rests his forehead against mine. "I love you, Lake. And maybe I shouldn't. Maybe this is a terrible idea, but I want you to know that even with everything that has happened, my feelings have never gone away. Maybe that's why this has been so hard. But damn it, I love you."

My tears turn into full-on sobs as Wilder lifts me up, forcing my legs to wrap around his hips. He carries me back to his bed and lays me down as he hovers over me.

"Tell me I'm crazy. Tell me I shouldn't love you."

I shake my head. "I can't tell you that. Because I love you, too, Wilder. Maybe we're both crazy."

He lets out a soft laugh before his lips find mine again. This kiss tastes different. It tastes of forgiveness. And I relish in it.

Soon he is pressing into me with soft, gentle thrusts. So different from the hate sex he pushed on me just thirty minutes ago. This time he is showing me how much he loves me, and I'm right there with him. Meeting him thrust for thrust. Letting our bodies express what is so hard to do with words.

Afterward, we lay next to each other. Wilder's playing with my hair as I face him, and I'm running my fingers along his chest.



“Where do you want me to start?” I ask.

“From the beginning.”

So I tell him. I tell him about my brother and how he stole money from Dad. I tell him about how I took the blame for it all and got kicked out of the house. I tell him about moving into a seedy apartment in LA and the boyfriend that I had. The boyfriend who stole money from some gangster and then landed in jail. I tell him how I was being stalked. That the guys he got in trouble with thought I had the money. Then I tell him about the day that the man I now know as Carter West showed up in the strip club. How he gave me enough money to pay off my dad if I followed through with calling this woman, and he would take care of the gangsters that were threatening me. I tell him about finding out I had to get a job with Rise Management and how it led to the tour. I tell him about the calls I would get and what to write on the notes. I tell him about the guilt I felt when I started to enjoy his company. And then how the guilt turned into pain when I knew I was falling for him.

He listens the entire time without saying a word. He lets me talk for what feels like hours as I tell him every lie I told him and the inevitable truth of it all. He listens, and he never once tells me to leave.

By the time I finish my story, I’m yawning. So tired from finally letting someone know the truth of what I’ve been through. The truth I wanted to tell him back on tour but was too scared to do.

Then he surprises me by pulling me into him and telling me he loves me and that he is sorry he ever thought less of me. That he should have known I never would have intentionally hurt him, not with the way things were developing between us.

I cry more. I swear I have never cried this much in my life. With all the things I’ve been through, I always just rolled with the punches and took the pain. I never let myself feel anything more than what I needed to, but with him, I let it all out.

And he holds me as I fall asleep.



# WILDER

I wake up feeling content for the first time in weeks. I know it's because of Lake. There is no other reason. She spilled all of her secrets and lies to me last night. She talked for hours, going into every single detail of what happened and why she did what she did. I can't blame her. I understand now. And now I just need the guys and Riot to understand, too.

I roll over and reach out for her, but she isn't there. The bed sheets are still slightly warm from her body. I start to panic.

Did she leave me? After everything she told me last night. Was it too much?

I crawl out of bed as depression starts to set in. That elation I felt just minutes ago, long gone. I should have known she wouldn't stay. That she was only here to clear her name.

I groan as I get out of bed, ready to go downstairs and pour myself a drink. Wake up Roan, and have another day of us just getting shit-faced and not dealing with our problems. Screw band practice and screw everything.

I make my way downstairs to the smell of bacon. There is no way Roan is awake cooking in my kitchen. I rush the rest of the way down the stairs and see Lake standing in my kitchen cooking breakfast.

“Hey, I woke up and was starving. I hope—”

I cut her off by rushing over to her and kissing the hell out of her.

She pulls away. “Good morning to you, too.”

“I thought you left.”

A frown appears on her face. “Wilder, after everything I told you last night, you really think I would leave?”

I shake my head. “No, I didn’t think you would. But my head got the best of me when I woke up, and you weren’t next to me.”

“Would you rather I have left a note on your pillow?” she asks defensively.

I laugh. “Please don’t ever leave me a note ever again.”

She purses her lips. “Okay, that’s fair. Next time, would you rather I wake you up to tell you I have to pee and that I’m hungry.”

I smile at the thought of next time. “Yes. Everything you do, I need to know.”

She scoffs, “You’re ridiculous.”

I pull her into me. “Actually, I would rather wake up to you sucking my cock or riding my dick.”

“There’s the Wilder I know.”

I give her my most charming smile, and she surprises me by dropping to her knees.

“Is this what you want?” she asks.

“Lake, I was kidding.”

She pulls my shorts down. “I’m not.”

Her mouth is on my dick in an instant. My cock takes no time to wake up to her decadent lips. She pulls me in deep as she sucks my dick. My hands fly into her hair, thrusting deeper into her throat until I am fucking her face.

She moans, and the vibrations take me so close to the edge. Never has a woman made me come so quickly in my life quite like the way Lake does.

She grips my thighs as she opens her throat, excepting each deep thrust until I am shooting my cum down her throat.

She swallows every single ounce of me before climbing back up to her feet and patting my cheek.

“I hope that satisfied you this morning.”

“Hardly,” I choke out.

She gives me a smile then turns back to the bacon on the stovetop. “How do you like your eggs?”

“You really are just going to suck my dick like a pro then go back to cooking breakfast.”

She looks over her shoulder at me. “I told you I was hungry. And that was a delicious appetizer, but now I need real food.”

“You are going to be the death of me, woman.”

She points at the eggs on the counter next to the stove.

“Over easy.”

“Thank you.”

I chuckle. I can’t believe how easy it feels between us right now. Even if I did have a minor freakout a few minutes earlier.

“What the fuck is going on here?” Roan shouts.

Lake freezes at the sound of his voice. I turn to look at him standing in the doorway to the patio.

“Hey. Lake is here.”

“I can fucking see that,” he growls.

“It’s a long story, but I will tell you just give me a few.”

He looks over at me, and I can tell he is pissed. “You can explain this to me now. I thought we agreed as a band not to \_\_\_”

“Things changed,” I cut him off.

“The band isn’t going to be happy to hear about this.”

“Knox already knows,” I tell him.

“Oh.”

“Yeah oh, out of everyone, he was the most against this, so chill out.”

He walks into the room and takes a seat at one of the island stools. “So, mind explaining all of this?”

Lake looks over at me, then at Roan, and starts talking before I can. “I sought Wilder out. I needed to explain everything. And I did.”

“Clearly,” he mutters.

“I want to explain everything to all of you guys, but I had to talk to Wilder first. It was the only way. And I know you all hate me and don’t want to even give me the time of day, but I need you to know I never meant to hurt anyone. I was stupid to think I could do what I did without hurting Wilder, much less all of you guys.”

Roan nods his head at her, then looks at me. “So I’m guessing you all kissed and made up.”

“Is it that obvious?”

“Well, she is in your kitchen wearing your shirt, and you are half dressed with a semi-hard dick, so what do you think?”

Yeah, my dick hasn’t calmed down since Lake sucked my cock like a good girl.

“I love her,” I tell him.

“Yeah, man, I know you do.” He looks over at Lake. “And I’m guessing you love him, too.”

She nods.

“Fucking hell, am I really going to be the only miserable one in this band? Like what the fuck happened that everyone is now falling for someone after years of you all being single.”

I laugh at that. “Hey man, your time will come.”

“Unlikely,” he mumbles.

Lake looks between us, and I know she doesn’t want to say anything, but I am sure she can read the room and knows Roan is hard up on Riot.

She breaks the silence, though. “So, Roan, how do you like your eggs?”

He looks at her and laughs. “Well, if you are going to cook for me, too, I guess you can stay.”

She raises a brow at me, curious as to why Roan is even here. “He is living in the pool house during this tour break.”

“Okay.” She looks back at Roan. “So eggs?”

“Sunny side up.”

And just like that, I know I have at least one person on my side with this.





# WILDER

“You look anxious as fuck, man.”

I look over at Roan as we sit in my car outside the practice space. “Of course I am. I need to tell the guys that Lake is back.”

“It’s just Silas and Jackson. Knox knows.”

“Yeah, but he wasn’t happy about it.”

“But he doesn’t know the truth. He didn’t hear the words from Lake’s mouth.”

After breakfast this morning, Lake told Roan about what happened. Not getting into the personal details but telling him that West told her to contact a woman, and that woman was the one telling her to leave the notes. I know at least Knox knows some of this because of the list he has with the blocked numbers from Lake’s phone records. But it doesn’t make this any easier.

“He still isn’t going to like this,” I tell Roan.

“I know. But honestly, everything that Lake said makes sense. It proves that West was behind all of this. That he has something to do with all the threats that have been coming our way for the last eight months. He has to know something or have some personal tie to that damn guy you killed.”

I groan. I hate thinking about that. I hate knowing that I have blood on my hands. “He was a nobody. Some low-laying dealer who killed Silas’s brother.”

“Well he had to have something to do with this all, or he wouldn’t be taking it out on you.”

“Did he ever know?” I ask as something hits me. “Did he ever know for sure who killed that guy?”

Roan looks at me pensively, and then something dawns on him. “No, man. He didn’t. He wasn’t there. There were no witnesses. You think this all ties together. You think that man was working for him.”

“Had to be. I don’t know why else he would give a shit about some random guy I killed.”

“Unless he just wants that as something to hang over our heads when he needs a favor.”

“But he already has that.”

“He just never knew who did it. But I think now he does.”

I lift my sunglasses and rub my fingers between my brows. “You think he’s going to do something about it?”

Roan shrugs. “Hard to say, man. You never know what that man is planning.”

“Fuck,” I yell as I slam my fist against the steering wheel.

“Before you get all pissy over this, you need to tell them. They need to know Lake is back and that you trust her.

“I know.”

Roan nods and opens the passenger door. I wait a minute before getting out and following him into the practice space. I just need a moment to breathe. To take this all in and prepare for the onslaught I know I am going to face when I tell the guys about Lake.

I climb out of my SUV and cross the street, trying not to hold my breath over this conversation. Roan holds the door open for me as I walk inside. We make our way down the hallway, and I take a deep breath as I open the door to our practice room.

Jackson, Silas, and Knox are already here. And I can tell by the looks on their faces that Knox already told them about

Lake walking into the bar last night.

“Hey.”

Knox looks at me with a curious look on his face like he wants to know what happened.

“Did you tell them?”

He nods.

“How much?”

I’m surprised when Jackson is the one to answer. “Lake is working for West.”

I nod.

“But she didn’t know?” Silas asks.

I nod again.

Roan looks over at me with large eyes. “Just tell them.”

I take a deep breath before I relay Lake’s story to them. “She had no idea. It was like she saw a ghost when she saw us talking to West. He was the one who met her months ago. He told her to call some woman, she doesn’t even know the woman’s name. That woman was the one that told her to leave the notes. So she took the job. She didn’t have much of a choice. But she didn’t think she would fall for me in the process. And she hates what she did.”

“And you believe her?” Knox asks me.

“Yeah, man, I do.”

“Why would she do all this?”

I finally take a seat on one of the couches and lean over, resting my elbows on my knees. “She owed a debt to some people, and West gave her the money to pay it off if she just followed his instructions.”

“Why her, of all people?”

I shrug. “We don’t know.”

“I would still be cautious around her,” Knox chimes in. “She could still be playing you.”

Roan is the one to speak up. “No, I don’t think she is. She was a different person this morning when she told me the truth. I could tell she was scared about what all this could mean.”

“That doesn’t mean she is still lying.”

I shake my head. “She’s not. I know she isn’t. She told me so many things last night. Things she never told me before. The way all of this has made her feel. I know she’s being honest this time.”

“Roan?” Jackson asks like he is looking for Roan to agree with me.

“I believe her.”

“But what about Saylor?” Knox demands. “What if she could still be hurt from all of this?”

I look over at my best friend and tell him the honest truth. “She still could be. But you need to know I would never want anything to happen to my sister. But if West is behind all of this, then we are all at risk.”

“Then what are we going to do about West?” Silas asks.

We all look at him and sit in silence because the one thing we know we can’t do is retaliate against the man that got us to where we are.



# LAKE

Wilder and Roan are at band practice. I felt awkward when they told me to stay here. I haven't even been back in Wilder's life for twenty-four hours, and he has me hanging out at his house alone.

So I spent the afternoon in the pool. I don't want to even think about whose swimsuit I'm wearing since he had a few random women's swimsuits at his house. But I let that thought pass as I worry more about the conversation the band is having about me.

We didn't talk about it. I have no idea how they feel, but if Roan being pissed as hell this morning is any indication of the rest of the band's feelings, I know that today is going to be hard on Wilder and might decide our fate.

I can barely concentrate on the book I'm trying to read when my phone starts ringing. I paddle over to the side of the pool on the floatie I'm on and grab my phone. I'm sure it's my brother calling since he can't seem to let the whole paying off Dad thing go and wants to know how I got the money. I know that he just wants some of it. Not that I have any left. Not after paying off the debts I owed.

But the blocked number on the screen sends chills across my body. I haven't had a call from this woman since the day after I left the tour. She asked me to leave another note, and I told her I couldn't. I had no idea then what the consequences would be, and I didn't care. But now? Now that fear is creeping up my spine like an unwelcome friend.

“Hello?” I answer timidly.

“I hear you’re in New Orleans.”

My face pales. How the hell does this woman know that?

“I’ll take your silence as a yes. I also happen to know Wilder Reed is back in the city as well. The band is on a break. Sounds like the perfect opportunity for you to get back to work after you decided to quit touring. I’m not very happy about that.”

“I had to leave.”

“Oh I know. It’s because you were getting too close with the band. Something you shouldn’t have been doing.”

“I-I did what I needed to do in order to leave the notes,” I stutter.

“I didn’t realize sleeping with them was necessary.”

How does she even know about Wilder and me?

“Well, now that you are back in their good graces, I need you to leave another one.”

“I’m not in their good graces. I just happen to be in New Orleans.”

“Coincidence?”

She knows it’s not. “Look, I knew they were here, but I just wanted to get away from LA. It has nothing to do with them.”

“I’m not an idiot. And I need you to finish what you started.”

“Why? Why do you need me to do this?”

“I’ve already told you it’s none of your business. Now leave a note. And don’t get caught.”

So she has no idea I’m actually back here with Wilder then? And she has no idea they know it was me.

“Fine. But I’m done after this.”

“I’ll tell you when you are done.”

“Whatever,” I mutter. “Just tell me what it should say.”

“Your days are numbered.”

“That’s it?”

“I’ll be in touch soon,” she says, then hangs up the phone.

I set the phone down and then pick it back up. I need to tell Wilder. I won’t keep this from him anymore. Besides, if I leave a note, he’ll know it’s me. And I don’t want any more secrets or lies between us.

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“She called you?” he asks.

I nod as I sit on the couch in his living room, wrapped in a blanket sipping on a cup of tea. It’s hot as hell outside, but ever since that phone call, I can’t seem to get the chill out of my body.

“What did she say?”

“She wanted me to leave you another note. Because somehow, she knows I’m in New Orleans.”

“What did she want it to say?”

“Your days are numbered.”

“That’s ominous,” Roan says as he leans back into the recliner he’s sitting in.

“What does she mean by all this Wild? You never told me, and I know you know something.”

He looks over at Roan, and Roan nods at him before standing up. “I’ll leave you two to talk.”

I watch as Roan walks outside and toward the pool house before I look over at Wilder, who is sitting next to me.

He grabs my hand and squeezes before talking. “I don’t want you to think anything less of me when I tell you the truth.”

“Why would I?”



“Because my past isn’t just hearts and rainbows. It was rough there for a while. I know I grew up with a silver spoon, but the second I decided to pursue music, I was cut off from my family. My parents wanted me to be a lawyer or a doctor like they were. They never approved of my friendship with Knox. They thought it would get me into trouble, and I guess it did. Knox was a drug dealer. He worked for Carter West, and that’s how he met Jackson, Silas, and Roan. The three of them were in a band back in Baton Rouge, but when Silas’s brother was killed in a drug deal gone bad, they lost their drummer. Knox ended up joining the band and brought me in, too. Before I knew it, I was also working with the four of them selling drugs to make ends meet. To get the equipment we needed to pursue music. West helped with it all. He, for some reason, saw potential in us as a band and made sure we always had the best jobs to make the most money from him. I have no idea why he held so much interest in the band. None of us do. We figured it was so we would owe him something down the line. He likes to do that, work in favors.

“Anyway, one night, Silas, Roan, and I were doing a deal when we came across the man that killed Silas’s brother. Silas was packing as per usual, and he tried to shoot the man, but the guy hit him first, got a shot off into his arm. I never knew Silas’s brother, but I knew the pain that he was going through with losing him, so I picked up the gun and fired off a few shots. I never held a gun before. Never thought I would ever need one, even if I was selling drugs. And well, I got the guy in the chest. He died.”

“You killed someone?” I ask him for clarification I don’t need. But I am in shock. The carefree man in front of me has never come off as a man that would kill someone, and I don’t even know how to react.

He nods. “That’s what the notes have been about. Whoever is having you leave them knows it was me. A secret that has only been known by the band and well, Saylor because she found out on tour.”

“Y-you killed someone?” I ask again, sliding back into the couch, putting space between the two of us.

“Lake.”

I start to shake. I don't know why. I don't know why this is affecting me so much. Maybe because I thought Wilder was normal and not someone with dark secrets, and it's just so much for me to take in.

“Please don't be afraid of me.”

“Y-you held a gun to my face, Wilder. You could have killed me. And how am I supposed to know if you wouldn't have thought twice about it.”

He tries to reach out for me, but I flinch backward.

“I never was going to pull that trigger. I was trying to scare you to get the truth out because I didn't believe what you were saying, and I wanted to think it was you behind this all, not some twisted game where we didn't know who was holding the strings until now.”

“I... I don't know w-what to say,” I stutter as I stand up.

“Baby, please.”

I shake my head. “I just... I need time to think.”

“Don't leave, please. I don't trust anyone in this city right now. I'll give you time alone, but please just don't leave.”

I know he wanted to say don't leave me, and the sad thing is my heart doesn't want to leave him. I want to comfort him. Let him know it's okay, that I still love him. But my head is telling me I need to be cautious.

“I won't leave. But I need some time.”

“You can have all the time you need. But please know this doesn't change anything about me. I'm still the guy you fell in love with. I'm still the guy you know. Just with a dark secret.”

I swallow as I stare at him, not sure how to answer. “I'll be upstairs.”

He nods, and I can feel his eyes on my back as I climb the stairs.

I end up taking a shower in his bathroom. I don't even know how long I've been in here as I let the hot water cascade over my body. My mind is too caught up in thoughts of Wilder. Am I really in love with a murderer? Tears form in my eyes as I can't get the thoughts out of my head that I got caught up in someone else's mess again. First it was Nathan's mess, and then my stupid ex, and now Wilder. Maybe I am just too nice, too welcoming. Maybe I never see people for what they truly are. Maybe I am just blind like that.

I could leave. I could try to run like I planned to before my heart decided I needed to talk to Wilder. I could face the consequences of running. I don't know what path that will lead me on, but it has to be better than this. Because what if the truth comes to light, and Wilder's secrets are let out into the world? Then I would have to deal with another man I thought I loved being put into jail. But the worst part is how it would ruin Wilder. His name would be all over the news. It would destroy the band. It would ruin everything they built.

Is that what this woman wants? Revenge on the band? Or does this have something to do with that man, Carter West? But what good would it do to destroy the public image of the band? How would he benefit from that?

I have so many questions and no answers. And I'm not sure if I'll ever get the answers I'm looking for.

There is a knock on the bathroom door, and I don't say anything because I know Wilder will just walk in.

"Lake, are you okay?"

I try to hide my sniffing from him, but it's no use. He has to know I've been standing in his shower for God knows how long crying.

The shower door opens, and I must have red eyes from crying because sadness crosses his features as he steps in fully dressed.

"Talk to me, Lake. What's wrong?"

I don't say anything, I just burst into more tears. His arms wrap around me, and he presses a kiss to my head.

“It’s a lot to take in. I know.”

“H-how do you live with it?”

He tenses around me. “I think about it nearly every day. and I hate myself for it. I try to make up excuses that I was defending Silas, saving him from being shot again. But I know those excuses for what they are, a way to make me not feel guilt. But I do feel guilty every damn day. Because I may have killed someone that killed someone else, but I still killed someone. And that man’s family lost a brother, a son. I wonder how his family feels about all of this. If they still mourn him every day even though it’s been over ten years. If they want revenge on me like I took revenge for Silas.

“It’s hard, Lake. I’m not going to lie about that. And maybe I cover it all up by being this happy-go-lucky man. Someone who is the life of the party. Someone no one thinks would ever do something like this. But you need to know deep down that it kills me.”

I wipe some of my tears away. “I hate that you feel that way. I hate that you felt like you had to do what you did. But it doesn’t change things. You still killed someone. And I told myself I would never get involved with a criminal again. Hell, my brother is practically one. My ex is in jail. I just never thought I would fall for someone like that again.”

His arms tighten around me. “You need to know I am still a good man despite all this.”

I look up at him, resting my chin on his chest. “That’s why this is so hard for me. I know you are a good man, Wilder. And the fact that you have this secret... it just hurts.”

“I know it’s not easy to live with this. Trust me, I’ve been living with this secret for years. But I need to know that if we are going to make this work, if we are going to be together, that you will keep this secret, too.”

I contemplate that. He is giving me a way out, letting me choose to leave if I can’t live with this. But my stupid heart knows that life without him is going to be worse. I will constantly be thinking about him, what he’s doing, who he’s

with, if he's okay. Hell, I had those thoughts for ten days when I left him in Atlanta, and I barely survived. How can I face a lifetime?

I guess I know my decision.

I bring my hands up around his neck. "I would never tell a soul about what you did, Wilder. Never. Even if we weren't together. I would never want to hurt you."

He looks down at me with those crystalline eyes, and I just about lose it. There is so much hope written in them and love. Because I know this man loves me. Without a doubt in my soul, I know no one is ever going to love me the way this man does.

I stand up on my toes and bring his mouth to mine. I need him to understand just how much he means to me. And this kiss, this kiss speaks more than words ever could.

It starts out gentle but soon turns wanton. I need him. I need him so badly, and he needs to know that. I practically climb him as the kiss turns more intense. He isn't hesitant at all as he takes over the kiss, pushing me against one of the walls in the shower. I moan into his mouth as I grind against him, my need for him becoming unbearable.

"Lake," he groans as I pull his wet shirt over his head.

"I need you, Wilder. I need you to feel me. I need you to know I can live with your secret as long as you can live with mine."

"Baby, there is nothing stopping me from being with you. I would tear this world apart for you."

He shifts so he can unbutton his jeans and pull his cock out. Within seconds, he is inside of me. I meet his thrusts, needing to just feel him as deeply as I can. Because I want this. I want him. I know there is no other choice.



## WILDER

Lake is lying in my arms as I drag my fingers up and down her back. After the intense shower sex, we made it to the bed, where I showed her again how much her words meant to me. We then spent hours talking about everything. I told her more about the battle I face knowing I took someone's life, and she told me more about her life growing up and what it was like being a socialite, a life she is happy to be away from.

I feel like I know her inside and out. From the short amount of time we've been together, I think she is the only person who has ever truly known me. Even more so than the guys in the band.

"So would you rather eat five loaves of moldy bread or drink a gallon of sour milk?"

I laugh at that question. We've gone back to playing this game for the last twenty minutes. "Moldy bread."

"Gross."

"What? Would you rather drink the sour milk?"

She shakes her head. "Neither that was your question, not mine."

I slap her ass, and she jumps. "Not fair. But okay. Would you rather shit yourself every time you coughed or vomit every time you sneezed?"

"Vomit all the way. No way do I want to shit myself daily."

"What if you had bad allergies?"

She snorts. “I guess I would be puking everywhere.”

I clutch my chest. “Oh, the acid reflux is making my chest hurt just thinking about it.”

“You would honestly rather shit yourself?”

He raises a brow at me. “Hey, not my question.”

She punches me in the arm, and I can’t help but pull her into me, claiming those gorgeous lips with my own.

When she pulls away, she looks me in the eye hesitantly. “Um, so you know I should probably go and grab my clothes at some point if you are going to keep me hostage in your house.”

“I wouldn’t call it hostage if you are the one begging for me to fuck you all the time.”

“I have not been begging.”

“Yet,” I tease.

“Or ever.”

“I don’t know, babe. If I hold back sex from you, I am pretty sure you will be begging.”

She looks me in the eye and laughs. “You would not last if you held back on sex.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Wilder, you practically think with your dick. You’re insatiable.”

“That’s because you have that magical pussy.”

She covers her face with her hand. “Oh my god, you’re ridiculous.”

“I thought I was insatiable.”

“You’re both!”

I laugh as I nuzzle into her neck. “What I wouldn’t give for that magical pussy to be sitting on my face right now.”

She smacks me in the chest. “Enough about my pussy. Can we talk about getting my stuff?”



“Of course I’ll let you get it. Especially because that means you’re staying.”

She gives me a look like I’m an idiot. “You told me I had to stay here.”

“I never would have held you against your will,” I tell her. “Now, what hotel are you at?”

She shakes her head. “I’m not staying at a hotel. My brother has a place in the French Quarter, so I was staying there.”

“Your brother?”

“Yeah, remember I said he lived here for a while. Well, he never sold the apartment.”

“The same brother that did all the drugs?”

She nods. “What are you getting at? Oh my god.”

She must have put two and two together. The same way I did. “If your brother owed someone a lot of money for drugs, it would only be one man in this city.”

“Carter West.”

“Bingo.” I shift in the bed and sit up. “This all makes so much more sense now.”

“What does?”

“Remember how I said he works in favors? Well he probably used you to cash in on a favor for your brother.”

“But he paid me,” she says.

“No one understands how that man’s mind works. But it’s obviously brilliant with the fact he nearly runs half the south.”

“So you think this is all a ploy to get at you and cash in a favor for my brother?”

“It has to be,” I tell her. I don’t know what else to think.



# LAKE

I adjust the dress I have on as I get out of the car. We went to my brother's apartment, and Wilder let me change before we showed up at Silas's house. He's having a party tonight, and I'm nervous as hell about going. I'm worried about what Knox is going to say to me after last night. He didn't look happy at all that I showed up, and I'm sure he won't be happy that I'm here. Wilder did tell me he talked to the guys at band practice earlier, but I'm still worried about how they will treat me.

I follow Wilder to Silas's backyard, and I am taken aback by his huge house and property. I thought Wilder's house was large, but this is obnoxious.

"I know his house is huge," Wilder says to me as if he can read my thoughts. "He's making up for other things."

I snort at that. "How old are you again?"

He holds up five fingers. "This many."

"That's what I thought."

He grabs my hand and squeezes as we make our way through the crowds of people to one of the sitting areas outside. And I say one because, from the looks of it, there are at least three. I wasn't kidding when I said his house was huge.

"Lake, glad you made it," Roan tells me as he scoots over on the couch. He drove here separately from us since we had to stop at my brother's.

"Hi."

Jackson nods his head at me, and Knox is sitting with Saylor. Both of them give me dirty looks.

Wilder takes a seat on the couch and pulls me down so I am half sitting in his lap.

“So I just want to say I’m sorry to all of you. For what I did. For what I put Wilder and Saylor through. I never meant to hurt anyone.”

“Wilder told us what he told him earlier today,” Jackson tells me. “We want you to know that since Wilder trusts you, we all do, too.”

I look at him and then over at Knox, who has a grimace on his face. I am guessing he isn’t as trusting of me as the others are.

“Thank you.”

“We think we figured something out,” Wilder says.

“Let’s wait until Silas is here,” Jackson suggests.

I sit in an awkward silence as the other guys talk around me. I feel so out of place, and I know why. I led them on, made them believe I was someone I wasn’t, and then turned out to be the awful person out to ruin their lives.

“I’m going to get a drink. Do you want one?” I ask Wilder.

“Sure, babe. Want me to come with you?”

I shake my head. “I think I can manage on my own.”

He gives me a sharp look but then lets go of his hands on my waist, and I head toward the house. It’s super crowded, people milling about everywhere. I make my way inside and find a plethora of drinks on the kitchen island. I pour myself a shot of vodka and down it before I mix my own drink and make a gin and tonic for Wilder, something I notice he drinks often.

“Hey, Lake.”

I turn my head to see Saylor next to me.

“Hi, Saylor.”

“I just wanted you to know that I trust you if my brother does. I know that Knox is being a total dickwad right now. But if Wilder believes you, then I will, too. I just wanted you to know before Knox lays into you out there because I can guarantee he’s going to hound you with a million questions.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it.”

“So you never meant to hurt me?”

I shake my head. “I didn’t. I honestly was just doing what I was told to do.”

She cocks her head to the side. “That’s what Knox mentioned. But then why push me in front of a car.”

I remember her saying something about that the night in the hotel. But to this day, I still don’t even know the full story. “I don’t even know what happened that night. It wasn’t me. This is my first time to New Orleans in years.”

She looks at me pensively. “Then who was it?”

I shrug. “I honestly have no idea. My only guess is it’s the woman who was calling me.”

“The one who told you to leave the notes?”

I nod. “I think she’s local. At least that’s my best guess. She knows I’m here, so somehow she has seen me or has someone following me.”

“I guess that makes sense. It’s the only way someone would have known where I was that night if they live here and if they had someone following me too.”

“What happened?” I ask her, genuinely curious.

“I was walking home talking to Wilder, and someone pushed me in front of traffic. I got banged up, but other than that, I was fine. But I never saw who did it. And the driver that hit me didn’t see anyone either.”

“Oh my gosh, I am so sorry that happened to you. I swear it wasn’t me.”

“I’m starting to believe you. The weird thing was Wilder knew something may happen. He got a note and pictures of me

from that day. He was frantic on the phone.”

I think back to when I was sent pictures via email and told to print them and leave a note. It was the first one I left. It was the beginning of tour and As The Angels Fall weren't even on the tour yet. But I took a flight to Seattle and dropped off the note like I was asked to. I figured it was so it didn't look like it was me when I would be able to leave them all the time.

“Wait, did this happen in June?”

She nods.

“I think I was the one who left the note. It was the first note I was asked to leave. I printed out pictures of you that I was sent. I had no idea who you were. And really no idea what anything meant at the time.” Pain hits me in the chest. “I feel terrible.”

“Well, like you said, it wasn't you who pushed me. Honestly, if I hadn't been on the phone with Wilder, who knows what would have happened.”

“Yeah, but Saylor, you were hit by a car. I could have stopped all this if I actually paid attention to those damn notes.”

“It's not your fault. I don't want you to think it is. That's why I came in here. I wanted to forgive you.”

“Why?” I ask, confused. “Knox hates me, and I just figured it had to do with you.”

“He can form his own opinions, and I'm hoping that he understands where you are coming from soon. Because it's annoying as fuck to listen to him bitch about everyone agreeing to trust you.”

I laugh and surprise myself. “Well, thank you. It means a lot that you can trust that I'm telling the truth.”

“Now about you and my brother.”

I look at her with raised brows. “What about him?”

“Do you love him?”

I nod. “I do.”

“And you won’t do anything to hurt him again.”

“Not intentionally.”

“Okay, good. Well then, welcome to our family.”

She surprises me by giving me a hug, and it takes me a second to wrap my arms around her. I never thought she would welcome me back into her life so easily.

When she pulls back, she has a mischievous look on her face. “Now I just need to give you a reading to make sure everything you are saying is true, and you won’t hurt my brother. He’s a pansy, and I don’t want to see him moping around like a lovesick fool over you. It already happened enough over the last two weeks.”

“He was moping around?”

“Big time,” she says. “He was annoying as hell.”

That surprises me since when I first sought him out, he practically shut the door in my face.

“Now let’s get back to the group and sort some shit out, and then I am reading your cards.”

I have to agree because I don’t think Saylor would take no for an answer. I grab mine and Wilder’s drinks and head back outside.

---

I’m drunk and happy. After a long conversation, they all came around to trusting me. Something I never thought would actually happen. I thought Wilder would end things with me if the rest of the band couldn’t gain my trust. I think they all really do believe that West was cashing in on some favor my brother owed him by throwing me into the mix of it all. I guess it just had to be some coincidence that I already knew the band.

The party lasted long into the night, and now it’s nearly three in the morning as we drive home. Wilder decided to be

the designated driver for me and Roan so the two of us had quite a few drinks.

Now I can't keep my hands off Wilder as we approach his house. I can't wait for him to do things to me tonight, like tie me up and spank me. I was teasing him about it all night long, and I know his dick is rock-hard right now. I mean, I am stroking it through his jeans.

"You two do realize I'm in the back seat, right?" Roan asks.

I just giggle as I sit back in my seat. "No fun."

"Oh, I can be plenty of fun, but I'm not into you two being this close to pulling the car over and fucking each other on the side of the road."

"Cool it, man, you're just jealous that Riot showed up with a date to the party tonight."

"I'm not fucking talking about that."

I do feel bad for Roan in that sense. Wilder filled me in on how the two were married and now divorced but that Roan is still in love with her. Riot was kind of parading this new guy around like she wanted to hurt Roan.

When we pull into Wilder's driveway, I am flying out of the car. I am so horny, and I just want his hands all over me. Wilder lets out a deep laugh as he catches up to me and then whispers some dirty, dirty things into my ear.

He opens the front door, and before we can step inside, we both see an envelope sitting on the floor.

"What the fuck?" he says as I look over his arm.

He pulls a note out of the envelope, and when I read it, all those feelings I just had about getting Wilder naked go out the window. Because now he isn't the only one being threatened. I am too.

*You thought you could play me. I know about you and your girlfriend.*



*Meet me on Friday night, 11pm, at  
the address below, and maybe I  
won't kill you both.*

The blood drains from my face. "Wilder?"

"Fuck. Whoever this is, knows. They know you told me. They know we're together. And now you aren't safe anymore either, Lake."



# LAKE

“You can’t seriously think you are going to meet this woman,” I tell Wilder as I pace in his bedroom as he sits on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands.

“Babe, I can’t risk something happening to you over something I did twelve years ago.”

I stop pacing in front of him. “This isn’t just about you anymore, Wilder. I chose to work for this woman, I am just as guilty as you are.”

He grabs my hand and pulls me so I’m standing between his legs. “No, you aren’t. You didn’t pull that trigger. And my life would have been hanging in the balance regardless if you ever left those notes.”

“I should have said no,” I tell him. “I shouldn’t have taken that money. Then maybe we wouldn’t be here.”

“Those notes still would have found their way to me,” he tells me as he forces me to look him in the eyes. “But then I wouldn’t have you. And I would much rather have you.”

Those words hit me hard in the chest. This man loves me despite everything I’ve done. “Wild,” I say softly as an idea pops into my head. He doesn’t have to meet this woman, but I can. I can protect him after everything I put him through.

“Lake, I don’t like that look in your eyes.”

“What if I go? Alone. I can tell her...” I trail off because I don’t know what I would tell her.

“You think you can just get me out of this mess? You can’t. I pulled that trigger, and I need to face the consequences.”

My heart hurts. I know what facing the consequences means. He could die.

“Hey.” He pulls me onto his lap. “It’s going to be okay. I’ll figure this out.”

I look into those eyes I fell in love with and run my hands through his long blond waves. “How can you be sure? I can’t lose you again. God, it hurt so much when I lost you that night in Atlanta. It was the worst ten days of my life, and I’ve been through some shit. How can I know that you’ll be okay?”

“You have to trust me. I can make some calls, get Knox to help. But I am not going to put you in harm’s way. Besides, you showing up with me or even alone, proves that her note is right. I need to do this alone. And maybe I can convince her that we aren’t together.”

“I don’t like this.”

He laughs. “Of course you don’t, babe. But you know it’s the best plan. The only plan that will work.”

A knock hits the bedroom door, and we both look up to see Roan standing there. “I just wanted to come and see if you came up with a plan. Want to know how I can help.”

Roan was just as surprised to see the note as we were. He left us alone for the last hour so we could talk this through but I saw that anger on his face when he read the note. I know he wants this all to be over as much as Wilder and I do.

“We need to call Knox in the morning. Let him know about this. He will do whatever he can to make sure this threat is gone for good.”

I turn my head to look at Wilder. What does that even mean? Is Knox going to take the woman out? “I don’t want another person with blood on their hands because of what I did.”

Roan snorts. “Lake, Knox has had blood on his hands for years. Longer than Wilder over here, Knox won’t have second

thoughts about any of it. Especially if it means Saylor is safe too.”

I feel Wilder flinch underneath me. I know it’s still a hard subject for him. The idea of his sister with his best friend. But I also see an understanding in his eyes. He isn’t the only one who would risk everything for his sister.

“I’ll call him in the morning. It’s time we have a talk anyway.”

“Good. Let me know what you all come up with. You know I am here for you too, man.”

He nods as Roan gives us both a close-lipped smile and turns from the door.

“So it’s settled then, you are going to meet this woman?”

“What other choice do I have? I need to protect my family. That includes the band too.” He pauses, then looks intensely into my eyes. “And you, Lake. You are a part of my family now too.”

Tears hit my eyes at his words. “You’re my family too, Wild.”

He presses his lips to mine in a searing kiss, a kiss that tells me more than just the fact that he loves me, but also a kiss that tells me this might be the end of us too.



# WILDER

I'm nervous. I don't know why, but I am. This is my best friend. The guy who's had my back for years but lately we seem more like strangers than anything.

And now I'm standing on his doorstep ready to finally hash out all the shit that is between us over my sister. Then I need to tell him about the note and have him help me with a plan.

If this was before the tour started, he would have been the first to know. I would have called him last night at three in the morning. He would have come over and helped me figure shit out then.

But I've put a wall between us because I can't let myself get over the fact he is with my sister. In love with my sister.

I should be fine with the idea, and I think I am starting to get there. Lake opened my eyes up to a lot of things, and the fact that the guys are mostly fine with me being with her, the woman who left notes threatening the band, then I need to be okay with my best friend dating my little sister.

He answers the door and gives me a nod before holding the door open for me. I walk into his house, which is just blocks away from mine, and take a seat at his dining room table.

There is no sign of Saylor here, which is a good thing. I don't know if I could have this talk if she was around. No doubt she is hanging out with Janae at her witchcraft shop.

“So,” Knox says as he takes a seat next to me. “You finally want to sit down and talk about this.”

I nod. “Yeah, I do. But I don’t want you to think I came here just to talk about your relationship with my sister. I want to be honest with you. And I hate feeling like I’m walking on eggshells.”

“What else is going on?” he asks with a stern look on his face.

I run my hands through my hair before pulling a hair tie off my wrist and tying it up into a bun. “There was another note left last night.”

“Another note? Who would have left it? There is no way Lake is leaving notes for you again. Because if she is—”

I cut him off. “No, man, it wasn’t her. You know the truth about her and why she was leaving the notes. But this one threatened her too. Whoever that woman is that she was working for knows we’re together.”

“How?”

“I have no idea. It’s not like we are ever out in public together with our relationship.”

Knox scoffs. “You two could never keep your hands off each other when we went out while on tour.”

“That was then though. She knows about us now.”

“Do you think she was at that party last night and saw the two of you together? It would make sense as to how she was able to gain access to Silas.”

I shrug. I never really thought about that. “Maybe.”

“What did the note say?”

I pull it out of my back pocket and show him.

He scrunches his brow as he reads it. “So you plan on meeting her?”

“I don’t really have a choice.”



“I agree. I think you need to. But you know I will be there with you. Despite everything between us, I won’t make you do this alone.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. “Thank you.”

“So do you have a plan?”

“Not much of one, part of the reason I came here. You always were good at figuring out the plan.”

“Because I grew up with this shit.”

I look at Knox and see the kid that became my best friend years ago. The guy who I know would take a bullet for me now. Things have changed so much in the last fifteen years. But deep down, he is still my best friend.

“Before we get into all that, though, I want to apologize. For being a dick about you and Saylor.”

He looks at me with surprise. “Finally admitting you were an asshole?”

I rub the back of my neck. “I was. I guess I just worry about her, and I didn’t want her to get pulled into this life.”

“She is already a part of it just by being your sister.”

“I know that now.”

“Lake help clear some of that shit up for you?”

This guy knows me too well. “Yeah. Honestly, being with her, someone I know none of you want me to be with. I realized it’s the same thing I was feeling about you and Saylor. But I know how happy she is with you, and I can see how happy you are with her. Honestly, if I had to pick someone for my sister to spend her life with, I would want it to be you. I just never let myself actually face that realization.”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here,” he laughs. “I’m dating your sister, not marrying her.”

“Will you though?”

“Hey, man, what did I just say?”

“I just want to know. Not as her brother. As your best friend.”

He clenches his jaw but then relaxes as he thinks about what I said. “Honestly, yeah, man. I can see her in my life forever. I’m not saying I’m ready to pop the question now. We are still so new. But I can see her as my wife.”

“Well I better be your best man. And I better help you pick out that ring. You know I have better taste than you.”

He shakes his head as he chuckles. “I don’t know about that.”

“We good though?”

He looks over at me with a smile. “Yeah, man, we’re good.”

“Now just to figure out what the hell to do about this situation with Lake and the note.”

“I could call West. Pretend we don’t know he’s involved. Make him meet us there. See what card he plays.”

“That’s probably a good idea.”

“I’ll make the call.”

“Thanks.”

I go to stand but then realize we haven’t really talked like brothers in weeks if not months. “So can you believe our short break is over, and we are already getting ready to get back on the road?”

“No, man. I wish we had another month off. I am getting too old for this shit.”

“Maybe if you weren’t up at all hours of the night fucking my sister.”

He looks over at me, and I wonder if it was too soon to make the joke, but he just starts cracking up. “Like you have room to talk. How is it going with Lake?”

“You really want to know?”

“Yeah, I mean, if you are fine with Saylor being my girlfriend, then I should be fine with Lake being yours. She seems to be proving to us all that she really is a good person. I saw it last night even if I didn’t want to admit it.”

“Things are good with us. It is definitely hard, and we had a lot of walls to break through, but we realized if we were honest with each other, then that is the best way to trust each other.”

“Did you tell her about killing Johnny?”

I nod. “She didn’t take it so well. She thought she was getting pulled into something she didn’t want to be in, but after a long talk, she got where I was coming from and she eventually was okay with it. At least I think she is okay with it.”

“I mean, it’s a lot to take in,” he says. “Saylor really struggled when she found out about you. Hell, she took it better knowing about my past than she did yours.”

“I guess that means you guys are meant for each other.”

He raises a brow at me. “Don’t get all sappy with me.”

I laugh as I start to make my way to the door. “I think I am going to have too much fun making fun of you two for the rest of my life.”

“Ass.”

“You love me.”

He nods. “Yeah, man. I do. I really do.”

—

The tour starts back up tomorrow, and we have a sound check today. Luckily, with us practicing, we don’t feel too rusty after having two weeks off. We have a new opening band joining us for the rest of the US leg of the tour. And then the European leg starts a week after that with a few new bands.

We run through mic testing before running through a few songs to make sure everything is at the level we want before we all go back to the green room and open a round of beers.

“You excited to play for your hometown?” Riot asks as she walks into the room.

“Of course we are,” I tell her, speaking for the whole band. “We love playing for them. They are the wildest crowd we have.”

“Good. You guys sounded good today too. I’m impressed. You all seemed to be a little off the last few shows, but now you are sounding like the band you used to be. Honestly, those quick song run-throughs might have been the best on tour yet.”

I look over at Knox, and he gives me a nod as I give him a smile. “I think we all just worked shit out.”

“Good. Well, I need to go grab the kids from Janae. I will see you all tomorrow.”

She heads out, and I watch Roan as he watches her leave, but I don’t say anything. I know he misses her. He said as much, but I know he isn’t going to do anything about it. Not after how pissed he was about her showing up to Silas’s end-of-tour kickoff party with another man.

“So I think we need to talk,” Jackson says to us.

“About what?”

“Roan mentioned the note to me earlier. And that you guys were planning on meeting this woman tonight.”

“We don’t really have a choice, do we?”

He folds his arms over his chest. “Yeah, I suppose you don’t.”

Knox speaks up. “As much as you and Silas probably want to be there. I think it’s best if it’s just me and Wilder.”

“What do you guys have planned?”

“We are pulling West into it. See what card he is going to play since we know he’s behind it.”

“And he agreed to show up?” Silas asks.

I nod. “Yeah, he told Knox he would be there so he could find out who this woman was that was even escaping his

knowledge.”

“Something doesn’t seem right about all this.”

“I know,” I tell him truthfully.

“It’s risky. Tour starts back up again tomorrow, and something could happen to one of you. Not going to be easy explaining to our fans if one of you is suddenly injured or dead.”

“Morbid much?” Silas asks Jackson.

“I’m being honest. We don’t know what could happen tonight. And I don’t trust West.”

“He’s not going to kill any of us,” Knox replies with a straight face. “How many of us owe favors to him? You know how he is. He wants us caught in his web. And if he kills one of us, he’s going to have to let us all go. But since we know he is behind this. This could be our ticket out.”

“More reason for him to kill one of us,” Jackson mutters.

I shake my head. “Knox is right. He won’t do it. We’re too high profile, and he couldn’t risk that coming back on him. We might actually have a leg up because of that. Maybe that’s why he has us so caught up in his business. He knows we could report him at any given time. So maybe he has been threatening us to keep our mouths shut.”

Roan disagrees with us. “He owns the cops here. They wouldn’t do shit about him being reported.”

“But not the feds,” Jackson retorts.

I put my hands up. “It’s not the time or the place to figure out why West has been keeping us so tightly connected to him. We need to end this once and for all with the threatening notes. That’s the main priority here. West may not know the length this woman has gone. For all we know, the woman used him to get to us.”

Silas looks over at me. “You bring up a good point. I think you’re right. Do what you guys have planned.” He looks over at Roan and Jackson. “You all in agreement?”

They both reluctantly agree.

“Then it’s settled,” I tell them. “We’re meeting the woman tonight.”



# WILDER

Knox and I are leaning against a building in a dilapidated part of town. We got here early to scope out the place, but there was no sign of anyone here. I look over to my SUV with worry, still not convinced that shit isn't about to go down tonight.

“Stop looking at her. You are just going to make it more obvious that you agreed to let her come with.”

I look over at Knox and then back over at the SUV. I stupidly told Lake she could come with as long as she hung out in the car and didn't make herself known. She honestly didn't give me much of a choice. I didn't want her here, but she insisted. She wanted to know that I was safe. And wanted to see the woman who was forcing her to leave the notes.

“I never should have let her come,” I tell Knox.

“No shit.”

I fold my arms over my chest and wait. It's well past eleven, and the woman still isn't here. I am starting to get more worried. Like maybe we were set up for something. Maybe they are going after Saylor. But I know she isn't home. Jackson made Charlie invite her over for a late dinner just in case this was all a setup. Part of the reason I wanted to bring Lake with us. I didn't want her at risk of being alone at my house.

Two headlights turn into the parking lot of the abandoned warehouse we're at. And I know it's time. I look over at the SUV once more before turning my head to watch a woman get



out of the car. She looks run down like she's done one too many drugs in her lifetime. Her hair is a dirty shade of mousy brown, and her frame is thin.

*Is this really the woman that's been threatening us?*

Knox stands up straighter, and I push myself off the side of the building as the woman comes into view.

"I told you both to meet me, not him," she says in a scratchy voice as she looks over at Knox.

"I don't know who else you would want to be here," I lie.

"Your girlfriend," she yells as she pulls out a gun and throws her hands in the air.

Yeah, this woman is definitely not stable.

"I don't have a girlfriend, hence why I am here. I wanted to know what the hell you meant by that."

"I know you're lying, I know that Lake is dating both of you."

Knox raises a brow at her. "I think you've been given the wrong information because neither of us are dating the woman that you paid to leave threatening notes to us."

"Then how do you know that?"

I speak up this time. "Because I was the one that threw her to the curb when she admitted her feelings for me and told me the truth."

"But she's here, in New Orleans. I saw her."

"She tried to get me back, but I wasn't going to let someone who lied to me into my life."

The woman looks over at Knox. "What about you? You don't want her either."

"I'm not with her."

"Lies, all lies. I've seen the pictures of you two together."

I freeze at that statement. "What pictures?"

She cackles into the humid night air. “So you don’t even know.”

“Know what?”

“I can ruin you both by releasing those pictures.”

Knox looks over at me, and we both know they must be pictures from four years ago. It was the only time that the three of us were together.

“What do you want?” I ask her because I’m tired of her bogus threats.

“I want my brother back,” she screams.

I scratch my head. “You mean Johnny? The guy you keep threatening me about. Sorry miss, but we both know he isn’t coming back from the dead.”

“Because you killed him!”

“He tried to kill us.”

“I don’t care, I don’t care at all. I just want my brother back, and I want you to pay.”

“Do you even know how to use that weapon?” Knox asks her mockingly.

“Of course I do. I’m not an idiot.”

“Why did you do it?” I ask her. “Why the threats?”

“I just needed to find out who killed him so I could get my revenge. I knew it was one of you entitled bastards. You think you are unstoppable because you are in some rock band, but you aren’t. You can all bleed the same way.”

“But that won’t bring your brother back,” Knox says with a coldness in his tone I’ve never heard before. “Isn’t that what you want?”

“He told me you would do this. He told me you would pay for it.”

“Who did?”

“My brother!”

Is she delusional?

Knox looks over at me like he can hear my thoughts just as two more cars drive up to us with their headlights cut off.

West unfolds himself from the back seat of the SUV and walks over to us. I don't pay attention to him though, I watch the woman as the color drains from her face.

"Carter," she mutters.

"Belinda," he says. "What are you doing?"

"How did you know I would be here?"

He picks an invisible piece of lint off his well-pressed suit. "I have my ways."

She turns the gun toward me, and I put my hands up. "You called him!"

"They didn't call me," West answers. "Like I said, I have my ways."

She turns the gun toward West, which is a stupid idea considering he has four men flanking him that are all holding weapons.

"You told me someone would pay for what my brother did."

He shrugs. "And I didn't think you would go to these lengths to get your revenge."

"They killed him." She points at me. "He killed him."

"I heard it was self-defense."

I'm shocked that West actually knows what happened that night.

"Let's not forget your brother was working to overthrow me," he tells Belinda.

"That's beside the point. You told me—"

He cuts her off. "I told you shit. But now I have you, and the man your brother was working with. So thank you for making that possible."

“What are you talking about?” I ask West, confused.

“Belinda is my cousin. So was Johnny, and they were both trying to steal from my business. I just didn’t know who was giving them the money to make that happen. But now I do.”

West signals to one of his men. The man goes to the back of the SUV and pulls out a man with a bag over his head. West’s cronie throws him on the ground between him, Knox, Belinda, and myself.

“It seems you found a man to help pay for the drugs that went missing, and you never had any intention of paying him back once you both started to earn a profit.”

“That—no... I mean...”

“So tell me why did you think you could undermine me? Your brother knew that he could never take over the business. He was too busy shoving the drugs up his nose just like you were. And I know for a fact your business partner here was the exact same way.”

“Carter, we just... we wanted a cut.”

“Then Johnny should have tried to make his way up in my ranks instead of constantly skimming from me. You know I don’t take that lightly.”

Knox looks over at me, and we both have shock written on our faces. Neither of us had any idea this is how tonight would turn out.

“Now, let’s see what your business partner has to say?”

West leans over and pulls the bag off the man’s head, who is lying on the ground with his hands tied behind his back.

A head of dirty blond hair is the first thing I notice before I see a bruised and bloody face. I’ve never seen this man before, and I have no idea what part we play in all this.

Until I hear the voice of Lake, who I told to stay in the goddamn back seat.

“Nathan!”



# LAKE

I sit in the car watching quietly from the back seat. I hate that Wilder didn't let me walk out there with him, but I should be grateful he even let me come. Even though I am under strict orders to hide in the back of the car. I have no idea what is about to happen tonight, and I fear for both him and Knox. I have no idea who this woman is and what she has the capability of doing.

I see headlights as a car pulls up in front of Knox and Wilder. I bite my nails in anticipation and fear. What if I know this woman? What if we met before?

But as she gets out of the car, I know I've never seen her before. So I have no idea what is going to happen.

I'm too far away to hear their conversation, but every now and then, I hear the woman scream. When she pulls out a gun, my hand lands on the door handle, ready to run and protect Wilder. But what good am I? It's not like I have any way to protect him against a gun.

The sound of tires in the parking lot has my head turning again. Two vehicles approach Wilder, Knox, and the woman with their headlights off. I know that Wilder told me Knox called Carter West, so I can only assume it's him. My heart is beating so hard in my chest as I wait in anticipation.

He gets out of the car, and more conversation ensues. I wish I could hear them. I wish I knew what was going on. I'm still scared for both Wilder and Knox. What if Carter West

finally turns on them and kills them both? What would I do if I lost Wilder after just getting him back?

The woman turns her weapon on West, and his men pull their weapons out and point them at her. I swear I am going to have a heart attack as I wait here.

A few minutes go by before one of West's men grabs a hooded man out of the back seat of one of the cars. I watch in anticipation as he is brought to the ground in front of West.

But when the bag is finally torn from his head, I swear I black out for a second. There is no way. This cannot be happening. But sure enough, as West lifts the man's head, I have a clear view of his beat-up face but I know without a doubt that's my brother.

I scramble out of the car so quickly that I trip over my feet as I make my way to the crowd.

"Nathan!" I shout.

I look at Wilder just as his head snaps toward mine.

No no no. This cannot be happening. Why is my brother here? What did I do to deserve this?

"Ms. Hawkins, I thought you would be joining us," West says in that cruel voice of his.

I ignore him and the weapons that are suddenly turned at me as I kneel to the ground in front of my brother, wiping some of the blood away from his face.

"Nathan, my god, what have they done to you? What are you doing here?"

Within seconds, I am pulled to my feet by one of West's men. I struggle against him, but Wilder's eyes meet mine, and he just shakes his head.

"What is going on?" I demand as I struggle against the man holding me.

"It seems that your dear brother has been caught," West says to me. "Did you know about how he stole from me? Oh

wait, of course you did because you paid for his debts to your father.”

My eyes snap away from West to look at my brother. “Nathan?”

He ignores me as I try to get an answer from him. I knew he was caught up in some bad shit, but I had no idea it was this.

“You see, Miss Hawkins, your brother worked with this woman here to steal a bunch of my product. He eventually paid me back for it all, but he didn’t stop there. He then tried to start a business to overcome me. Little did he know just how powerful I am, and there is no taking me out. He fled once he figured out it would never work. But I think you know about how he has moved so often in the last few years.”

“What does she have to do with any of this?” Wilder asks.

“Absolutely nothing,” West answers. “But I needed her to get to her brother. Once she could start getting calls from Belinda here, I was able to track all the calls she was making, and that’s how I found her brother in the Cayman Islands.”

I look over at Nathan. “That’s why you were trying to leave. Not because you got into trouble there but because West found you.”

Nathan remains silent through this all, and I half wonder if West cut out his tongue. But then I see the fear written in his eyes. He knows what he did, and now he’s been caught.

“I’m sorry to have used you, Miss Hawkins, but you got me who I needed. And you should be thanking me. I did get those men off your back and helped you pay back your father for what your brother stole. So really, I think I did you a favor.”

“B-but why the threats? Why make me write those notes?”

West looks over at the woman who is staring at me with daggers in her eyes. “She was just another pawn, thinking she could get her revenge. But you see, no one gets revenge quite like I do.”



Before I can even ask another question or stop him, he pulls a gun from his suit jacket and shoots my brother in the head.

I cry out and fall to the ground as West's man lets me go. Wilder is on me in seconds, picking me up and comforting me.

"Now, Belinda, I think it's time you also pay for your crimes against me."

"No, don't kill me. I didn't have anything to do with this."

"You had everything to do with this. From my knowledge, you were the one who told Johnny to undermine me. But don't worry I'm not going to kill you. I have much better use for you."

I watch through tear-stained eyes as West's man hauls her off toward one of the waiting vehicles.

West turns toward me. "Sorry about your brother, but he was a terrible man. He owed me, and sometimes the only way to pay me back is through death."

I don't even have words to say. I just watched my brother get killed in front of me. Wilder runs his hands up and down my arms as I just stare at my brother's lifeless body.

"Now I have things to do. See to it that I don't need to go through such extremes again," I hear West say, and I am not sure if he is directing it at me or Wilder.

I feel completely frozen as I watch West's cronies haul my brother off the ground and carry him away. Wilder and Knox remain quiet until West leaves, the three of us standing in the empty parking lot for minutes before anyone says anything.

"What the fuck?" Knox says.

Wilder ignores him as he lifts me up into his arms and carries me back to his SUV. I can hear Knox following us, but I don't look at him. I don't even look at Wilder. I feel lost. And I don't know why. I wasn't that close to my brother. But he was still my brother. And he was just murdered in front of me.

My brother's dead.

I try to comprehend it, but my mind just won't allow me to. A dull ache takes over me as silent tears fall from my eyes.

Wilder puts me in the back seat of his car, and I barely see him toss the keys to Knox before he is climbing in next to me and pulling me into his lap.

“Drive,” he tells Knox.

The car starts moving, and I just sit frozen in Wilder's lap as we make our way back home.



## WILDER

“How is she doing?”

I look over at Knox, who is sitting in my living room next to Roan. We have our first show in New Orleans tonight, and I've barely slept. I never thought last night was going to happen like it did. Never expected that Lake would be tied into this mess from the beginning because of something her brother did. That her brother was part of the reason I killed Johnny that night. And who knows if her brother was part of the reason that Silas's brother was killed all those years ago.

Jackson and Silas should be here soon. We didn't tell them much last night, all of us in a state of shock over what happened. Roan only knows because he was sitting on my couch waiting for me when I got home, and Knox filled him in.

The fact that West didn't give a shit about the letters the whole time and led us on just because he was trying to get to Lake's brother. It makes sense why he pulled her in, why he let Belinda have a vendetta against us instead of just taking her out. All so he could get to the man he couldn't find. And Lake had to suffer the consequences one last time for what her brother did.

“She's asleep,” I tell Knox. “It took her a while to fall asleep. She was just lying in bed staring at the wall until about six this morning. But I finally got her to take a sleeping pill.”

“She's in shock,” Roan says.

I nod.

“She isn’t used to this life, Wild. It’s going to take her a long time to heal from watching her brother get killed,” Knox tells me.

I know it will. It took me a long time to feel normal again after I killed someone, and it still haunts me to this day. I can’t imagine how she is feeling right now. And I don’t even know how I am supposed to play tonight knowing the woman I love is broken.

“Saylor will stay with her,” Knox says. “I can see your mind working over there. You don’t know how you are going to leave her today. But Saylor will be here.”

I nod reluctantly. I know I have to do this. I have a job. I have fans. I have a crowd of people that paid a lot of money to see us tonight, and I can’t let them down.

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“You good, man?” Jackson asks me as I pace around the green room.

“As good as I can be.”

It took everything in me to leave Lake earlier. She woke up about an hour before I had to leave. She was still in a comatose state, but she told me to go. She knew I had to be here tonight. I had a long talk with Saylor too. She told me she would make sure Lake was okay and already planned to order all the pizza and ice cream possible in order to help Lake. I don’t really know if that will help at all, but I have to believe it will.

I just need to get through this night. One night and then the next and the one after that. And I know eventually, Lake will be okay. We all have been through tragedies, and I know we will be there to help her heal just like the guys were there for me.

“Okay, I need you guys to stop loitering back here and get on stage,” Riot tells us as she walks into the room.

Our tour manager has been back here twice to tell us to get our asses side stage, but the guys knew I needed as much time as possible before I put on a front for the crowd.

“You got this, man,” Silas tells me as we make our way down the hall. “I know how hard it is, and I know how much you are hurting knowing that Lake is hurting but you’ll be fine. You both will be. Just give her time. And remember, being on stage is going to help you.”

I give him a weak smile, but I know he’s right. Playing for crowds is what has helped us for so long get through all the shit we’ve been through.

I grab my guitar from one of the roadies and place my in-ear monitors in my ears before making my way onto the stage.

Knox gives me a head nod as he taps his drumsticks to start our opening song. I bury my pain and the pain for Lake deep down as I play the first few progressive notes of the song. Before I know it, I get lost in the music. I let it take over my body the way I always have. I put on a show for the crowd like this is what I was born to do. I let thoughts of Lake fade from my mind unlike what I did weeks ago after I told her to leave. Maybe it’s that I know she will be waiting for me when I get home. That I will be able to comfort her and give her what she needs as soon as we are done tonight.

I let that thought drive me through our performance. I hit every note, I sing every lyric the way I am supposed to, and the crowd goes absolutely wild. This is what I live for, and it’s giving me some peace of mind for the time being.

When we get off stage after our encore, everything hits me again. Lake, last night, seeing her brother killed, but at least I pulled off the show like I was supposed to.

Jackson claps me on the back as we walk back to the green room. I take a shot with the rest of the band like we always do and just pray that Lake is okay when I get home.

---

The sound of laughter has me confused as I walk through the front door of my house. Cackling, high-pitched laughter. I walk into my living room and find Lake surrounded by Saylor, Marley, and Charlie. All the girls were missing from the show tonight, but that didn't affect us. We all knew they wanted to be with Lake to make her feel better.

I grab a slice of cold pizza off the kitchen counter as I look at the girls on my sofa. Six empty wine bottles sit on the table in front of them, and I know they are drunk off their asses. But the thing that stops me in my tracks is the smile on Lake's face. It may just be a band-aid but at least she is smiling for now.

"Wilder!" my sister shouts. "How did it go? We actually talked about crashing the show tonight but then realized we would need to put on clothes instead of pajamas."

I laugh at her. She rarely ever drinks, but I can tell she is happily drunk from the look on her face.

"It went amazing. The crowd loved us."

"Like they ever wouldn't," Charlie says as she stands from the couch. "Are the rest of the guys here?"

"They should be soon. I left a few minutes before them."

We all agreed to meet at my house after because we knew the girls would be there.

Lake slides off the couch and saunters over to me, then throws her arms around my neck. She clearly had more to drink than the others. "I missed you. I can't believe I missed your show tonight," she slurs.

"It's okay, babe. How are you doing?"

She shrugs. "I mean, everything still hurts, but at least a few rom-coms and wine made everything hurt a little less."

I bend down and kiss her briefly on the lips. "Glad to hear that," I mutter against them.

I'm worried though. Worried that she will either keep drinking to mask her pain or will fall into a deeper depression tomorrow once her hangover wears off.

“I do have a secret though,” she tells me.

“What’s that?”

She stands on her toes and whispers in my ear. “I want you naked.”

I bark out a laugh. “You can have me however you want, but we should probably wait until everyone is gone.”

“No fun,” she mutters as her hands slide from around my neck and down my chest. “I think I need more wine.”

“Go get some then.” I hate to encourage her. But at least she is smiling, unlike how she was a few hours ago.

The sound of my front door opening and closing as the Marley and Saylor squealing as they both run to jump on their men.

Knox picks my sister up and looks at me over his shoulder. I just nod my head and turn away as he kisses her. I may be okay with it, but it’s not something I really want to watch.

I pour myself a gin and tonic and take a seat on the couch next to Lake, who is downing a glass of white wine. I try to pry it out of her hands, but she pushes me away. I guess this is just part of the grieving cycle. I know it’s going to get worse, but I decide to let her have her fun for the night.

By the time the guys leave, and Roan heads back to the pool house, Lake is passed out. I carry her up the stairs, put her in bed, and wrap myself around her, hoping that tomorrow she is a little better than she was this afternoon.





## LAKE

I t's been a week since I saw my brother killed, and every day has been harder than the last. I've been actively trying not to let it get to me, but it's not really helping. I feel like a zombie. I let the days go by, but all I can see any time I close my eyes is him being shot in front of me.

I haven't called my dad yet. I'm not even sure what to tell him. Wilder tells me that Carter West will probably get rid of the body and that I need to act like I don't even know what happened. Act like Nathan just disappeared. But it's hard for me to think about. This whole week has been hard.

And I know it's been hard on Wilder too with the way I've been acting. Besides that first night when I got absolutely trashed, everything has been different since then. I've been in a mostly comatose state. Letting the days pass by. I haven't even gone to any of Saints & Sinners shows. It's just too hard to face that many people and keep a secret. At least everyone in the band and the girls know, except for Riot. Apparently, she knows nothing about their relationship with Carter West, which I find hard to believe.

The guys leave for the second leg of their tour today. Naturally, Wilder expects me to come along, but I am not sure if I can. The grief is eating away at me, and I feel like I will just bring everyone down if I go with them. I feel like I need alone time. Like I need to figure this all out on my own. But I know Wilder won't have that. And it makes me second-guess everything about our relationship. Not that I want to end things with him, but I am not sure if now is the time to take things

one step further. Even though I've been living at his house for the last week and a half it doesn't feel the same as going on tour with him. I just don't want to bring him down, and I feel like I will.

I stare at the bag I packed, wondering if I am going to buy a plane ticket or get on his bus when he walks into the room.

"You okay?"

I shrug.

"What's wrong, baby?" he asks me as he wraps his arms around me. "Are you not sure about this?"

I don't know how, but in the last week, Wilder has gotten very good at reading the thoughts in my head.

I nod. Because what good would it be to lie to him? I never want to lie to him again. "I'm not sure if I am ready for this."

"For what?"

"Moving on. Forgetting about what happened. I feel like I'm just going to put everything behind me and forget."

"You aren't moving on and forgetting, baby. You are just living your life. You need to keep living. I haven't said anything to you because I didn't want to piss you off. Plus, I think you needed this week to just sit and think and do what you felt like you needed to do. But you need this. You need to live your life. And I want you to live it with me. I don't want to lose you again. And I'm worried if I let you stay behind, I will lose you. And my heart can't take that. So maybe I am being selfish and doing this for me because I need you in my life, but I think it will help you too."

"I'm just going to get in the way and bring your mood down."

"No, you won't. You haven't brought my mood down this last week."

I grimace at that because I know I definitely have. "I felt like I've been in the way."

He pulls me onto the bed, forcing me into his lap. “You haven’t been in the way at all. I’ve been giving you the space you need. But I think it’s time you have a change of scenery. Saylor and Marley are going to be there with us. So you will be able to talk with them. And Marley knows about loss.”

“She does?” I ask him because I really don’t know much about these girls.

“She lost her baby a few months ago. It nearly tore her and Silas apart, but she’s been doing better each day. She could be there for you, walk you through the grief.”

I contemplate that. I didn’t know she had lost a child. I think that would be worse than losing a brother. And to think that Silas went through losing his brother and child. I can’t even fathom that.

“Maybe I should get a therapist.”

“That’s a good idea.”

“But I can’t tell them the truth, and I don’t know if that will help me at all.”

“There are ways to still talk to them about your loss. But it’s up to you. You just need to figure out what will help. Just know I am here for you. Always.”

---

I sit on the bus staring out the window as Wilder sleeps. I decided that he was right, and I should go on tour. A change of scenery has helped the last few days, but everything still hurts. The pain is so deep inside of me. I wish I could have done something to stop West from pulling that trigger. I wish that my brother didn’t get caught up in the shit that he did. But I know I can’t change anything.

I pick up the journal I bought earlier at a local bookstore. Marley told me that writing everything down helped her get through the pain. So I decide to try it out. I pour my thoughts and feelings into the journal, things I never thought I would even admit to myself. My pain, my anger, my hatred for my

brother. Because I think above everything else, the thing that hurts worse than my grief is that fact I hate him for what he did. For the lies he told me that led me here. That got me tied up in this mess.

But I am grateful for some of it. And I think that is where part of the pain of me hating myself comes from. Because all the pieces that fell into place led me to Wilder. A man I know loves me more than anything. But I question how he could, after what I put him through. How can he see past my lies? How can he let it all go so easily when I feel broken inside. I hurt him more than I ever wanted to. Yet he took me back so easily. He forgave me.

Maybe that's what I'm missing, I need to forgive myself.

I set my notebook down, feeling slightly better after writing down all my thoughts. I know that it's going to take time. The time it takes to mend all wounds. Both those of my brother's mistakes and my own. But at least I recognize that.

I walk down the hall past the bunk beds and into the bedroom at the back of the bus. Wilder is sound asleep and spread across the bed. His blond hair falling out of the bun he has it in. His chiseled chest on display along with all those tattoos. The sheet drapes low across his hips showing off that vee that leads to one of his amazing assets. I curse at myself for thinking about sex with him. Sometimes I wonder if that's the only thing that is keeping us together. That one day he will get bored of the sex and realize all that's left is me. A woman with no future and who is completely broken over the decisions she's made in her life.

A tear falls down my cheek, and I brush it away. No matter how much I think Wilder would be better off without me, there is a part of me that doesn't want to let him go. That can't let him go. I am so deeply in love with him. And I just want to know that he feels the same about me. That I am the one for him despite everything we've been through.

He shifts on the bed and opens his eyes. "Lake, what are you doing up so late?"

I look at the clock and see that it's past three in the morning. We will probably be getting to Dallas soon. "I was just thinking."

He pats the bed, and I crawl across it to him and let him wrap his arms around me. "About what?" he asks as he presses a kiss to the top of my head.

"Everything," I sigh.

"I know it's hard right now, but you know things will get better."

I nod because I don't know what to tell him. I don't want him to know that I feel things never will get better or that they will only get worse between us.

"I love you, Lake. I don't want you to think that I don't. I can see what is going on in that head of yours. But you need to know that I'm okay with what you did. Yeah, it hurt, and I was a wreck after it all went down, but I am okay now. Because it let me have you. Despite all the lies, I knew to look at the person I was falling for because that woman who spent hours twisted in sheets with me, lying next to me, telling me her darkest secrets, that woman is still here. The rest doesn't matter. What matters is that I have you."

The damn tears hit my eyes. "How can you look past everything I did?"

"I don't know. I just can. Maybe it's because I know you were forced to do those things, but if that never happened, I wouldn't have you in my arms right now. You've made me a better man, Lake, and that is something I will always be grateful for. I can look past your mistakes and the flaws that occurred in our relationship and just see you. Your beauty, your mind, the things I fell in love with. Those were all real. The lies weren't. That's how I can love you. That's how I know that I'm in love with you."

I wrap my arms around him and press my lips against his chest as he pulls me into him. "I love you too, Wilder Reed. And I don't know what I would do without you."

He holds me for the rest of the ride to Dallas. We don't talk, and we don't sleep. He just comforts me in the way he knows how, the way I love.





**WILDER**

## **One month later**

**T**onight is our last show of the US leg of the tour. Our fourth show in LA. It's crazy to think about everything that has happened in the last few months. My sister and Knox. Marley coming back. Lake.

But it's been worth it. All the ups and downs. The trials and tribulations. The dirty secrets and the wicked lies. It's all been worth it.

Lake is asleep in my arms at my house here in LA. When she first walked into my beach house, I didn't know how she would react, but I had hoped she would love it. It's not as big as my house in New Orleans because damn real estate here is expensive as hell. But to me, it's perfect. A small three-bedroom bungalow directly on the beach. I bought it so I could get up and surf in the mornings, which is exactly what I plan on doing once I can shift out of the hold Lake has on me.

She rolls over, and I make my exit. I head outside, throw on a wetsuit, and grab my board before jogging out to the water. The waves are calm this morning but big enough that I can get a few runs in. I paddle out to the break and sit on the board, staring at my house thinking about Lake.

She's gotten better in the last few weeks. I think the therapy has helped, and so has Marley and my sister. I have no idea what they talk about, but every day, the three of them eat lunch together and come back in better moods. Some days with tears in their eyes, but I guess it's their therapy. Whatever they need to do to overcome the things they've all been through.

I inhale deeply, the salt in the air reminding me of Lake and how she feels like home. I never realized that until a few weeks ago when she was cuddled up next to me, and I was breathing in her scent. That saltiness to her skin reminds me of home. Of these waves. Of the sand beneath my toes. The place where I am most comfortable, and now it's with her.

So much of everything she does is wrapped up in my life. And I am grateful for all of it. We may have had a rocky start. There may have been lies between both of us, but not anymore. Now what we have is real. And I love every single minute I get with her.

I grab the next wave that comes by, riding out the crest as I feel so much peace in my life. I never thought the day would come when I would settle down with one woman. Hell, I've never settled before. But Lake is special. She feels like home, and I can't wait to spend the rest of my years with her.

When I hit the beach, I shake the water out of my hair and toss my board in the sand. I unzip the top half of my wetsuit and pull my arms out of it just as I notice Lake walking down from my house to meet me.

Her messy blond hair blows in the warm breeze of the California coastline. Her perfect body covered up by one of my T-shirts. She is holding a towel and a cup of coffee in her hand as she makes her way to me.

“You are such a natural out there.”

“Were you watching me?” I ask her.

She nods. “How could I not? It was so hot watching my surfer boy ride the waves.”

“Was it now?”

Her fingers trail along my puka shell necklace. “This is growing on me. It does suit you.”

“I told you, it's stylish.”

She snorts. “I wouldn't go that far.”

“I'm beginning to wonder about your sense of style.”

“You should be worried about yours,” she teases as she looks me up and down.

I grab the coffee out of her hands and take a sip before tossing the cup on the ground and pulling her into me.

“Have I ever told you how sexy you look in just my T-shirt?”

“Many times,” she tells me as she tries to push away from me.

I pull her in hard and bring my lips to hers. The perfect morning kiss with the woman I love on the beach that feels like home.

She tries to pull away from me. “Wild, you’re getting me all wet.”

I raise a brow at her. “I like it when you get all wet.”

“That’s not what I mean at all.” She laughs as she pushes against my chest.

“You sure about that, babe?”

Before she can fight me on it, I lift her up and toss her over my shoulder.

“Wilder!”

“I heard you were wet; I am ready to find out.”

I smack her ass and carry her inside.

# EPILOGUE

WILDER

## One Year Later

I'm sitting in an Adirondack chair in my backyard in LA with a small bonfire going as the stars light up the night sky. It's crazy to think it's been an entire year since Lake stumbled back into my life. And we went through a lot. The ups and downs of our personal lives and our time together. The turmoil we experienced in our relationship. But the bliss we've had this past year outweighs all that. We've found the life we thought we were missing in each other, and I will never forget that or be ungrateful for our time together. We may have started out as friends and ended up enemies, but now we are lovers on the deepest level.

Things didn't get easier when we got back on tour in Europe. Her brother's body was found a few weeks in. The cops found him in a seedy part of town, half decomposed. They assumed it was a drug deal gone wrong. Another victim of a nameless crime.

It took Lake a while to recover from seeing him shot, but it took even longer for her to recover from the news of his body being found. Like she was reliving that night over and over. It's taken a lot of work to get where she is now, but I know she's better. And she's happy. That smile I love shows up on her face more often than not. And when she tells me she loves me, I know she means it. I can see it written in her eyes, across her face, through her entire glorious body.

I finally learned to heal too. Heal from the guilt I felt over being a murderer. Maybe because it turns out the man I killed was deserving of his death. But I wasn't the one that deserved to shoot him. Either way, I let it eat away at me less and less. I've taken up what Lake does and write all my feelings down in a journal. It's therapeutic for sure.

I turn and look in the house and see her grabbing us some drinks before she makes her way outside. She hands me a gin and tonic while she takes a sip of her martini. She sets her drink down on the table between us and curls into the chair

next to me. The cool breeze of the ocean sent chills down her body.

We decided to spend the summer here after nearly a year on tour. The heat in New Orleans was unbearable, and we both felt more at home by the ocean. Plus, it helps Lake get her business on the ground. She decided to open her own stylist business, and she already has a list of celebrities ready for her to take on.

I'm proud of her for all she's been through and all she is accomplishing. She is a miraculous woman, and I am so happy I get to call her mine.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asks me as I study her sapphire eyes.

"Can't I stare at you, woman? You're beautiful."

She blushes in the faint light of the fire. "Don't you get sick of telling me that?"

"Never."

"You're ridiculous."

"I'm in love."

She shakes her head at me but gives me a soft smile. I'll never stop telling her how much I love her. And I don't think she gets tired of it, no matter how much she pretends she does.

"Now, where were we? I think it was your turn."

She takes another sip of her martini. "Would you rather have horns that sprouted from your head or a tail?"

"You calling me the devil, woman?"

She grins at me. "Maybe."

"I'll take the tail. I think I could get use out of it when it comes to you." I wag my brows at her.

She punches me in the arm. "You're... I don't even know what to call you anymore."

"Amazing. Handsome. The sexiest man you've ever seen. The best lay you've ever had."



She rolls her eyes at me. “One day, that head of yours is going to shrink.”

“Unlikely.” I laugh at myself, knowing it’s the total truth. Even when I’m old and gray, I’ll be just as cocky as I am now. I take a sip of my drink and turn my eyes back to her. “Would you rather be my girlfriend or my wife?”

“What kind of question is that?” she asks me, confused. “That is not how we play this game.”

“Fine. Would you rather be miserable and stuck in a concrete room for the rest of your life or wake up next to me every morning and call me your husband?”

“Wilder,” she groans. “What is up with you?”

“I think it was a fair question.”

“More like a ridiculous one.”

“Just humor me and answer it.”

“You know the answer.”

I pump my fist into the air. “I knew you wanted to be my wife.”

“Actually, I’ll take the concrete room.”

I gape at her, and she just laughs. Then she grabs my hand. “You know I’m kidding. But we haven’t even talked about marriage. I didn’t think—”

“Why talk about something that’s inevitable?”

“Wilder.” She looks at me with pursed lips.

I push up from my chair and then kneel in front of her, pulling out a three-carat diamond solitaire from my pocket. “Lake, I’ve loved you for a long time, probably even longer than I realized. But I was serious when I asked that question. Because to me, a life without you would be absolutely miserable. Be my wife.”

Tears crest her eyes, but she nods with a huge smile on her face. “Only you, surfer boy. Only you.”

“Is that a yes?”

“I didn’t realize you asked me a question.”

I give her my most charming grin, then grab her hand and slide the ring on her finger. “Will you marry me, Lake Hawkins?”

She leans forward and presses her full lips to mine. “Yes,” she mutters against my lips.

I pull back before she can kiss me again and let out a whoop into the air and scream. “This woman is going to be my wife.”

She giggles as she pulls me into her and kisses the hell out of me. Something I cannot wait for her to do for the rest of our lives.

The End

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Roan's story is next. The final chapter!

Broken Vows

Coming January 2024

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finally! You finally have another book. This one took it out of me. I was going through so much mentally and emotionally for a few months that writing was next to impossible for me. I hated everything I wrote and would just delete it. But I knew I needed to get this book done and out to all of you so I pushed myself everyday to write even if it wasn't a lot. And eventually I got here. I hope you enjoyed this book. It took a lot out of me but I know that I am ready to keep telling stories now!

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tori Fox is the author of romantic suspense and contemporary romance with a little bit of angst and a whole lot of sexy. When she isn't writing, you can find her listening to true crime podcasts as she tends to her plants or singing along to Taylor Swift as she drinks champagne. Tori is living her best life in the magic of New Orleans with her dog.

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