

BROKEN  
VOWS



SAINTS & SINNERS SERIES BOOK FIVE

T O R I F O X



BROKEN  
VOWS

SAINTS & SINNERS SERIES BOOK TWO

T O R I F O X

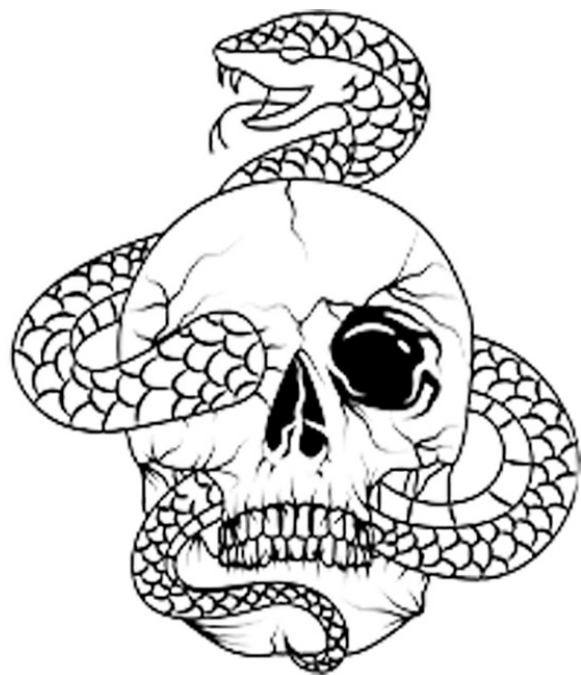
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# **A NOTE TO READERS...**

This book does contain triggers that may be sensitive to some readers including:

- Drug use
- Alcoholism

## ROAN

I've made a lot of mistakes in my life. Ones that I regret and others I would rather forget. But the one that rattles me to my core is losing my wife. It's all I think about. Even here, sitting among my best friends trying to have a good time before we leave for the European leg of our tour, all I can think about is her. Riot. The one I let get away.

The hardest part of it all is that it's my fault. There is no blaming her for anything. I'm a fuckup. An asshole. A bastard. I ruined the best thing I ever had all because I can't control myself. I've never been able to. I couldn't control myself when I had my heart set on her. I demanded we be together even though she was completely against it. Convinced her mentor was right that you can't mix business and pleasure. And as things started to go south in our relationship, she always came back to that. Always said she knew this would never work out.

But none of it is her fault. It's all mine. And now I have to live in constant heartbreak. Missing the woman I see all the time. Missing the two beautiful little girls we brought into this world. All because I let my vices get the better of me.

I take a long pull of the joint in my hand. Here I am, yet again, turning to my vices.

"You okay, man?" Wilder turns toward me, pulling the joint from my fingers and taking a drag.

I shrug, what else am I supposed to say? My life is falling apart, and all I



want right now is to not feel anything. I can't say that. I almost spilled my guts to him a few months ago when we were hanging out in his backyard but luckily I was interrupted by Silas.

I'm not the type of person who shares my feelings. I never really have been. The only person I ever let in was Riot, and I've learned that it means shit. Because look what happened. I ruined everything. I was so focused on myself I didn't look to see what she needed. I let my vices get the best of me. I did too many drugs. Drank too much. And then I cheated. If it was only once she probably would have forgiven me. But it wasn't just once. It was three times. Three times I forgot the vows I promised to keep and look where it got me. A divorced bachelor drowning himself in misery.

"You know if you just talk about it, things might get better."

I snort as I take the joint back from Wilder. "And say what, man? I fucked up so much shit in my life, and all I want is forgiveness?"

Wilder studies me, and I know I've said too much. "If you asked her for forgiveness, she would give it to you."

"No, she wouldn't. She gave it to me one too many times. She's done with me."

Wilder purses his lips and shakes his head. "I don't think so, man. I don't think that woman will ever be over you."

"She's moved on, man."

"I see the way she looks at you. I don't think she's moved on. I think she is just looking for a distraction."

I raise a brow at him. "A distraction from what?"

"Her own feelings."

"The only thing she feels toward me is hatred."

Wilder grabs the joint from me again. "I don't think so."

"Then what?"

He takes a long drag then hands me back the almost-finished joint. "I think she misses what you guys had."

I laugh at that. "No, she doesn't."

"I'm not talking about the way things were at the end. I think she misses what you guys used to have. Back when she finally gave in to you. The passion, the love that you all shared."

"Don't get sentimental on me. I think you are too in love with Lake to see the fact she hates me."

"She doesn't hate you."

“You don’t know what I did.” I regret the words as soon as I say them.

Wilder takes a sip of his beer. “Then maybe you should tell me.”

“And watch you tell everyone else? Thanks for the concern, man, but no.”

I feel my blood start to boil thinking about not only what I did, but that Wilder thinks I would just tell him.

“Come on,” he huffs. “You’ll never be able to move on if you don’t tell someone what happened. And I know you aren’t going to talk to a shrink. Might as well tell me.”

“You are the last person I would tell.”

He grips his chest. “I’m wounded.”

I ignore his pleading eyes and look around the party. We leave for the European leg of our tour in a few days, and Silas decided to throw a party at his house in LA.

“Roan.”

I grab a bottle of whiskey off the table in front of me and stand up. “I don’t need to hear this.”

“Hear what? I’m trying to help you.”

“Fuck off,” I mumble as I stumble away and into the house.

I’ll never tell the guys what I did. The final straw that made me lose my wife. That’s the one secret Riot and I will keep to ourselves forever.

I make my way past a group of women who have their eyes on me and head to the bathroom. I could really use a distraction right now. Something to make me forget that conversation happened. Then I almost slipped up and spilled my secrets to the gossip of the band. I may love my bandmates, but none of them deserve to know my secrets.

I slam the bathroom door behind me and dig into my pocket for the one thing that I know will ruin everything but that always makes me feel better. Makes me forget what I did. Yet makes me become the man I hate more than anything.

I pull the baggie out and shake a small amount onto the counter. I roll up a dollar bill and inhale the line of heroin. I immediately feel it hit. Not as strong as I want. Not the high I need. But enough to make me forget.

Forget about the pain I caused.

The lives I’ve ruined.

The woman I’ve lost.

I just want to forget it all.

## RIOT

“Brixley, stop pulling my hair!”

I groan as I hear Lyric yelling at her sister. “Mike, I got to go, but we can go over these details tomorrow. I think everything should be good.”

“Lyriccccccc!”

I wince as I hear my girls fighting. They have been getting worse and worse by the day. I really should have put Lyric in school instead of homeschooling her, but with my schedule, I feel like I never got to see my babies.

“The girls fighting again?” Mike asks.

“Always. I swear they get worse by the day.”

“I know what you mean. I feel the same way about my kids. You think they would get better once they got older. But teenage boys...be lucky you have girls.”

“Oh I know I’m lucky, but they still know how to drive their momma crazy.”

Mike chuckles into the phone. “I’ll get these final details smoothed out for the tour. No need to worry, Riot. We’ve done this enough times to know what needs to be done.”

“Thank you, I appreciate it.”

“Anytime.”

I hang up the phone and let out a long breath. Mike has been Saints &

Sinners' tour manager for the last five years, and we've always worked well together. I have no doubt he will get these final details smoothed out before the guys leave in a few days.

I've been Saints & Sinners' manager for over ten years. My job is tough, managing the biggest rock band in the world, but I would never trade my job for another. I would bleed for the band as much as I know they would bleed for me. We all came from nothing. I knew they would make it huge one day. But at the time I was working as an assistant for an A&R rep who never believed in me. So one day I quit and decided to start my own company. The first thing I did was tell the guys in the band I was going to make them the biggest band in the world. They didn't believe me. They never thought they could get to where they've gotten. But I never had my doubts about them. I knew we would be here one day, and I couldn't be more proud.

"Mommmmm!"

I sigh as I hear Lyric yelling for me. These girls are a handful on most days. Their attitudes definitely come from their father.

I push away from my desk and make my way downstairs to find them in the living room fighting over a Barbie doll.

"It's mine!" Brixley, my four-year-old, yells at her older sister.

"No it's not, and you know it. This is my Barbie."

"Girls!"

"No, it's mine!"

"Girls!"

"You think everything is yours. You're such a baby!" Lyric yells at her sister.

"I'm not a baby anymore."

"Yes you are. A big old baby who spends her nights crying for Daddy, but he's never coming back."

Brixley lets go of the doll and starts wailing.

"Lyric, do not talk to your sister like that," I yell as I make my way in between them.

"Well it's true. She's always crying for Daddy, and Daddy isn't here to hold her anymore. He never will be."

My heart clenches at her words. I know how angry she is with her father, but she has no right to talk to her sister that way. Not when I'm the reason her father isn't here anymore.

"Lyric, apologize to Brixley right now."

“No.” She pouts.

“Lyric, I’m going to count to three, and you better—”

“She always gets what she wants,” she stammers before running away and stomping up the stairs.

I let out an exasperated breath. I’ll deal with her later. Right now I need my youngest to stop crying.

“Come here, baby girl. Momma’s right here.”

I open up my arms to her as I kneel on the floor next to her, and she wraps her arms around my neck. Wet tears run down her face and into my hair as I hold her close.

My heart breaks for both my girls. And it’s my fault. I’m the one that kicked their father out. I was the one who said I wanted a divorce. And I’m the one that battled for custody. I never let him have a chance. Not after that final straw.

But I know my girls miss him. Brixley says it all the time, and Lyric is telling the truth when she says Brixley cries for her dad—it happens nearly every night. But I don’t have it in me to let him see her. Maybe that makes me a bad parent. But I worry about how he will act around the kids. When he wasn’t using, he was so good with them, but near the end, the drug use got bad, and he nearly lost everything because of it.

I hold Brixley in my arms until her tears diminish. I know she is hurting, and I don’t know how to fix it. I am so used to fixing problems all day, yet parenting is something I never expected. It’s so much harder than I thought it would be. And now being a single mom is even harder.

I hear Lyric still stomping around upstairs and know I need to go talk to her. She has been getting so angry lately, and I don’t know why. She’s only six. Yet she carries the weight of the world on her shoulders. I know she is angry with her father, and maybe she is angry with me too. I think she misses her dad more than she lets on, but she won’t talk to me.

And I shouldn’t be at the point where my daughter won’t talk to me. She is six not sixteen. Maybe she just needs to see her dad and then everything will be okay. Except I don’t know how her father will act around her when he is around. The guilt he feels weighs him down, I know that. But I am more worried about the state he’ll be in. His drug use has gotten worse, and I fear one day I am going to get the call I never want to get.

## ROAN

The beat of the music matches my heart rate as we chill out in our practice space. We are preparing to leave for the European leg of our tour. It's only a short break after the US leg so we aren't too concerned about our performance, but we still like to practice at least three times a week.

Silas has some new metal band's music playing, and I can't help but get lost in the drum beat as I smoke a joint I'm sharing with him.

It seems like I'm high nearly every day, whether from weed, coke, or heroin. But I need it to get through each day. My depression is hitting an all-time low. At least I'm pretty sure it's depression. I've never gone to a shrink mostly because I don't want to talk about my problems. And I seem to get by just fine on my self-medication.

But things are getting worse. Part of it is that all the guys are happy right now. All in loving relationships, and it's hard to watch. I liked it when we were all drowning. When we all had something weighing us down. But lately it's just been me, and I can't help but feel guilty over the fact I'm dragging the guys down with me into this hole of my life I live in.

I never wanted to be this way, but things have just gotten worse over time. I know it's my fault, I know I should have been a better friend, a better husband, a better father. But I wasn't. And I can't change the past. And I'm not even sure I can change the future.

I take a long drag of the weed and pass it back to Silas.

"Do you think we should change anything about the setlist?" Wilder asks.



I don't really care about participating in this conversation so I just sit back and let them figure it out on their own.

"If anything, maybe shake up the encore. I know we play some of our biggest hits during it, but what if we play some of our favorites instead and then end with *Dying Breed*?" Knox chimes in.

"That could work," Jackson says. "I think we don't play enough of our favorites. Maybe mix it up for each show."

"You mean, play a different song every night?" Silas asks as he hands me back the joint.

"Yeah I think it would be fun."

"Or a lot of work."

"I think it would give the crowd something to look forward to." Wilder adds.

"Roan, what do you think?"

I open my eyes and lift my head from the back of the couch. "Whatever, man, I don't really care."

Jackson gives me a look, and I know he doesn't like my nonchalant attitude. "Come on man, let us know what you think, we are a band here."

"As long as the crew is good with the changes, that's fine with me." See look, participating.

"I'll give Riot a call and see what she thinks."

Great, the last person whose voice I want to hear.

Jackson places the phone on speaker mode as it rings my ex-wife.

"Hey Jackson, I'm kinda busy—"

"Mooommm!"

The sound of my daughter screaming in the background pierces me through the heart. I miss my kids so much, but after what I did, Riot has really pulled the reins back on me seeing them.

"Go play with your sister." Riot's words come out muffled as she is no doubt juggling the phone. "Oh god, I'm so sorry Jackson. I have no idea why I thought homeschooling the kids was a good idea."

She is homeschooling them this year?

Jackson smiles as he stares at the phone on the coffee table. "Don't worry about it. You're on speaker by the way."

"Of course, y'all had practice today. What's going on?"

Silas clears his throat. "This idiot here thinks we should change up the setlist every night for the encore."

“Interesting,” Riot answers. “That would definitely be something different than what you’ve been doing.”

“It’s a lot of work.”

“Silas, stop being a lazy fuck,” Knox says.

“What? It’s a lot of work to remember a new song every night.”

“What about the crew? Do you think it will be too much work for them?” Wilder asks.

“I’m sure they can make it work. I really like this idea, guys. There are still some shows that aren’t sold out yet, but I bet this will sell out the rest of the tickets when fans can see something different every night from what’s just been streaming across the internet.”

“So it’s settled then,” Jackson says as he picks the phone up off the table. “Thanks, Riot, talk to you later.”

“Y’all making me work hard,” Silas whines. “This handsome face has to do more than just stand there and look pretty.”

Knox punches him in the arm as a smile forms on my face. “You know sometimes you have to be more than just a pretty face.”

“I thought I was the pretty face,” Wilder groans.

Jackson snorts as he folds his arms over his chest. “We aren’t having this argument again. You two can hash out your vanity issues on your own time. We should start to decide what songs we are going to choose for the encores.”

Silas sticks his tongue out at Wilder, and I shake my head at both of them. They are ridiculous. But at least they got me out of the dark mood I was in when I showed up here today.

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I get back to my house and pour a glass of whiskey before taking a seat in the dark. While my mood was lifted for a while at band practice, by the time I got in my car, everything shifted back to depression again. I hate coming home to my empty house alone. It’s too big for one person. And this house holds too many memories.

This was mine and Riot’s house. When we got divorced, she kept the home in New Orleans, and I kept the one here in LA.

I remember buying this house with her, how perfect we thought it was to

raise a family. Five bedrooms, a giant kitchen for family dinners, a finished basement as a playroom for the kids, and a pool. A pool that I can barely look at now after what I did.

I sip on my whiskey as I try to figure out where I started to go wrong. I mean, it's obviously the cheating, but I don't even know why I did it. I'm not sure how it even started. I was probably just fucked up on coke and horny, and my wife wasn't around. But I also know there were fights before the cheating happened too. When we would argue over petty things and it would piss me off to no end.

It doesn't help that we are both stubborn people. We are always trying to win against each other when it comes to our fights. We never tried to compromise. Sometimes it led to amazing make-up sex, but other times it led to us not talking for days at a time.

And that's when I would do it. I'm not proud of the fact I cheated on Riot a handful of times. I hate that I did since it led to our downfall. But there were so many other things that played into it too.

I never should have been with her. I've never been good enough for her. But I had my head set on being with her. It took a lot of convincing and a lot of flirting, but one night she kissed me back, and I thought there was no way anything could ever go wrong with us.

I was as much of an idiot back then as I am today.

I finish off my whiskey and pour another glass. My thoughts drifting back to when things were good with us. To the nights when we would make love all night. To when she would look at me with so much love in her eyes. I thought I was the luckiest man in the world.

Maybe in another lifetime we would work out. Maybe it was just bad timing for us. I was too focused on my music and living a rock-star lifestyle. And she was too focused on her company and her career.

But there is an ache in my chest that maybe one day we will find that love again. We will be able to live the life I only dreamed of us having.

Who am I kidding? The woman can barely look me in the eyes now.

I clench my fist around my glass until I'm almost sure I'm going to break it. There will never be a Riot and Roan again.

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## ROAN

I'm packing my bags for the tour when my phone starts to go off incessantly. I try to ignore it, but the damn beeping is making it impossible to ignore.

I grab it from the nightstand and see missed texts from Jackson, Riot, a few people from our label, and our publicist.

What the fuck?

I open Jackson's text first.

**Jackson: Don't read the article, man. It's all bullshit.**

I flip to the next message from Riot.

**Riot: Please call me. I'm already working to get this taken down.**

**Riot: None of what he wrote is true. Please don't take it to heart.**

**Riot: Roan, please call me asap.**

What the hell is going on? And what article?

I flip through the rest of the messages. Our publicist saying the same thing Riot did about getting the article taken down. The label seems pissed.

I scratch my head, confused about what article they are talking about. And then I remember that stupid interview with Steven Rouse from *Encore* magazine. It was supposed to come out today.

I close out my messages and search the internet for it. It takes all of two seconds to find it, and I pull it up.

*The band of the decade may finally be losing their grip on reality. While they continue to play sold-out shows across the world, no one can see the inner workings of the band. And what is sure to be their downfall.*

*While some members of the band seem to be doing just fine, Silas Ford seems to be mastering broodiness. The once jovial and center of attention man is now sitting quietly to the side as I interview them. His face solemn and eyes down. What has caused this man to drop to such lows?*

Why are they so worried about me reading this and Silas's broody ass before Marley came back on tour this summer. I don't know why this would affect me at all.

I decide to skim the article, skipping over the parts about Silas. There isn't much about our music written in here, and as I recall that painful interview, I remember he didn't ask a lot about the future of the band and what we had in store. He was meticulous in his questions, and I felt like he was trying to read us the whole time.

Then I get to the part that I know everyone warned me about.

*Then there is Roan Mathieu. The broody lead guitar player. While the fans may think it's an act, I can tell you it's not. The man has many problems all of which may cause the demise of the world's favorite rock band. I could tell he was high the moment he sat down in front of me. He seems to be the reason behind the band's drug problem although they say there isn't a problem anymore. But we can all remember the days not many years ago when they would party too hard and be fucked up on drugs. It's a surprise none of them ended up in the twenty-seven club. While some may have cleaned up their act, Roan has not, and I have no doubt he will be the demise of the band. He was seen out at the clubs earlier in the week dazed and confused. I was surprised he was somewhat coherent when he sat down in front of me. But from the nights after the interview and witnessing firsthand what goes on when they go out, I know that this will not last for long. The fate of Saints & Sinners lies in the hands of one band member who will likely fail them and be the downfall of this once-great band.*

I punch the wall. Because I don't know what else to do. I am not the reason the band is falling apart. And it's not falling apart. Is it? Or am I just

too blind to see it? Do we have issues that I've been too high to notice?

My phone starts ringing, and I swear to God it better not be Riot because I know that all she'll do is try to talk me down off this ledge I seem to be teetering on.

But it's clear as day, I am the problem in the band.

I look at my phone screen and see Jackson's name. I shouldn't answer it. I don't want to talk to anyone after reading that. I just want to go sit in the dark, get high, and forget about my problems.

But I answer anyway.

"Hello?" My tone is dark.

"I'm guessing you read the article."

"What the fuck was that about?" I grit out.

Jackson sighs into the phone. "Yeah, man, I know. That's why I told you not to read it."

I'm quiet as I take in what I read, the guilt eating at me that maybe it's true.

"You know it's not true," Jackson says as if reading my mind.

"Isn't it though?" I pace as I talk to him. "I am fucking things up for the band."

"Dude, no you're not. Steven Rouse is just a jackass."

"It doesn't help that I feel that way sometimes."

"Well, you shouldn't, man. You have been a part of this since we were assholes living in Baton Rouge. Long before Wilder and Knox joined. You are what makes this band Saints & Sinners. Without you, this band wouldn't exist."

"I still feel like I am to blame for things."

"You've been having a rough go of it for a while, but that doesn't change things. You'll get your head out of the darkness soon enough, man. I know it. Silas knows it. Knox and Wilder know it too. This band doesn't exist without you."

I lean against the wall in my bedroom trying to believe Jackson's words, but it's hard because no matter what he says, I am still going to believe I'm the problem.



## RIOT

Roan has not answered my calls in the two days since that article came out. I'm worried about him, and from what I've heard from the rest of the band, he isn't doing well.

So I am flying out to LA before they leave for tour. I just want to check in on Roan and make sure he is really doing okay. I tried so hard to get the article taken down, but it's a lot harder to get an article taken down from a credible magazine than it is a tabloid.

Besides, the damage is done. Thousands of people read and shared the article. The only good news is that the fans have brushed it off. But it doesn't help that the naysayers found even more to criticize the band over.

When I get out of the busy airport, I make my way to the practice space that they should be at. They are supposed to be doing one final rehearsal before they head out to Europe tomorrow.

I'm surprised when I walk through the door and find Jackson and Silas packing up their instruments.

"Hey, what's going on here?"

Jackson looks up at me, surprise etching his features. "Riot, what are you doing here?"

"Hey, Ri." Silas nods his head at me.

I wave at him then turn my attention to Jackson. "Where is everyone? Y'all are supposed to be practicing today."

Jackson runs a hand over his head. "Yeah, well, practice was canceled."

“Why?”

He looks over at Silas who makes himself busy and ignores both of us.

“What the hell is going on?”

“Why did you come out here, Riot?” Jackson has a serious look on his face.

I set my bag down and fold my arms over my chest. “You know why I’m here.”

“No I don’t. Please enlighten us.”

I sigh knowing that he does know exactly why I’m here. “I came to check on everyone after the article came out.”

Jackson raises a brow at me. “Everyone? Or just Roan?”

“You know I worry about him,” I plead.

He nods his head. “Yeah, I know. I’m just surprised you’re here, is all. We canceled practice because of the article.”

“Because you all needed a break or because of Roan?”

Silas stops what he’s doing and walks over to us. “You know that Roan didn’t handle it well and I think you being here will make it worse for him.”

“How so?”

Silas looks at Jackson then back at me. “He just needs to be alone right now.”

“Doubtful. Where is he?”

Silas scratches the back of his head but doesn’t give me an answer.

“Look, I know you think I am coming here as your manager, but I’m here because he is my ex-husband, and I worry about him. Please just tell me where he is.”

I watch as the two of them have a silent conversation before Jackson finally speaks. “He went out. I’m not sure where. But he was in a mood this morning, Ri. He came to practice and was already hammered.”

“It’s barely noon.”

“I told him that he didn’t need to be here. I thought we sounded good the other day. Figured he could use the day off to cool down.”

Anger radiates through me. Jackson knows better than to let Roan do his thing when he’s in a mood. “So you just let him go out?”

“He’s a grown man. I can’t really control him.”

I rub my eyes trying to remain calm. I know that Jackson and Silas did what they thought was best. But leaving Roan to stew in his own emotions is never a good decision.

“Okay,” I tell them as I turn around and pick up my bag from the ground.

“Yo, Riot, where are you headed?”

I ignore them as I storm out of the practice space. I need to find Roan before he does anything stupid.

I head to Santa Monica to our old house, the one Roan still lives in when he’s here. I can only hope that he is here and not out and about at some bar doing something stupid. But I did swing by a few of his old hang-out spots and didn’t find him anywhere.

I try my old gate code and luckily it still works as I pull into the driveway. I really hope he is home. I park my rental car and head to the front. My code still works on that too, so I make my way inside.

My heart hurts a little as I walk through the house. I miss this place. We had so many dreams when we were able to buy a second home in LA. And Lyric loved being so close to the beach.

“Hello?”

There is no answer, so I make my way into the backyard hoping like hell Roan is here. But the door is locked so I know he isn’t here.

I walk into the kitchen and can’t help but tidy up the dirty dishes in the sink.

And then I sit and wait for Roan to come home.

---

I managed to get some work done for the three hours I sat waiting for Roan. I finally hear the front door unlock and him come stumbling in.

“Who the fuck is here?” he slurs.

“Yo, man, remember I told you Silas said Riot was in town.” The sound of Wilder’s voice brings me some sense of relief that Roan didn’t drive in the state he’s in.

“What is she doing in my house?”

I try not to let it get to me that he doesn’t want me here. If I were in his shoes, I would probably be pissed off too.

I stand up out of the bar stool I was sitting on and walk into the foyer.

“Get out of my house, Riot.”

“Roan, I’m not leaving until I talk to you.”

“And that is my cue to leave,” Wilder says. “Nice seeing you, Ri.”

I watch as he walks out the front door then turn to face Roan who has made his way to the stairs.

“You never returned my calls,” I tell him.

He looks down at me and then keeps walking up the stairs.

“Roan.”

“Just leave me alone.”

“I’m worried about you.”

He scoffs. “Yeah sure.”

I follow him up the stairs. “I mean it. That article was trash, and you never should have been put in the spotlight like that.”

He shrugs as he walks into the master bedroom. “What’s done is done.”

“Oh come on, you never go down without a fight.”

He strips his T-shirt off, and I try not to stare at his sculpted chest. Despite how much this man has been destroying his body with drugs and alcohol, he still works out nearly every day, and his body is a work of art.

“That was the old me. The new me doesn’t care.”

“If you don’t care, then why were you out doing god knows what when you should have been rehearsing?”

He glares at me. “So you are here to check up on me and make sure I am doing my job.”

“No, I am here to make sure you are okay.”

He snorts. “Could have fooled me.”

I walk up to him and place a hand on his arm causing him to flinch. “I’m worried about you, Roan.”

He pulls his arm away from me. “I’m doing just fine,” he says as he trips over a pair of shoes on the ground and falls over.

He is clearly wasted. I rush over to him to help him up, but he puts a hand in my face. “Just leave me the fuck alone, Ri. It’s hard enough seeing you.”

I scrunch my brow. “What does that mean?”

“Forget about it.”

“No, tell me what you mean by that.”

“I’m going to take a shower, and when I get out, you better be gone.”

I want to stomp my foot on the ground and throw a tantrum because I just want him to communicate with me like an adult for once. “Why is it hard to see me?”

He shakes his head as he walks into the connected bathroom.

“Roan!”

He slams the door behind him, and I hear the water turn on.

I don't want to leave him like this, but I am also not sure that me being here will do any good. It's obvious he doesn't want me here, and maybe for once, I should just do what he wants instead of pushing his buttons.

I leave the bedroom and head back down the stairs, calling Wilder as I go.

"What's up?" he answers the phone.

"Is he okay?" I ask.

Wilder is silent for a while, and it makes me worry even more.

"He will be. He just had a rough twenty-four hours. He needed to handle it how he handles things. Don't worry about him, Ri. We will make sure he gets on that plane tomorrow and shows up like he's supposed to."

"Okay," I tell him. "You know I worry about him."

"I know you do. But I can promise you, he will be okay. We will all make sure of it." He pauses. "I don't think seeing you will make things easier on him though."

"Why?"

Wilder sighs. "You know why. He loves you, and just talking to you is hard enough on him. Showing you care makes him feel even worse about everything."

I know what he is saying makes sense. I know I need to let Roan live his life the way he wants without me constantly stepping on his toes. But it's so hard for me to give up control.

"Just make sure he is okay while you are in Europe."

"You have my word."

"Thanks, Wild."

He hangs up the phone, and I gather my things, hoping I am making the right decision in leaving.

**ROAN**

**W**e've been on tour for three weeks, and nothing has changed. I'm still the same miserable man I was when we started the tour. Luckily, I seem to shake it all when I'm on stage, but every other moment of my life I feel like I am living in this dark hole.

Between the article by Steven Rouse and the fight I had with Riot before I left, I just feel like a miserable fuck. I don't know why she doesn't get it. Why it's so hard for her to see. I never stopped loving the woman, and every day I see her, it's harder and harder on me. Not to mention this summer, I saw her on a date with some guy that I'm sure was a fucking asshole. And she had the audacity to show up at Silas's party with him.

I clench my jaw as I think about that memory. It happened so long ago, but I can't get it out of my mind. For two years, I thought I would get her back, but it's abundantly clear she's moved on. Yet she still thinks she has some control over my life. Why the hell did she think she could just fly out to LA and check on me? She doesn't have that privilege anymore.

I grab the bottle of whiskey off the dresser in the hotel room and take a long gulp. The burn going down comforts me, knowing that soon I'll feel less stressed, less angry.

But the more I drink, the more my thoughts eat away at me. I can't take this shit anymore.

I dig around in one of my bags and find the drugs I bought off some guy yesterday. I didn't want to keep relying on them to make my problems



disappear, but here we are.

I don't have any needles on me, as those were harder to find here, so I need to resort to snorting the drugs to get high. I cut up the heroin and drag out three lines in front of me. I snort two of them and immediately feel the high, my eyes dilating with the bliss I feel.

This is right.

This is the mindset I want to be in right now.

Everything seems to fade away. My problems. My anger. My depression.

I grab the whiskey bottle off the dresser and slump down in the chair that faces the window, overlooking the busy streets of Prague.

All the guys went out tonight, but I wasn't in the mood. My head too much of a messed up place to be around them.

I know they worry about me, but I tell them I'm fine every day, and they seem to fall for it.

If only they knew what was really going on inside my head. If they knew the demons I fight every single day. The memories I battle to forget.

Somedays I just don't want to live anymore. I think it would be easier if I just disappeared. I wouldn't be a disappointment to anyone anymore because they wouldn't need to worry about me.

I watch the people walk by on the streets below me. They all seem so happy and carefree. I knew there was a time when I was like that. Back when Riot was my wife. When I didn't have things to worry about. Back when I was happy.

I snort thinking about that.

I haven't been happy in two years.

And every day I seem to fall deeper down into this endless abyss full of darkness and monsters. But I find some comfort in it. My demons are here to comfort me in only the way I know how.

I take another drink from the whiskey bottle and rest my head against the back of the chair, closing my eyes and letting the darkness take over.

## RIOT

“How’s the tour going?” I ask Mike.

“Good, everything seems to be running smoothly. The guys sound great.”

“Glad to hear that.”

Mike snorts into the phone. “You really can’t not be in control can you, Riot?”

“What does that mean?”

“I know you didn’t come out on tour with them this time, but you don’t need to constantly check up on them.”

“I know. I just can’t help it,” I tell him. Which is the truth. I’ve always been on some part of a tour with them, and this is the first time I decided not to join them at all. I know they are doing great, I’ve read the reviews, but I still can’t help the feeling that I wish I was there.

Maybe it’s just because I’m worried about Roan.

“We have our show tonight in Prague, and then we are headed to Germany tomorrow. First Berlin then Munich.”

I am well aware of the band’s tour schedule, but I keep my mouth shut, no need to snap at Mike. “And Roan is doing okay?” I can’t help but ask him.

“Yeah, I mean, he’s been keeping to himself a lot, but he performs like he should. I can tell that article is eating away at him though. But you know he won’t tell me shit.”

“I know. I don’t think he’s even confided in any of the guys. It makes me

worry about him.”

“You know I will tell you if anything happens.”

“I know you will. I appreciate it, Mike. I really do.”

He starts talking to someone in the background before he’s back on the phone. “Well soundcheck is about to start, and I should make sure everything goes smoothly.”

“Please let me know if you need my support in any way.”

“Always, Ri.”

He hangs up the phone, and I stare at my computer in front of me. I know that I should let Roan cope with everything the way he wants to, but I can’t shake the feeling something bad is about to happen.

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It’s been a week since I talked to Mike, and everything in Berlin seemed to go well. The band had two shows there and then two more over the next week in Munich. I keep tabs on them as best I can from the other side of the world, but I have to trust that everything is going okay for them all.

“Momma,” Lyric yells for me. I shake my thoughts and go back to cutting up the watermelon in front of me.

“Yes, baby?”

“Monica said she is having a sleepover this weekend, and I want to go.”

I look over at my daughter who is standing in her wet swimsuit dripping water all over the kitchen floor. She asked if she could have a pool party for all her school friends, and I had to oblige. I feel bad that I wanted to homeschool her this year. She’s only in first grade, and I wonder if I made a mistake by pulling her out of school.

“That should be fine. Let me talk to Monica’s mom, though,” I tell my daughter.

She gives me a big grin then swipes a few pieces of watermelon off the counter. I watch her as she runs back outside. I wince hoping she doesn’t slip on the wet floor, but she makes it out without a problem.

I throw all the watermelon into a bowl and make my way outside to join the other moms that are here with their kids.

I watch as Lyric jumps into the pool, splashing her sister who is doggy paddling around with floaties on her arms.

One of the other moms starts talking to me, and I only half pay attention as I think about how brave my daughter is. She almost drowned in a pool two and a half years ago. She doesn't remember much of it, and to her it's just a blip of a memory. To me it holds so much fear over me. I immediately enrolled her in swim classes, and now she is like a fish. I'm glad the incident doesn't affect her the way it does me and her father, though.

I go back to listening to the mom talk about whatever drama is going on in the school when I see Charlie, Jackson's girlfriend, and a good friend of mine, walk into my backyard.

"Riot."

"Hey girl, what's going on? I didn't think you were going to be able to make it today."

She takes a deep breath, and then I see the look on her face. She isn't happy like she usually is. A grim look has overtaken her features.

"What is it?" I ask as a feeling of dread overtakes me.

She pulls me away from everyone else, her grip shaky on my arm. "You weren't answering your phone."

I wave my hand. "I don't even know where it is. Got a lot going on at the moment." She gives me a serious look, and I start to worry. "What's going on?"

"It's Roan." She grabs my hand. "He overdosed."

## ROAN

**M**y head is pounding. I must have drank too much last night. Or taken something that did not mix well with the booze I was drinking. I feel like I've been run over by a truck. I wince before trying to open my eyes. I can tell it's already too bright in my hotel room. I must not have shut the curtains before I crashed out.

I shift in the bed and go to rub my eyes and feel a tug on my hand, like something is pinching me. I try to adjust to my surroundings before fully opening my eyes when I hear the faint beep of something in the background. I have no idea what it is. I know I wasn't sober enough to remember to set an alarm last night.

I finally manage to open my eyes slightly and realize I'm not in my hotel room at all. The walls are white around me, clinical and depressing. I look over and see a heart monitor, the sound of the beeping. When I look down at my hand I notice an IV in it.

What the fuck?

Why am I in a hospital?

I manage to open my eyes the rest of the way, the room is dimly lit, but there is enough light from the windows making it hard to adjust to the brightness.

I go to move my other hand but feel something gripping it. I turn my head and see a head of curly hair lying down on the side of my bed. A small hand intertwined with mine.

I must be dreaming. Why is my ex-wife here? She wasn't on tour with us and didn't plan on joining us. And she definitely would have said something to us before coming out.

"Riot," my words come out scratchy like I spent an entire night screaming into a microphone. But we didn't have a show last night.

I hear the beeping on the heart monitor start to speed up as I begin to wonder what the hell is going on. Why am I in a hospital? Why is Riot here?

I try to squeeze her hand, but everything in my body hurts. I feel weak. Maybe I was hit by a truck.

Riot shifts, her head lifting, and her caramel eyes meet mine.

"You're awake," she whispers.

"What's going on?" My words come out panicked.

Tears crest her eyes, and I am starting to freak out. Why is she crying? The last time I talked to her we were fighting.

"Roan," she sighs.

"Tell me what is going on," I say in a tone harsher than I mean to.

Full-on tears start streaming down her face. "You're okay. Oh god, you're okay."

I am so confused. Why is she worried about me?

"What happened?"

She chews on her bottom lip, hesitating to answer me.

"Riot, just tell me."

She pulls my hand up to her lips and kisses the back of my hand. "You're okay," she cries in relief.

"I don't understand. Was I in an accident?"

She shakes her head. "I should get the doctor."

"No," I grit. "Just tell me what happened."

She looks at me with so much sadness, she reminds me of the woman who used to love me, who would do anything for me. Not the woman who hates me.

She pulls her hand out of mine and stands. "I really should get the doctor."

No, I don't want her to leave. I don't want to lose this version of Riot right now. The one that I've been missing for years. The one who vowed to love me forever.

"Please," I beg. "Just tell me."

She wipes her eyes. "You...you overdosed, Roan."

I can feel my face pale at her words.

“Silas and Jackson found you in a bathroom at a club. Y-you were seizing when they found you.”

What? This can't be real; this must be a dream.

“Let me go get a doctor.”

I find whatever strength I have in me to grab her hand. “No. Tell me everything.”

She shakes her head before pulling away from me and exiting the room leaving me stuck in my thoughts.

How the hell did I overdose? I mean I know I've been fucking up and doing drugs more often than I ever have, but I know I have responsibilities. I just like to take the edge off. Life has just been too much lately. And I can't find any better way to deal. Between that article and everyone in the band being happy and falling in love, I've just felt stuck. Like I'm trapped in a dilapidated building with no way out, everything crushing down on my chest making it hard to breathe.

But I would never intentionally overdose. Would I? Do the doctors think I did? Does the band? Worse, does Riot? Did she really think I would try to end it all? And why is she here? She is the last person I would expect to show up. Not after that last fight, not after everything I have put her and the kids through.

All these questions have my head pounding more, and I would like nothing more than to take the edge off yet again. Relax my brain and these never-ending terrible thoughts that I have.

There is a knock on the door, and then it opens. A young woman with blonde hair and a white coat walks into the room.

“I am glad to see you awake, Mr. Mathieu. You had us scared there for a while.”

A while? What didn't Riot tell me?

I look behind the doctor and see Riot standing stiffly by the door, her arms folded over her chest. I know that look, I know she kept something from me. It's the same look she would give me months before she told me she wanted a divorce.

The doctor walks over to me and checks the monitor before grabbing a light from her pocket. “Let's see how you're doing. Can you follow the light with your eyes?”

I do as she says, and she seems to nod in approval.

“You had us worried there, Mr. Mathieu. It’s been two days with no improvement in your vitals. I’m honestly surprised to see you awake and lucid.”

“Did you say two days?” The panic starts to set in again.

She nods. “I’m Dr. Bauer, by the way. I’ve been monitoring you since you arrived.”

“What happened?”

“I was hoping you could tell me that. You were brought into the emergency room with an overdose that led to a seizure. Paramedics were able to restart your heart on the scene and—”

“Did you just say restart my heart?” I cut her off.

“Mr. Mathieu, you died.”

“Died,” I repeat, completely in shock.

“Your heart stopped beating for nearly two minutes, but luck was on your side, and you were able to be revived. But you have been out for two days. Your brain function has been minimal, and my team was concerned you wouldn’t wake up.”

I don’t even know what to say or how to react. I glance over at Riot who is staring at the ground, but I don’t miss the tears still falling down her cheeks. Is that why she is here? Did she think I was gone? She probably hoped I was—one less problem she would need to worry about.

“Your wife came here as soon as she found out. She’s been by your side the whole time.”

I glance back to Riot and see her watching me, but as soon as our eyes meet, she darts her gaze away.

“What about the band?” I ask more to Riot than the doctor.

“They have been in and out of here as much as your wife.”

“Ex-wife,” I mutter.

The doctor nods then turns to look at Riot. “We still need to run some more tests, Ms. Arceneaux, but from my brief examination, I think Roan will make a full recovery.”

“Thank you,” Riot says to the doctor.

“But recovery is going to take a long time, Mr. Mathieu. We need to get you into a program to detox from the drugs. It’s a standard protocol here. We can’t just release you back into the world. You need to complete a twenty-one-day program and—”

“No,” I cut her off again. “I don’t have twenty-one days to complete a



program. I'm fine. It was an accident. I never meant for this to happen."

"Mr. Mathieu," the doctor sighs, and I am sure she has heard this numerous times from many other patients. But I don't have twenty-one days. I don't even have a day. And if I was out for two, that means the band has already had to cancel at least one show.

"I need to leave," I tell her as I shift in the bed and rip the IV out of my hand. "I have things to do."

"Roan." Riot says my name with that commanding voice she uses to manage the band, and I know why she's here. It's not because she was worried about me, she was worried about the band and what would happen. I almost laugh thinking that I thought she was here because she cared about me. I should have known better.

"No Riot, I can't do this. Not to the band."

"We can figure something out, right, Dr. Bauer?"

The doctor turns and looks at Riot. "We have multiple options we can discuss, but he needs a program. Not just because we require it but for his own good."

"We can talk about those later. Let's just make sure he is okay for now."

The doctor turns back to me. "We need to run some more tests before anything is decided, Mr. Mathieu. For now I am going to send a nurse in to reconnect your IV—you still need as many fluids as possible."

I just nod at the doctor. I don't have any words to say to her that won't turn into me yelling at her because I am definitely not doing some program to get better. I'm fine, I don't have a problem.

The doctor walks out, and I'm met by Riot's stare.

"You need help, Roan."

"And is that why you are here? To make sure I get help, or are you more concerned about something happening to the band and you losing out on a paycheck?"

She raises a brow at me. "You can't be serious right now."

"Tell me, Riot, why are you really here?"

She rolls her eyes then takes a step closer to the bed. Right now she looks like my manager rather than the woman who was holding my hand, worried I wouldn't wake up.

"You honestly think I would fly all the way over here if I didn't care about you?"

"You seemed to be pretty agreeable with the doctor that I need

treatment.”

“Because you do, Roan,” her voice exasperated. “I’ve been trying to get you help for years.”

“Again, because you are worried about the band.”

“You really think that is all I care about? You are more hard headed than I thought if that’s the case. I want you to be better. I know you can be better. I know the man you can be. But that man hasn’t been around in a long time. You need help.”

“I’m perfectly fine. I must have been given bad drugs.”

“You shouldn’t have been taking them in the first place!” she yells. “Haven’t you learned anything from what happened? How can you be so selfish?”

I scoff. “I’m selfish? Yeah, okay, Riot.”

“Don’t make me bring up what caused this rift between us. You know it has to do with your drug use, and you know you need help.”

“I’ve been doing just fine since our divorce.”

“Just fine? You call this just fine?”

I clench my jaw, I don’t want to fight with her, but I don’t see any other option. This is always what happens between us.

“Roan, you know you need help. You are just so far in denial.”

“I’m not in denial of shit. I’ve been fine on my own, and I know I will continue to be. This was some freak accident. It won’t happen again.”

“No, it won’t.”

“Good I am glad we agree on something.”

“It won’t happen again because you are going to get help.”

“And what about the tour? From the sound of it, you’ve already had to cancel a show.”

She sighs and takes a seat back next to the bed. “Your health should be the priority, not the band.”

“The band is all I have!” I yell.

I see the words hit her the way I wanted them to. She thinks we are still friends, but that is far from the truth. She took away my kids, she took away everything from me.

“Then you need to do right by the band.”

I look away from her because deep down, I know she is right. I just don’t want to admit it. I don’t want her to know how much I hate myself every day for the things I’ve done. For the way I’ve treated her, treated the kids, treated

myself.

“Look, Roan, I know you think everything is fine. But it’s not. You aren’t fine. You’ve been hurting yourself every day for reasons I am sure I know but don’t want to admit because I don’t want to make you more upset than you already are.”

“You’re doing a great job.”

She glares at me. “But you need to get clean, Roan. For the band. They need you.”

“They’ve been doing just fine with me the way I am.”

“But how long can that last?”

We’re interrupted by a nurse walking in, and I don’t even care. I am sick of having this same argument with her over and over again.

“I’ll let her do her job. I’m going to find a cup of coffee.”

I watch Riot as she walks out—something she’s been good at doing for the last two years.

## RIOT

“**Y**ou doing okay over here?” Jackson asks me as he finds me on a bench outside of the hospital.

I shake my head. “He doesn’t get it.”

“He’s a hard headed bastard. What else did you expect?”

I turn toward Jackson. “He almost died. And yet he still won’t admit he needs help.”

“Like I said, hard headed.”

“The hospital wants to put him into a program before they release him.”

“What? He can’t; we’re on tour. We already had to postpone one show. We can’t cancel the tour. We can’t do that to our fans. Especially not after that damn article.”

“I know. But he needs help. I just... I’m going to talk with the doctors and see if there is a way to let him get help while touring.”

Jackson laughs. “You really think he is going to survive the tour with no booze or drugs?”

“He has to. He needs to learn to live without them. He needs to stop risking his life every day. And he doesn’t get it. He doesn’t realize he can lose more than he already has if he doesn’t stop.”

“I know, Ri, I know. This is the worst it’s ever been.”

I nod. I know that. And I blame myself. That fight we had when the article came out destroyed him. He blames himself for everything but doesn’t get the help he needs. He can’t see past the haze in front of him. He blames

himself but won't do anything about it. He just falls deeper into the hole he put himself in.

"I just don't know what to do anymore," I admit.

"You know he isn't your problem?"

I glance over at Jackson as pain crushes down on my heart at those words. Of course he isn't my problem because I gave up on him. Something I never should have done.

"He's not yours either or anyone's in the band. But he needs help, and he needs someone there to support him."

Jackson nods. "I know. And you know we are all here for him, but he won't listen to us."

Roan won't listen to anyone, I know that better than anyone. We were together for six years, and I've known him for eleven, and in that time he never listened to anyone's advice. Roan Mathieu is his own force to be reckoned with.

"What are you going to do, Riot?"

I look back at Jackson and shrug. "I need to stay and knock some sense into him."

"What about the kids?"

"They're with my mom now. She will be fine watching them for as long as I need." I pause as I think back on everything my mom has said to me since the divorce. "You know she never thought we should have gotten divorced."

"I thought your mom hated Roan."

"So did I, but I guess not. I think she just didn't want the kids to grow up like I did, with a single parent. She wanted me to have the family she never gave me."

"Maybe this time on tour will be good for the two of you."

"You say that like you think we'll get back together." My words are incredulous.

"He never stopped loving you."

I sigh. "But love isn't enough, Jackson."

"Things can change."

I don't answer him. I'm not sure things can change. Especially with a man like Roan. But would I want that? Would I want to get back together with him? He's always had a special place in my heart, and I would be lying to myself if I said I didn't still love him. But like I told Jackson, love isn't

enough, and too many things have happened between us for me to be able to forgive him.

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**ROAN**

“You don’t need to be here,” I say as I make myself busy in my hotel room.

“Yes, I do, Roan. You know this was part of your release from the hospital.”

I grunt at her words. I don’t know what magic she worked, but somehow she got the doctors to agree to her watching over me as long as I talked to a therapist three times a week. Not that I’m looking forward to her being here or the therapist. All I want right now is a hit of something to drown out this incessant pain racking my body. It’s both physical and mental. I’m sure the physical is because of the days without drugs. But that’s not what’s killing me. It’s the idea of Riot being here, watching over me. I know she just won’t be here as the manager of the band, but as my babysitter to make sure I don’t get into more trouble than I’ve already gotten into.

“You don’t need to be in my hotel room,” I clarify.

She leans against the wall with her arms folded across her chest. “I just wanted to make sure you were settled in.”

“You sure you don’t want to check all my shit to make sure I don’t have any drugs on me.”

“I know you don’t.”

That’s right—she had the guys go through all my stuff and get rid of any drugs they found.

“Well I’m just going to go to sleep so you can leave now.”

“I think we need to talk about this.”

“What is there to talk about?” I shoot her a glare as I strip off my T-shirt.

“You’ve barely said a word since you were released from the hospital.”

“What is there to say?”

She crosses the room and lays a hand on my arm. “You aren’t okay, Roan. I worry about you.”

I scoff at that and pull away. “You didn’t seem to want to worry about me when you signed those divorce papers.”

“Are you really going to go there? That was two years ago.”

I unbutton my jeans and pull them off. “I just find it odd that you suddenly are worried about me. It’s been a long time, Ri, you could have worried at any other point.”

She sighs as she brushes a hand through her wild curls. “I’ve been worried about you this whole time.”

“Could have fooled me,” I say harshly as I pull the sheets back on the bed.

“Oh come on, Roan, you think that just because we aren’t together means I don’t care anymore. I loved you for a long time. My feelings for you just don’t go away.”

I lay down on the bed and fold my arms behind my head. I don’t believe a word she says. I mean I know she worries but not in the sense that matters. She worries about the band and what my behavior will do to the band. She doesn’t care about me as a person. She made that clear a long time ago when she took everything from me.

“Roan, the silent treatment isn’t going to help.”

I raise a brow at her then continue to ignore her. She isn’t going to say anything to me right now that’s going to make me happy or ease my mind so she might as well go away.

“Roan,” her voice comes out irritated, but I continue to ignore her.

I lean over and turn the light off next to the bed leaving the room in darkness.

“If this is how you are going to act, things will never get better.”

It’s not like things could get worse. I hit rock bottom a while ago, and nothing is going to bring me out of it. Hell, the drugs didn’t make me feel better, but at least they shut off my mind.

She finally gets the hint that that I’m not going to answer her, and I make out her form leaving my room.



But of course she isn't done talking. "Just so you know, I'm not leaving the tour. I will be here every single day. So maybe you should get your head out of your ass and actually try to make an effort to get better."

She leaves after that, and I finally let out the breath I was holding. I don't want her here because every minute that she's here is just going to remind me more about what I lost.

**ROAN**

I'm woken up by a knock on my door. I swear to God if Riot is back here forcing me to wake up and start some form of therapy, I might punch a hole in the wall. I know I need to do it. And even though I don't want to, I will find some way to make it through it. But I do not want to see her right now. Not after last night.

I barely even slept. My body is still detoxing, and it's leaving me in more pain than I thought it would. I pull the covers over my head and try to hide from whoever is at the door, but the knock comes again.

"Yo man, you can ignore me all you want, but just so you know, Riot gave me a key to your room, and I don't really want to walk in on you jerking off."

I roll my eyes at the sound of Wilder's voice. Thank God it's him. Wilder I can deal with.

"Use the damn key then because I am not getting out of bed for you," I yell.

Wilder must hear me because two seconds later the door opens.

"How are you feeling this morning?" he asks as he walks into the room.

I grunt in response.

"That great, huh?"

"What do you want?" I pull the sheets down and look at him.

"So grumpy this morning, sweet cheeks." He sits on the corner of the bed and smiles at me.

“I feel like I was hit by a truck.”

He frowns. “Still detoxing?”

“Doc said it could be at least a week until the drugs are out of my system.”

“Rough, man. How are you feeling about it?”

I know he is the last person who would force me to quit the drugs. He was the only one who didn't mind that I always had them on me when I was living in his house during our break. “I don't need another therapist.”

“I know, man. I just...” he sighs. “I wish things didn't happen this way. I wish a lot of things were different.”

“You and me both.”

“I'm glad you're alive, though.”

“Gee thanks, asshole.”

He laughs as he leans back on his elbows on the bed. “You scared us, man. When Knox found you in that bathroom...” He runs his hand through his long hair as he trails off.

“I didn't mean for that to happen.”

“I know.”

“Shit's just been hard.”

“I didn't realize how bad it was getting, or else I would have done something.”

“You honestly think you could have done anything?”

He shrugs. “I don't know. I really don't know.”

We sit in silence for a few minutes before I sit up and grab the meds the doctor prescribed for me. Something to help with the detox. And I just hope it helps with the pain because there is no way I can leave this bed if I continue to feel like crap.

“You think you'll feel up to running through some songs later?” Wilder breaks the silence.

I shake my head. “I don't think so. I just need a few more days of waiting this out.”

“Okay, I figured as much.”

“Then why did you ask?”

I don't need him to say anything to know it has to do with Jackson. The man is definitely worried about the band.

“Let me guess, Jax wants us to rehearse so we don't lose our edge.”

Wilder looks over at me and nods. “I told him that we would make do.”

“What’s the schedule look like? No one told me.”

“The canceled show was moved to two nights from now, but it’s all contingent on you. We can always cancel it again and come back here when the tour ends.”

“I can’t do that to our fans. I’ll do what I need to be able to play in two nights.”

“You just tell me what you need.”

“You here to pamper me?”

“I have been told I give really good massages. Do you want one?” he laughs.

I throw a pillow at him. “Get out of here and let me sleep.”

He stands and heads toward the door. “You’re going to be okay, Roan. I know it doesn’t seem like it, but I know you, and you can get through this.”

I don’t say anything to him and just watch as he leaves. No one has ever really had much faith in me, so it’s good to hear that one of my best friends does. But I still can’t help but think that things will only get worse from here.

—

I managed to spend the entire day in bed without anyone else coming to check on me, not even Riot has stopped by. I’m guessing Wilder told all of them to leave me alone, and I’m grateful for that.

But between naps and doing absolute shit, I cannot get the thoughts out of my head that I’m ruining everything this band touches. Yeah, we made it big, and we are at the top of our game, but what if I wasn’t around? What if they had another guitarist who could do so much more for this band than what I have to offer.

What are the fans going to think when they find out that I nearly died? I know it was an accident, but it doesn’t feel that way. To me it just felt like something inevitable. I never thought I would live a long life. Even when I was happy and in love, I always had the inkling that my life would be short-lived. Maybe it was the way we grew up. Silas losing his brother at such a young age, Jackson’s brother overdosing similar to the way I did, except he didn’t make it. Am I supposed to be on the same path as them? A short life for someone who doesn’t really matter.

I know this is depression talking, but it’s feelings I haven’t been able to shake for a while. Like maybe I am supposed to die young. Although I am too old now to go down in infamy like everyone else in the twenty-seven club. But maybe I wasn’t destined to be much of anything, and the life I have

now was meant for someone else.

I roll over in bed and sigh. I hate it when my mind goes down this path. Like things will never get better, but I can't help it. Maybe I need to talk to someone. But then I fear they will just tear me apart instead of actually listening to me.

It feels like it's been a long time since anyone actually wanted to listen to me. I had Riot, but then I lost her along with Brixley and Lyric because I could not control myself. I let the drugs control my life so much that I almost lost my daughter because of it. Yet nothing made me stop then, what's going to stop me now? A few weeks of therapy, and then I'll just be back to the person I was. An asshole, a worthless piece of shit that just is a waste of space.

I feel the tears on my cheeks before I even realize I'm crying. What kind of grown man cries like this over his stupid thoughts? I would give anything for a hit right now. Anything to drown out these thoughts in my head that are suffocating me.

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## RIOT

“How is he?” I ask Wilder who I found in the gym of the hotel with Knox.

I don’t miss Knox’s look at me, one that clearly tells me that Wilder isn’t going to tell me shit.

“He’s fine.”

Those are the fewest number of words I’ve ever heard come out of Wilder’s mouth.

“He’s fine?” I repeat the words back to him. “That’s all you have to say?”

Wilder sets the barbell down he was lifting and looks over at me. “You think he actually told me anything? This is Roan we’re talking about, he is as closed off as they come.”

He has a point. Ever since the divorce, Roan has become a shell of the person he used to be. He’s no longer the outgoing flirt I first met. He’s drowning, I know it, but I can’t do anything about it.

“I’m not getting in the middle of anything, Riot. I checked on him this morning. He just woke up. He was grumpy as usual. Then I left.”

“He really didn’t say anything?”

Wilder picks up the barbell again and lays back on the bench. “If you want answers to your questions, then you need to talk to him.”

“Okay,” I mutter in a way that is not like me at all. I can usually get the guys to tell me anything, but everything has changed since Roan’s overdose. We are all walking on eggshells around each other now.

I don't bother trying to get more answers out of him and head up to my own room.

I want to check on Roan, but I feel like I shouldn't. He was already mad enough at me last night. I don't want to poke the bear anymore. And I am sure he has a lot of pent-up anger from the last two years, and I really don't want to deal with that right now. Especially if he is detoxing.

When I get into my hotel room, I open the curtains and look out into the city. This is the first time I didn't go on tour with the band for a European tour. Usually, the dates were so close together that there was never any chance to explore the city. But now that Saints & Sinners is playing stadium shows, they have more time to get out and about, if they can avoid the fans.

Maybe I should get some fresh air and explore Munich, but I am too worried about Roan to know I actually won't enjoy anything.

I sit on a chair by the window as my phone starts to ring. Janae's name pops up, and I don't hesitate to answer it. I haven't talked to her since I got here.

"Hey, Janae."

"Riot, is everything okay? I've been worried sick, and your mom keeps calling me asking for updates, and I don't have any."

"Sorry things have been...hard."

"Is he doing okay? Is he still in the hospital?"

"No, he's out of it. Got released last night."

"And?"

I sigh. "And what Janae? There is not much to say."

"So things are the same as usual between you two."

I nod even though I know she can't see me. "He's not doing that great. I think the detoxing is getting to him, and he's pissed at me."

"What else is new?" She laughs into the phone.

"I just wish he would take this seriously, but I don't think he is. I think he thinks he can just get through the program he has to do, and then he can go back to living his life how he was living it. I don't think he wants to change."

"He's had a rough go of it ever since the accident, Ri."

"I know, and I can't help but blame myself for it all. Did I make a mistake in telling him we should get divorced? Should I have been more worried about how he was holding up back then?"

"You can't change the past, you know that. But maybe be a little more forgiving around him."

“He’ll think it’s just some sympathy act.”

“Maybe you should tell him how you really feel, Riot.”

I freeze at her words. I didn’t think she remembered what I told her nearly a year ago when we got shit-faced one night. She’s never mentioned it since then. So her bringing it up now throws me for a loop.

“Riot?”

I blink a few times. “I’m here.”

“Did you hear what I said?”

“I heard you,” I mutter into the phone. But all I can think about is that night. When I told Janae I was still in love with Roan. That I thought I made a huge mistake in divorcing him instead of figuring things out. I just freaked out so much when we almost lost Lyric. And like the bitch that I can be sometimes, I put the blame on Roan. It was his fault, but I should have found a way to make him seek help rather than push him away. I know he felt awful about what happened. I know he still does. I can see it in the way he’s changed the last few years. And I get mad at myself for the way I ended things with him. But I can never tell him that. I can’t let him know that I am still in love with him. I thought it was just because I didn’t have someone else. That my feelings were still so wrapped up in the past. But I’ve tried dating for the last few months, and things haven’t changed. My feelings for the man are still present just as they were years ago.

“I can’t tell him anything that is going to make him relapse, Janae.” There, that has to be a suitable answer rather than me saying I am too scared to admit my feelings to him.

“You don’t think that maybe if you admitted your feelings to him it would make him change.”

“Why are we talking about this?” I snap.

“Because you flew halfway around the world to make sure your ex-husband was okay when you know that you didn’t need to go. So yes, I think those feelings you had a year ago are ever-present today, and you are too scared to admit it to me.”

“How long have you been holding that in for?”

“Long enough. Listen, Riot, I know you think you are doing the right thing by letting him go, but maybe that has been the wrong answer all along.”

So much for a cheerful conversation with my best friend. “It’s just a lot right now. He needs to get better on his own. Not because I tell him I have feelings for him.”



“Ha, so it is still true!”

“Did you really just say all that to get me to admit that?”

“I learned from the best,” she teases.

I lean back into the chair and think about what she’s saying. Maybe I should tell Roan, maybe it would change everything. But deep down I know I am too scared to do it because that would make me vulnerable too.

**ROAN**

“**W**hen did feelings of depression start?”

I stare off into my hotel room looking at the cream-colored wall instead of paying attention to the woman on the laptop in front of me. Today is my first mandated therapy appointment. And of course, the therapist has pegged me for someone in a deep state of depression within the first ten minutes of the call.

I hate everything about this. I don't need a therapist to tell me I'm depressed or that I have a problem. I know I do. I just don't really care about fixing said problem. I've managed to get through it on my own for the last two years. I've learned to deal with it. Just like I learned to deal with Riot leaving me after messing up our relationship numerous times. And her deciding we needed a divorce. And her taking away the kids from me. I've dealt with it all, and I think I am managing just fine. Just not in the way people would expect of me. Or of anyone. But the drugs and alcohol were getting me by.

“How did your divorce make you feel? Is that when the depression started?”

I pick at my cuticles as the therapist continues to ask me questions. I agreed to do this, but that doesn't mean I need to cooperate.

“Did losing custody of your children play a part in the decisions you've made?”

How does she know all this? I haven't told her shit, and my only guess is

the Riot had a discussion with the therapist before any of this started.

“Look, Roan, I can’t help you if you aren’t going to participate in this.” Her German accent is thick as she speaks.

I don’t really have anything to say. She’s already formed an opinion of me and knows I don’t want to be here.

“How about we start with something else then?” She waits for my response, but I give her nothing. “How do you feel your role in the band has changed in the last few years?”

Now that just pisses me off. “The band is fine with me.” My tone gritty.

“I’m sure they have supported you along the way. You are all best friends, aren’t you? And that’s what friends are for.”

I nod.

“But do you think that maybe they want you to give a little more than you’ve been giving? Like maybe you aren’t performing at a hundred percent.”

“I’m doing just fine.”

“Are you sure that you don’t have guilt over the article that was written about the downfall of the band and the blame that was put on you?”

“That article was bullshit,” I yell.

“So just anger then?”

“What?”

“You feel angry, Roan. Over the article, your role in the band, maybe even the decline of your marriage.”

Where does she think she is going with this? All she is doing is pissing me off. “Yeah, I’m fucking angry, but it has nothing to do with any of this.”

“Depression can manifest as many different things. Anger being one of them. Did the drugs—”

“I’m not depressed,” I cut her off.

“Okay, maybe not, but there is a reason for your change in behavior.”

“I’m the same man I’ve always been.” That statement is far from the truth, but I really don’t like feeling like I’m being read so easily.

“Okay. I can see this isn’t helping at all.”

“Then can we end this?”

“I’m afraid not. We still have thirty minutes left of our session, and even though I know you don’t want to be doing this, you need to do this. Not just for yourself but for everyone around you.”

“I don’t care what others think.” I finally make eye contact with my

therapist.

“It’s not about what others think about you. It’s about what you do that makes them feel a certain way.”

I look away from my therapist and out the window. I’m a grown man, I’m well aware of what she is saying, but for some reason I can’t bring myself to care.

“How about instead of talking to me, you write your thoughts down? It’s less intrusive but might help you get it out. I don’t care what you do with the paper when you finish. You can throw it out, burn it—whatever you do doesn’t matter, it’s just about getting your feelings out of you.”

I look back at her and nod. I guess that’s easier. I won’t be judged by what I write, but maybe it will help. I don’t know exactly what it will help with, but it sounds better than speaking out loud.

“Good. I’m glad you agree. So take this next twenty minutes and write anything about how you are feeling. About therapy, the overdose, your divorce. I don’t care what you write, just get something on paper.”

“And you promise I won’t have to share?” I ask, hoping this isn’t some trick.

“Nope. I’ll just be here working on some paperwork. If you feel like you want to talk about something that you wrote down, then feel free to speak up, but other than that you are free to do as you please.”

I like this much better than talking. I grab a hotel-branded notepad off the desk along with a pen and start to write down what I’m feeling. It doesn’t make any sense, it’s just a jumbled pile of words, but at least I don’t have to talk to the therapist.

I don’t even realize twenty minutes have passed when she tells me I can stop. I’m not even sure what I wrote. But it did feel good to get it out. Words about my overdose and how waking up in that hospital scared the shit out of me. But it’s not something I will admit to anyone. I don’t want them to know that I was scared to die. That I am scared to die.

“Our next session is in two days. I encourage you to continue journaling if you have time or feel like it, but it’s not necessary. We can do it again during the next session.”

I don’t say a word, I just nod and end the video. I stare down at the pieces of paper I scribbled on and glance over the words. Thoughts I don’t want anyone to read. I grab them off the table and crumple them into my fist, choking the life out of the words before I toss them into the trash can next to

me.

I walk around the room, not sure if I feel any better. Am I supposed to after just one session?

I decide to text the guys and find out what time we are meeting for a rehearsal today. Wilder let me know last night that we would squeeze one in today before we make up the show that we canceled a few days ago. I haven't talked to the rest of the guys yet. I don't want to face them or their judgment. It was hard enough talking to them in the hospital. But I know it's inevitable, and I'll need to face them today.

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I get out of the SUV I rode over to the venue in with Wilder. He didn't talk much on the way over, surprisingly. He let me just stay in my head. Which I can't really say if that was a good thing or not. My mind is a scary place sometimes, and I wish I didn't have to live in it.

"You ready, man?"

I look over at him as he stands on the other side of the door. I haven't moved since I took a step out of the SUV. I'm hit with a sense of surrealism realizing I just need to move on. Pretend that nothing happened for our fans and continue living my life.

I have no idea what they were told, but I am sure there are rumors circling around that I OD'd. I mean I passed out in a bathroom at a club, I'm sure there were people around who saw it was me getting carried out on a stretcher. I just haven't had the nerve to ask anyone.

"You sure you're ready for this?" Wilder asks me.

I blink out of my thoughts and turn to look at him. "Yeah, yeah I am."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I tell him.

"You have that look in your eye. I know something is eating at you."

The few weeks I spent at Wilder's home during the break between the US tour and the European leg had me spending a lot of time with him. Even when Lake was around, they always included me in things. So Wilder got really good at reading me. Which I am not always thrilled about.

I know I can't just ignore him. "What were our fans told?"

"About postponing the show?"

I nod.

“Family emergency.”

“Nothing got out about my overdose.”

Wilder shakes his head. “Riot was working hard with the PR team to make sure that all stayed under wraps.”

“Of course, she would, she wouldn’t want to ruin our image,” I grunt. My hostility toward my ex-wife is getting worse by the day.

“No man, she did it for you. She knew it would affect you, and she wanted to make sure you were alright.”

I don’t say anything to that because I’m not sure if I believe him. Or Riot. She says she cares about me and worries about me, but I know it’s all because of the image of the band.

“Don’t overthink it, Roan.” He starts to walk toward the entrance to the arena. “Let’s just do what we do best and play our hearts out. I’m sure it will make you feel better once you’re on that stage.”

He has a point. Playing music has always made me feel better. It is the one thing that works better than the drugs. Maybe I should focus my attention toward it, and I can get past this depression that is weighing me down.

Luckily when we get to the green room, the guys don’t bring anything up. It’s business as usual with them, and I breathe a sigh of relief. Maybe they do know me better than I let myself believe.

Picking up a guitar helps, and as we run through our entire set for a long soundcheck, I start to feel slightly better. That is until we are done, and I run into Riot backstage.

“Hey, you guys sounded good out there,” she tells me.

“I was only out for a few days, not months. Business as usual.” I try to walk past her, but she stops me from following the rest of the guys who very quickly make themselves scarce in her presence.

“I wasn’t thinking that you were going to sound bad. I was just letting you know, Roan.”

I look past her for an out to leave. I don’t even know why she’s here, she said she was only here to watch over me, not to manage us on the tour. I didn’t think that would mean she would follow me wherever I go.

“How was your therapy session this morning?”

I clench my fists and try to take a deep breath, but it’s not working. “Why do you care?”

“You know why. I told you I care about you.”

“Yet you told the therapist all about my life.”

She goes to talk but then keeps her mouth shut, and I know what I thought to be true is.

“I knew it.”

She grabs my arm as I walk away. “The therapist reached out for some history on you, that’s all.”

“Sounds like you gave her my life story.”

“I knew you wouldn’t tell her shit, so I had to give her something to go off of.”

“Maybe you should just sit in the sessions with me too.”

“I’m not trying to step on your toes and get in your way. I just—”

I fold my arms over my chest and stare down at her as she tries to find her thoughts. “You want to believe what you want to believe. That the divorce made me like this. That I’m depressed and lonely and using drugs to make myself feel better. You painted her a pretty good picture, Riot.”

“I just want you to get better.”

“I can do that on my own.”

She grips my arm again, and I don’t have the energy to shake her off. Maybe because I like the feeling too much. It’s been so long since she’s touched me.

“I know you think all of this is stupid, but I do think it will help.”

I let out a breath and decide to just agree with her. Maybe because deep down I know she is right. I do need this. I need something to get out of this rut that I’m stuck in. And yeah the divorce had a lot to do with it. But my depression started before that. When I started to hate the man I was, the one that I knew was going to ruin everything for us. “I just need to get through this on my own. I will keep seeing the therapist, but I don’t need to tell you about every single thing we talk about.”

She frowns. “I didn’t expect you to.”

“Then just trust me that I am going to the sessions and doing things on my terms.”

She lets go of my arm, and I immediately feel the loss of her touch. “Okay, Roan.”

I walk away from her and go to look for the guys. Because I know if I spend another minute with her, I am going to end up pining after her once again.

## RIOT

I grab a coffee at a café down the street from the hotel and watch people as they walk about the street. I know I shouldn't have confronted Roan about his therapy yesterday, but I couldn't help myself. I worry about him, and I want to make sure he is getting the help he needs. I feel like his depression is partly my fault. I never should have shut him out from my life and the girls' lives the way I did. And I knew how he would react, I knew he would turn to drugs as a coping mechanism, but I just didn't think it through enough. I am so good at planning and making the right decisions, yet when it comes to my personal life, I'm far too reactive.

I try to suppress my guilt and think about happier times with Roan. When he was more carefree and happy. When I was happy. Because right now I'm not. I hate admitting that, but it's the truth. I've been looking for someone to bring me the type of happiness I felt with Roan, and I just can't find it. Maybe I'm looking in the wrong direction. Maybe I should find someone who can make me happy in a different way. But all I can think about is the bliss I felt when I finally let Roan into my life. When we got married on a whim in Vegas. When I found out I was pregnant. Nothing can compare to that.

My phone chimes reminding me that the guys need to head to the venue for their show in thirty minutes. I'm not here to manage them. Their tour manager has that job, but I still don't want to miss their show. I've always been a fan of Saints & Sinners and always will be.



I make my way back to the hotel, wrapping my jacket tightly around me as a cold gust of wind blows past. When I get to the hotel, the guys are making their way out the door.

I decide to let them go without me. I could take some time to think things through. Think about what I should be doing about Roan and my own happiness. I let them know I will meet them later then head up to my hotel room.

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I'm mesmerized by Roan as the band plays to a sold-out crowd. Despite everything he's been through, he doesn't let it affect his music. Despite what the gossip articles say and that horrendous article by Steven Rouse. When he is on that stage, he is an entirely different person. And it makes something in my chest ache. Because this man that I am watching right now is the man I fell in love with. He's the Roan who didn't cheat on me, didn't lose himself to drugs, didn't almost let one of our kids die. This is the Roan who charmed me, who flirted with me nonstop, who found a way to break down all my walls and let him in.

I would give anything to have that Roan back.

But he's only that man when he is onstage. Once he gets off, I know a switch will flip. He'll turn into an entirely different person. The one with the sour mood, the nonchalant attitude, the one who drinks too much and erases his pain with drugs.

I don't want that Roan anymore. I want him to be the man he used to be, and I can only hope that the changes he is making right now will stick, and I'll have that other Roan back. My Roan.

I gasp as I think that thought. My Roan? He hasn't been my Roan in years, long before I asked him for a divorce.

If I got my Roan back, would I take him back?

The aching in my chest is telling me I would, and that thought scares the shit out of me. I thought I was done with him. I thought I was ready to move on. But watching him on stage now has me thinking all sorts of thoughts I shouldn't be thinking.

"You okay there?"

I turn and look at Lake, Wilder's girlfriend, who is with them on tour.

“You look a little pale.”

I shake my head. “I’m fine.”

She eyes me curiously but just nods.

I didn’t think it was that obviously written across my face that I was thinking a million thoughts I shouldn’t be thinking. But I guess I was wrong. Lake noticed right away. Not that she has any idea what I was even thinking about.

I take a step back and then another. Wondering what I am even doing here. What’s the point of me watching over Roan? I’m not anything to him. And he made it perfectly clear he doesn’t want me here. Maybe I should just go back to Louisiana and hold my babies and not have these crazy thoughts that I may want to get back together with Roan.

Because that’s all it is. Crazy thoughts. My hormones must be acting up. Something must be off in my body. Because I don’t want him back. Yes, Janae knows I still love him, but like I told her, love isn’t enough. It was never enough for us. And there is no way that anything will ever be enough for us. Roan and I are like fire and ice. One of us will always get burned.

I back away and make my way down the hall to the greenroom before deciding better of it and just head back to the hotel.

## ROAN

Being on stage gives me a sense of freedom I haven't felt anywhere else. Not with the drugs or the booze or all the other women. This right here, playing to tens of thousands of fans, this is what gets my heart pumping. This is what makes me feel alive. I just tend to forget about it at times. I forget that music is what has always made me feel alive. That maybe things would be better and that I could live the life I always wanted. That's what music gives me.

And as I stare out into the crowd, I feel a sense of completion. Like this is right. Right here, right now. This is where I should always be.

I catch a glimpse of Riot on the side of the stage, and I'm immediately thrown back into memories of her when we first started playing. Of the wild pixie of a woman who was so dead set on making sure this band made it. And look at us now. Selling out stadiums around the world. She is a force to be reckoned with. One that I fell in love with almost immediately.

But things didn't work out for us. Because of me. Because of everything I did. But seeing her on the side of the stage now brings back so many memories of happier times. When she would jump into my arms after a show, when I would fuck her against a wall after the adrenaline rush of playing to a sold-out crowd.

Her standing on the sidelines right now hits me like a bag of bricks because she isn't here as my manager, she's here because she wants to be. And yeah, maybe part of that is to make sure I don't go off the rails but either

way, she is here. And I can't help that my stupid heart thinks more of it than it should.

I give her a quick smile and then turn back to the crowd as we continue to play into the night.

I head offstage for a quick breather before our encore and look around for Riot, but she isn't here. I try not to let the disappointment get to me. I know she watched us for a good while and maybe she needed to call the kids or check in on something with her business. I try not to let my thoughts get too dark about the fact that maybe she left because she didn't want to be here.

I take a deep breath and head back onto the stage as we finish up our set for the night. When we make it back to the greenroom, we celebrate like we do after each show with a shot of whiskey. I feel somewhat guilty about drinking. But even Riot told me that I could still drink in moderation.

The guys talk about heading out to a club, but I decide to head back to the hotel. It's too soon after the overdose to think about heading to a club again. And I don't want to give myself the opportunity to find drugs.

I make it back to my room, and all I can think about is Riot. Which hasn't changed much since she seems to be all I ever think about. I pace my room for a good twenty minutes before I decide to leave my room.

I'm not even sure where I am headed. Maybe the lobby bar or the gym. I just needed to get out of that room after being cooped up in it for so many days. I've only left to go to band practice and then for our show.

I don't know how I ended up here, but I find myself outside of Riot's room. I don't even realize it until I'm knocking on her door. I immediately want to leave. I have no idea why I came here or what good it will do. But before I can change my mind, she is opening the door.

"Roan? What are you doing here?"

I shove my hands in my pockets. "Umm, I'm not really sure."

I'm not going to tell her that my subconscious brought me here because I can't get her out of my head. I can't be that desperate. Can I? I miss the woman more than anything, but we both know this will never work out for us. We tried that and failed spectacularly.

Riot leans against the open door. "How was the rest of your show? I left a little early because I... ugh...wanted to call the girls."

That's a lie. She never hesitates except when she's lying. I don't want to have hope for something that may not be true, but I swear she felt that connection between us on stage earlier. Maybe she did feel it, and it scared

her because one thing I do know about this woman is that she will bow out of any situation she knows she won't win.

"How are they?" I ask instead of calling her out on her lie.

"They are good. They are having a great time with Mom, but I know they miss me."

"Of course, they do. You're a good mom, Ri."

She clears her throat. "So what are you doing here, Roan?"

I shrug since I don't really have an answer. "I guess I just wanted to let you know I didn't go out with the guys tonight."

"Are you worried that you might slip up?"

"I didn't want to give myself the opportunity to."

"That's good of you. It was a smart decision. Thank you for letting me know."

Well now this has just turned awkward. I should just leave. Walk away. There isn't anything she wants to say to me. Yet all I want to do is kiss her. But I know she will back away the second I try to make any move toward her.

So instead I just give her a nod and turn around ready to head back down the hall to my own room.

"Wait, Roan," her words come out desperate, like she wants me to stay. I turn around and face her, and she has a smile on her face. "I'm proud of you. For making the right decision tonight."

"Thanks," I mutter. That wasn't really what I wanted her to say.

"Also, you guys sounded amazing tonight. Especially you."

I give her a short smile. "Thanks."

"I'm proud of you, Roan. For taking the steps to better your life."

I give her a nod and then turn back around. No matter how much I want my wife back, I know she will never want the same. She does care for me, I can see that, but she just wants me to get better for me. I want to get better for her. I want to prove to her that I can be a better man for her and our kids. And maybe if I do that, I can get her back.

## RIOT

I didn't expect Roan to show up at my door tonight. I expected him to do what he always did and head out to the bar with the rest of the guys. Party and fall back into his old ways. So to say I was surprised when he showed up at my door was an understatement. Of course, then I felt like a fool lying to him saying I left to call the girls. I know he saw right through that lie. But it's not like I could tell him I left because my heart started beating for you again, and I didn't know how to feel about that. Because if I did say that then there would be a good chance he would still be here, and he would be in my bed right now.

*No, Riot, you can't let that man back into your heart.*

I know why I can't, and I know it can't lead to anything good. I need to let him go. Let him move on the way that I've tried to move on. We aren't good for each other. At least that's what I keep telling myself. Even though my thoughts tonight were totally different. All I could think about was how right we were for each other. The way we fit together. He may be some brooding rock star, and I may be an over-demanding manager, but for some reason it always worked for us. We belonged together at one point, and deep down, I wish I could belong with him again. I just know it won't be easy, and it's probably a terrible idea.

I don't even know where these feelings are coming from. I'm around Roan enough that I shouldn't be having these feelings for him come out of nowhere. Divorcing him didn't stop me from being the manager of the band

so I am still around him constantly. But something is different about being out on this tour with them not as their manager but as a friend. It reminds me of those days ten-plus years ago, before Saints & Sinners was a household name. When they were just a bunch of kids from the streets trying to make a buck and hoping someone would listen to them.

I flop down on the bed and rub my face. I cannot be having these thoughts about Roan. I made a decision to divorce him for a reason. Things were not working out the way they were supposed to. He was cheating, I was too busy building my company. He was becoming one of the biggest rock stars in the world, I had a family to raise.

I wince at that thought. Because it's Roan's family too, and I took that away from him. That is probably one of my biggest regrets, fighting for full custody. He didn't deserve it and neither did the girls. But I wasn't thinking straight, and I was living on the edge of a mental breakdown over the divorce. I know it was an accident. I know Roan never would have let anything happen to Lyric, but he should have been smart enough not to get high around the girls.

I roll over and scream into the pillow. I need these thoughts out of my head. I need to stop thinking about my ex-husband and wondering how things would have been different if I didn't act spontaneously. There have been few times where I haven't meticulously planned things. I'm never spontaneous. The only times I have been were quitting my job and taking the risk of managing Saints & Sinners and the other time was letting Roan into my heart.

So maybe I'm just spontaneous when it comes to him.

I groan into the pillow again and make the decision that tequila is what I need. Yes, it's probably a dumb decision, but I need to get out of my head.

I stand up and look in the mirror, brushing my hands through my head of curls before deciding I look decent enough to head down to the hotel bar to maybe get drunk enough I forget that I am having feelings for Roan.

I make it to the lobby bar, and it's quiet enough for a Thursday night. Only a few people lingering about. And I am happy to see Roan isn't here either. I told him he needed to quit the drugs, but I was more lenient about the drinking. I never really thought he had a problem with it, and so I told him he could drink in moderation. And after our awkward conversation tonight, I figured he might show up here.

Did I subconsciously think he would be here and that's why I wanted to

come here?

I shake the thought from my head but then get angry with myself over the fact I am trying to control Roan again. I think that's what drove us apart. Me trying to control him for so long, and he's the type of man you can't control.

I need a shot stat. I came down here to not think about Roan, and now that's all I am thinking about again.

I flag the bartender down and order two shots of tequila. I down them one after the other and immediately feel the effects. I breathe a sigh of relief as thoughts of Roan start to fade away, and I think more about my business and what I need to start working on for Saints & Sinners and my other bands.

I have a few margaritas as I take notes on my phone of everything I need to work on tomorrow when I hear a commotion behind me.

I turn around to see Jackson, Silas, Knox, and Wilder strolling into the bar. I didn't realize how busy the bar got as I was focused on work. But now that one of the biggest rock bands in the world is in here, a lot of girls are here trying to draw their attention.

I laugh to myself thinking about how the guys would have loved all the attention if it had been a year ago, but now they are all off the market, and these poor groupies are not going to get far with them.

Lake and Saylor follow the guys in and notice me sitting at the bar. I wave them over, and they come quickly.

Lake orders two shots of tequila for the two of us while Saylor, who doesn't drink that much, orders a water.

"How was the club?" I ask them.

"Boring," Saylor mutters. "There were way too many people who showed up there knowing the guys would be there, and so we couldn't have fun."

Lake snorts. "Mostly because you wanted to give your man a lap dance, but he pushed you away."

Saylor purses her lips. "Look, I just wanted to have a good time—"

"You wanted a quickie with Knox."

I bite down on my lip, holding in a smile.

"Well yes but..." Saylor trails off as Lake laughs at her.

"Good thing your brother was too focused on me to realize that's what you wanted, or else he may have smacked both you and Knox upside the head."

"I still don't understand why he gets the ick from the two of us fucking. I don't get it with you guys."



I laugh out loud. “Say, you’re his little sister and with his best friend, you know he doesn’t want to think about it considering he used to have threesomes with his best friend.”

Saylor just shrugs. “He needs to loosen up.”

Lake rolls her eyes at Saylor, and I just sip on my margarita. I love the girl, but sometimes, she is a lot to handle.

“Well I am going to go find my man and smoke a bowl, maybe not in that order.” She waves goodbye and then skips out of the bar.

I watch as Knox follows her out and smirk as the rest of the guys make their way over to me and Lake.

“Where’s Roan?” Jackson asks me.

“In his room. I don’t think he wanted to be tempted by anything tonight.”

“I’m surprised you aren’t babysitting him,” he teases.

I shake my head at him. “He would murder me if I was keeping that close of an eye on him.”

“That’s probably true. So how long are you sticking around?”

That is not something that I thought of. I just planned to come out here for a few days when I heard Roan was in the hospital, but then after finding out about the requirement from the hospital, I decided to stick around a bit longer. I just have decided how long to stay.

“I’m not sure. Maybe another week. I don’t want to be gone for too long as I have a band that is getting ready for their first US tour, but I do want to make sure Roan is okay.”

“I’m glad you’re here, Ri, I think it’s good for him.”

“Don’t tell him that. So far all we’ve done is fight.” Except for tonight when he came to my room, but I don’t want the guys to know that. Because I’m not even sure what it meant.

“He’ll get over himself soon enough and realize it’s best you are here.”

“I hope so.”

I spend about thirty minutes hanging out with the guys at the bar before we all call it a night and head back to our rooms. They have another show here tomorrow night and then off to Amsterdam for two shows next week. I should probably only stick around for those so I can get back home to my kids and to the amount of work that is piling up. As long as Roan is doing okay. At least that’s what I am telling myself, and it has nothing to do with these damn feelings fluttering in my stomach.

## ROAN

I toss my bag into the back of the SUV before we make our way to the airport. We are headed to Amsterdam. And while it is one of my favorite cities, I'm nervous about heading there. It's always so easy for me to score there, and I worry if I have a fight with Riot, it will push me over the edge and have me looking for some drugs.

I should probably talk to my therapist about that, but so far I haven't really done any talking with her. My last session was another filled with journaling. She seemed perfectly content that was all I did, and we didn't talk more than five minutes out of the hour session. Not sure if this therapy is helping, but it sure beats explaining my feelings to a person.

When we touch down in Amsterdam, I make sure to head straight to the hotel and not go out for a walk like the other guys plan to do. It's too hectic with all the fans everywhere, and I just don't want the temptation.

I make my way to the gym in the hotel and get in a workout. I never really understood why Knox spent so much time in the gym when he was going through shit, but I quickly realize it does help clear my head up more than I expected it would.

I make my way back to my room and run into Riot in the hallway.

"Hey, I was looking for you."

"Checking to see if I was behaving myself?" I bite.

She gives me a look that makes me sorry I asked.

"I'm not here to babysit you, Roan."

“Sure seems like it.”

She rolls her eyes at me and sighs. “I mean it. To be honest, I’m bored. It’s weird being here with you guys and not actually working. I really just came to see what you were up to.”

I eye her suspiciously because that sounds a lot like an excuse to babysit me, but maybe she is telling the truth. “I was at the gym. The guys went out.”

“You didn’t want to go with them?”

I shake my head. “Too much temptation on these streets.”

She gives me a smile. “You really are trying, aren’t you?”

I grip the back of my neck and then meet her honey eyes. “Yeah, I am. I can’t keep doing what I was doing. I guess the therapy is kind of helping.”

“That’s good!”

“We don’t even talk, but she just has me journaling.”

“Whatever helps.”

I nod. “So I’m guessing you want to hang out.”

“If you want to. Like I said, I’m bored. My team is doing a good job of not having work for me to do, and I don’t know what to do with myself.”

“Tragic. The workaholic can’t work,” I tease her.

She punches me in the arm. “Not funny.”

I laugh as I pull my room key out of my gym shorts. “I have a deck of cards. We can play some Go Fish.”

She gives me a smile I haven’t seen from her in a long time, and it nearly makes my knees go weak. Because that is the smile my wife used to give me. “You’re on, but just remember I am the reigning champion.”

I hold the door open for her. “In your dreams, woman. You know I hold that title.”

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I throw my cards down on the table as I laugh my ass off. This woman thought she could beat me, yet I’m up four games to one on her.

“You’re cheating!” she whines.

“Babe, how does one cheat at Go Fish?”

She stares at me intently, and I wonder what I said. Then it hits me, I called her babe. She hasn’t been my babe in two years. “Sorry, I…”

She shakes her head. “I mean, it was natural to call me that. The last time

we played Go Fish like this we were together.”

“I should know better than to call you that, though.”

She places her hand on mine, and I can feel the electricity that used to beat between us in her one touch. I think she feels it too because she quickly pulls her hand away. “It...it was just a slip of the tongue. No big deal.”

I nod because I want her to think I agree with her, but to me... God I just miss my wife, and I would do anything to get her back. But I need to pace myself, I can't force myself on her because she will never fall for that again.

“One more game?” she asks me, cutting off my thoughts.

“Yeah, but you know you aren't going to beat me. Even if you win this game, I'll still be up two games over you.”

“Well good thing there is more of the tour left, I can make sure that I end up beating your ass eventually.”

I study Riot as she deals out the cards. I have no idea how long she plans to stay here. I figured she would be leaving after Amsterdam, but with those words, maybe she will be here for longer. Giving me the time I need to convince her we belong together.

“How long do you plan on staying for?” I ask her.

“I haven't really decided yet.”

“How long did you tell the girls you would be gone?”

She chews on her bottom lip, and all I can think about is wishing that was my mouth on her lip.

“I told them a couple of weeks.” She pauses and meets my eyes. “But that all depends on you.”

“Sounds a lot like babysitting.”

She shakes her head. “No, it just means if you want me to stay or go. I'll leave whenever you want me to.”

“And if I ask you to stay longer?”

A blush hits her cheeks, something that rarely occurs, and I wonder if she is feeling things like I am. If this is reminding her of how it used to be when we were on tour.

“Then I'll stay.”

I give her a wide grin as my heart beats rapidly in my chest. This could be it, this could be the opportunity I need to get my wife back.

## ROAN

I can't help but glance at Riot who is standing on the side of the stage. She looks just as beautiful as ever. My little firecracker. Her hair is wild, and her eyes are rimmed in dark kohl making the caramel of her eyes stand out. I can see the fire in them even from here, and I miss that fire. The fire that used to burn only for me.

I turn away from her before I mess up and play for the audience again as Jackson screams into the crowd. I feel alive on stage. Everything else seems to disappear when I'm up here. All my problems, my depression, my anxiety. It's like the stage is my Narnia.

I get lost in the music as we play for another hour to a sold-out crowd. It amazes me to this day that so many people love our music. A group of guys from Louisiana who didn't have much, and here we are selling out stadiums across the world.

I'm still feeling the high of playing for the crowd as we walk to the green room. Marley, Saylor, and Lake are all here along with Riot. Silas, Knox, and Wilder all go to their women while me and Jackson hang back.

"Man, I wish Charlie were here. I hate watching those fucks so in love."

I snort. "Yeah, man, imagine how it is watching all four of you."

He claps me on the back. "You'll find love again."

I look over at Riot and shrug. I don't want to tell him I don't want to find love again. I want it to be with the only woman who has ever owned my heart.

Riot walks up to me and gives me that smile that I fell in love with. “Hey Roan, you sounded amazing tonight.”

“Thanks.”

“You going to head out with the guys tonight, or do you want to play another round of Go Fish?”

I look down at my ex-wife, and I want nothing more than to spend time with her, but I also know that it won’t lead anywhere, and I need to keep as much space as possible before I do something stupid like tell her I am madly in love with her.

“I might head out with the guys.”

She nods at me. “Be good.”

“I know how to behave myself.”

She raises a brow at me.

“Okay, most of the time I know how to behave myself.”

“Just don’t... I don’t need to tell you what to do and not to do. I trust you to make the right choice.”

I give her a quizzical look. Her telling me she trusts me says a lot. Because the last I checked she was babysitting me. But maybe things have changed the last few nights when the guys have gone out, and I’ve stayed in with her and played Go Fish.

“You can come out with us.” Why did I just invite her?

She lays a hand on my arm. “I should call the girls and maybe just follow up on a few things for work.”

“Yo, Roan, you coming in to do this shot with us?” Wilder yells for me across the room.

“You joining us?” I look down at Riot.

She shrugs. “Why not?”

It’s our tradition to take a shot together after the show, and we do it every single time. We never include anyone but the band and sometimes Riot since she is the one responsible for us getting to where we are.

The other girls stand off to the side while the six of us raise our glasses and toast to the band and always a toast to Silas’s brother who should be with us on that stage but isn’t, his life taken from him when he was far too young.

Once we do the shot, Riot says goodbye and heads out. I watch her as she goes, my mind not able to focus on anything else but her.

I look away once the door to the green room closes behind her. My eyes meet Jackson’s, and he has a look in his eye telling me he knows how I feel

about Riot. I mean they all know I still love her but I think Jackson knows that I am going to try everything in my power to win her back during this tour.

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I lean back in the booth in the club as I slowly sip on my whiskey. I've been here for about an hour, but all I really want to be doing is playing that stupid card game with Riot. For some reason the club isn't as exciting as it used to be for me. Or maybe it's because I've only had one drink the entire time I've been here. Maybe the therapy really is working. Or at least the journaling has. I don't find the thrill I used to find anymore. And I don't even crave the drugs like I used to. It's crazy that I could just give them up so easily, but I think having Riot around has helped. I want to get better for her.

"You look bored." Wilder slides into the seat next to me.

I shrug. "Not as fun as I thought it would be."

"You haven't been using, have you?"

I shake my head. "I definitely would be having more fun if I was. But I can't risk it for the band. I can't be put into an in-patient program for weeks. We have this tour, and I need to be here for you guys."

"How's it going? You getting any cravings?"

I run my finger along the rim of my glass. "The meds the doc gave me helped significantly. I mean it does help that I wasn't using every day. Just the days I was using it was bad."

Wilder nods. "We should have tried to stop you before things got worse."

"You know I wouldn't have listened to you."

"Oh I know." He smirks. "But I could have tried."

"It is what it is."

We sit in a comfortable silence for a few minutes, both of us sipping our drinks.

Wilder runs a hand through his hair. "So...ugh...what about Riot?"

"Why is everyone asking about her?" My words come out harsher than I intend for them to.

"Man, you've been in love with her since you all started dating. And you lived with me for a month, I know it when I see it. You still love her."

I set my glass down and run my hands over my face. I know out of

everyone, Wilder would be the one to see that I am still in love with my ex-wife. I've tried to keep it a secret from everyone. I think they mostly just think I'm moody over losing her and the kids but not that I still love her. And I do, I love her as much as the day I first told her I loved her.

"She is never going to take me back. I fucked up one too many times, Wild," I admit to him without actually telling him he is right.

"She's here, though, and she doesn't need to be. She obviously cares about you."

I shrug. "Yeah, but not enough to love me again. Besides, I think half the reason she is here is to make sure the band doesn't fall apart. Or at least keeps their shit together after that article in *Encore* came out."

"That was all such bullshit, Roan. You know it, I know it, the band knows it. Hell, most of our fans know it."

"It doesn't make me feel any better."

"Is that why..."

I give him a look, knowing exactly what he was going to ask me but shutting him down quickly.

"Sorry, man, that was dumb of me. I know that it was an accident."

I nod my head at him, but part of me deep down wonders if I did take those drugs that night because I was feeling so guilty about the article. I mean, I still do. Steven Rouse saw right through me and saw that I was a problem in the band. I don't want to be but look at me now. Everyone is walking on eggshells around me, worried I might use again. That I might OD on purpose.

But that night was an accident. I just wanted to drown out the noise in my head. I didn't think I did too much. I didn't think anything would happen at all.

"You okay, Roan?"

I look up at Wilder and realize I got lost in my head there for a bit.

"Yeah I'm fine. I think I am just going to head back to the hotel."

"I didn't mean to piss you off."

"You didn't," I assure him. "Just tired."

I know he doesn't believe me, but he doesn't say anything as I leave the club.

I should go back to my room and just sleep off my feelings or maybe journal for a bit since that seems to be helping, but somehow I find myself knocking on Riot's door.



She answers the door in an oversized T-shirt that I am convinced is one of mine, but I don't say anything. She also has her phone pressed to her chest.

"Roan, what are you doing here?"

I grab the back of my neck. "I was bored. Sorry if you were busy."

She shakes her head. "I was actually just FaceTiming the girls. They would love to talk to you if you want to."

A smile breaks out across my face. I miss my daughters, but with my crazy schedule and the fact Riot has full custody, I rarely get to see them. "I would like that."

Riot gives me one of her rare smiles that takes up her whole face as she beckons me into her room.

She sits on the bed, and I awkwardly climb in next to her as she holds the phone out and turns her video back on.

"Daddyyyyyy!" Brixley yells when she sees my face on the screen.

"Hey, pumpkin. I miss you."

"I miss you too. When are you going to come see us? Mommy says you are all the way across the ocean with her and that she will be there for a while."

I look over at Riot, surprised she told the kids she would be staying for a while when I thought she planned to leave next week.

I look back at my daughter and her crazy curls she has just like her mom's. "Daddy has work to do, but as soon as I can come back, I would love to see you."

"Yeah I need to show you the new doll Auntie Janae got me. And Grandma says I'm doing so well with school. I learned my alphabet last week! Want to hear me say it?"

She doesn't give me the chance to answer but just starts saying the alphabet. She messes up a few letters, but I can't get over the smile on her face. She goes on talking for minutes about going to the zoo with her grandma and the animals they saw.

I look over at Riot who has a smile on her face the whole time, and I wonder if I can get this life back. The one where my wife is on tour with me, and we get to FaceTime our daughters when they can't come with us. When, after we hang up the phone, she cuddles into me and tells me she loves me. Where I can make love to her for hours just to prove how sorry I am for everything I fucked up in our relationship in the past.

I'm startled out of my thoughts when Lyric joins her sister. She isn't as

happy to see me as Brixley, but I know she doesn't like me very much. She thinks I left her, and she never has been able to learn that sometimes moms and dads just don't always work out. Luckily, she was too young to remember the incident that drove Riot and me apart. Even though it directly affected Lyric.

"Hi, Daddy," she says quietly into the phone.

"How are you, baby? How's school?"

She shrugs. "I miss going to actual school and seeing my friends."

"You don't get to see them at all?"

"Well yeah, after school, we still play together, but I wish that we got to see each other in school."

I frown at that. Riot told me how she moved the kids into homeschooling this year because it was too hard with her travel schedule to have them in school. She hired a private tutor who can travel with her so the girls can jump between LA and New Orleans or wherever she may have to be on tour.

"Well maybe I can talk to your mom about that."

"Really?" she asks me excitedly.

I nod then look over at Riot who is giving me a stern look. "I can't make any promises."

"When are you going to be home, Daddy?" Brixley takes over the screen pushing her sister out of the way.

"As soon as I can be," I tell her. We have a month left of this European tour, and I would love nothing more than to leave and get home to my kids, but I have to check with Riot.

"Well Mommy and Daddy need to get to bed, it's late here, and you guys should be having dinner soon. I know Grandma was cooking."

"Okay, Momma," Lyric answers. "I miss you."

"I miss you too, baby girl."

Brixley presses her lips to the phone screen so all I see is her forehead. "Kisses for Mommy and Daddy."

I smile at my kids and tell them I love them as I try to hold back tears. I know I shouldn't be over emotional just seeing my kids on FaceTime, but the fact Riot invited me to do so is what makes the difference.

"Thank you for that," I tell her after she hangs up the phone.

She gives me a curt smile and a nod.

That's when I realize how close I am to her, sitting on her bed. My arm brushing against hers. I feel like a teenage boy hoping to get to first base. But

this is my wife in front of me, I shouldn't feel nerves racking my body.

"So..." Riot says to me her eyes dropping to my lips for the briefest second.

"So," I repeat as I scoot closer to her.

"What are you doing, Roan?" Her breath hitches.

"I don't know." I reach out to her and cup her face in my hand. "Probably something I shouldn't be doing."

She stares into my eyes and chews on her lip. "Probably something you shouldn't be doing at all." Her words come out breathless.

"But maybe for just a night we can pretend."

"Pretend what?"

I brush my lips against hers so gently she might not have even felt them. "Pretend I didn't fuck everything up and that this is normal."

"Roan," she mutters against my lips.

I press my lips to hers for the briefest second getting lost in the fantasy that my wife is my wife again. That this is normal, that we can have this together.

But it all comes crashing down the second her phone starts ringing, and she pulls away from me.

"I shouldn't, we shouldn't have..." she mumbles as she scoots away from me and stands, answering her phone.

I groan and flop back onto the bed wondering if I just made all that up in my head. But it seemed like she wanted me. For the briefest of seconds, she wanted me back.

I watch her as she paces in her hotel room talking business with someone. I drag myself off the bed and look over at the table by the window where a deck of cards sits. I should have just told her to play the game instead of trying to kiss her. Because I know she will just shut me out now.

I walk toward the door to her room and look back at her. She is watching me intently as I walk away. I choose not to say anything to her as I open the door and leave her to her own devices.

**RIOT**

**D**id I just let Roan kiss me?

It wasn't even a full kiss, it was the whisper of one as his lips brushed against mine.

What was I even thinking? Have I lost my mind?

But something just felt so right with him sitting there so close to me. The way he talked with the girls on the phone. The way he smelled of home as he leaned into me.

Goddamn this phone call. Or maybe it was my savior. Who knows what I would have done if I let Roan kiss me fully? I don't need to ask myself that question. Because I know I wouldn't have pushed him away. Not with how it's been the last few days with him, when he feels like the man I fell in love with.

And I was starting to have feelings for him a while ago. Janae knows, maybe I should call her and tell her what happened and ask her what I should do. Of course, she would say it was all laid out in the stars and this was supposed to happen. I probably shouldn't tell her.

But maybe this is a mistake, letting Roan back into my life. He cheated on me before, and what's to say that won't happen again? Yes, he seems to be getting better with his vices, but that doesn't mean that with a flip of a switch he is a different person.

This is a terrible idea. I don't even know why I'm pondering it at all.

I watch him carefully as he leaves my room.

“Riot, are you there?”

Shit, I forgot I was on the phone. “Yeah, so sorry. What were you saying?”

This time I actually listen as one of my employees tells me about some major problem going on with the record label one of my newer bands just signed to. I clear my mind of anything Roan and listen to what I need to worry about and the reason they are calling so late. This is important. This is my job. Everything with Roan is just an afterthought, I tell myself.

---

“You’re acting weird,” Saylor says to me as we sit on the private plane headed to Paris.

“How am I acting weird?”

She raises her brow at me. “You haven’t bossed anyone around today, for starters.”

“I’m not here to work.”

“Just to babysit your ex-husband.”

“I’m not babysitting him.”

“Weren’t you going to head home instead of coming to Paris?”

Fuck, she got me there. I was planning on leaving after the two Amsterdam shows but then that damn kiss happened, well almost kiss, and it threw all my plans out the window. I decided to stay for one more set of shows. Besides, it’s Paris, who turns down Paris?

Saylor gives me a sly look like she knows something is going on with me and Roan.

“What’s that look for?”

“What look?” she asks.

“I don’t know what you’re thinking, but whatever it is, you should stop.”

She grips my arm. “Oh come on, Riot, something is going on between you and Roan.”

I look around since she wasn’t quiet about that, but no one seems to be paying us any attention. “There is nothing going on. Who even gave you that idea?”

She knocks on her head. “My outstanding intuition.”

I snort. “Maybe you should have a talk with your intuition because it’s

wrong.”

“Nope, no way is it wrong. You two have been hanging out an awful lot.”

“Because I am making sure he is okay.”

“So you are babysitting him?”

I groan. “No, I’m not.”

“So just spending quality time with your ex-husband then.”

I give her a look that would scare most people from asking more questions, but it doesn’t faze her. “If something was happening between Roan and I, I’ll make sure you are the first to know.”

“Yeah, right.”

“Your intuition will tell you, won’t it?”

She purses her lips and stares at me with squinted eyes. “Fine,” she acquiesces. “But I have my eyes on you two.”

I roll my eyes at her and pull up my email, needing a work distraction from her and this trip.

---

“Do you have any threes?”

Despite all my self-talks and better judgment, I once again find myself playing Go Fish with Roan. “Go fish.”

He hasn’t said anything to me about the kiss or what was almost a kiss. In fact, he pretended like nothing even happened. And I am not sure which is worse. Because as I sit here playing this silly game with him, all I can think about is what would happen if he grabbed hold of me and put his hands on me. If he dragged me across this table and kissed the hell out of me, sending the cards flying.

But nope. We are sitting here playing like nothing ever happened.

“Do you have any eights?” I ask.

He hands me two, and I take them to complete my set. My fingers brush over his, and I feel that damn jolt of electricity I’ve never felt with any other man. I know he felt it too because he freezes as I take the cards from him, his hand hovering over the table as I pull mine back.

I clear my throat causing him to unfreeze. “Do you have any queens?”

“Go fish.” His words come out raspy.

I look up to see him staring into my eyes. His deep chocolate ones I used

to get lost in, and now for some reason, I want to get lost in them again.

“Are we going to talk about it?” The words surprise me as they come out of my mouth.

“About what?”

“Roan, you know what I’m talking about.”

“What is there to say?”

I lay my cards down and rest my hands on the table. “You tried to kiss me.”

He raises a brow at me. “And you seemed eager to kiss me back.”

I shake my head. “I...I just got lost in the moment.”

He grunts. “I knew you would say that. Hence, why I didn’t fucking say anything.”

“Don’t you think we should talk about it though?”

“What is there to say? You are just going to deny it ever happened.”

“I’m not denying it happened, but I think we should discuss it. I mean we are divorced, Roan; this is kind of a big deal.”

He shakes his head at me as he leans back in his chair and folds his arms over his chest. “Well what do you want me to say? It was a mistake?”

“Yes!” I shout then immediately want to take back my words when I see his face fall.

“Fine, it was a mistake. I got lost in the heat of the moment. It didn’t matter if it was you or some groupie, I probably would have acted the exact same way, so don’t overreact.”

I feel the punch in the gut when he says those words, just like he wanted me to.

He pushes the cards off the table. “Fuck this game.”

“Roan.”

“No, Riot. I am sick of everything being the way you want it. Get out of my room.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to talk about it?”

He scoffs. “What is there to talk about, you said it was a mistake therefore it was a mistake.”

“I didn’t...I mean...”

“I know what you meant. Nothing is ever going to change with us.” He leans over and rests his elbows on his knees, rubbing his temples. “Can you please just leave, Riot?”

I know there are no other words I can say. I already ruined the night we

were having by bringing up the damn almost kiss.

I grab my phone and room key from the dresser and leave his room with my tail between my legs.



## ROAN

I grunt as I lift weights that are just slightly too heavy for me, but I don't give a shit. Anything to make this constant headache I have go away.

Wilder is next to me, and he keeps eyeing me like he knows something is wrong. But at least he is being smart for once and keeping his mouth shut.

Or at least I thought.

"You're in a mood."

"I'm fine," I grunt as I do another bicep curl.

"Says everyone who isn't fine."

I set the weights down and stare at one of my best friends. "If I wanted to talk about my feelings, I would talk to my therapist."

"Would you?" he asks me sneeringly.

I sigh. "Fine, no."

"Then tell me what's going on, man. Think of me as your therapist but cooler."

"No fucking way. You can't keep your mouth shut for shit."

He gasps at me. "I take offense to that."

I snicker. "No, you don't."

"Fine, so just tell me. I promise I will keep my lips sealed unless it directly involves someone in this band."

I shake my head at him. Despite him being the worst gossip out there, I know he will keep my secrets if I ask him. I take a deep breath before I let out the words. "I kissed Riot."

“What?”

“Well almost. I brushed my lips against hers.”

“And?”

“We got interrupted by a damn phone call.”

“And?”

“And what?”

He smirks at me. “I know Riot pretty well, man. I’m guessing it didn’t go over well?”

I shake my head. “I left after. And then we talked about it last night. But it wasn’t really talking about it. More like we go into a fight about it.”

“Let me guess, she wanted to call it a mistake.”

“Dude, what the fuck, man. How do you know this shit?”

He laughs. “I know women rather well.” He looks around then says in a hushed tone. “Just don’t tell Lake I said that, she will deny it.”

I give him an amused look because I am pretty sure I would agree with Lake in that argument. “Anyway, we got in a fight, and I feel like shit about it.”

“Do you feel like it was a mistake?” he asks me with a serious face.

I don’t know the answer to that. I feel like maybe it was, but part of me wants to do more than kiss her. I want to do a whole lot more than kiss her, but I also know the timing just wasn’t right. And I’m not sure it will ever be right.

“Roan?”

I look up at Wilder and shrug. “I’m not sure. I mean, yeah in her mind it was a mistake but...”

“I’m not an idiot. I know you still love her. I mean you’ve told me as much. But maybe the timing wasn’t right.”

I humph in agreement. “You could say that.”

“Give her some time, man. You never know. She may warm up to you.”

“She turned her heart off to me a long time ago.”

He smacks me on the shoulder. “So did Charlie with Jackson, but look at them, they’re thriving.”

“He didn’t cheat on his wife and almost—”

“Almost what?”

I shake my head. There is no way I am telling Wilder my darkest secret. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Is this what you were almost going to tell me months ago?”

“Look, man, I’m not telling you. That’s between Riot and myself.”

He holds up his hands in defense. “Alright, alright. I won’t try to get it out of you.”

I don’t believe him.

“But maybe you should talk to Riot. And not fight. Maybe agree with her. Get on her good side.”

I run my hands through the buzz cut of my hair. “I don’t know if I’m ever going to get on her good side.”

“Haven’t you two been hanging out a lot lately though?”

I nod. “We just play card games like we used to.”

“Then maybe instead of picking a fight with her while you play you can...I don’t know...compliment her.”

“Wilder, this isn’t like I’m learning how to date someone, she’s my ex-wife. I know every inch of her body. I know what she tastes like. I know the sound she makes when she comes. I know everything about her.”

“Okay, then use that information to woo her instead of whoaing her.”

“That’s not a word.”

“I don’t know what the opposite of woo is.”

I laugh at him. “Thanks for the pep talk.”

“Did it help?”

“Not in the fucking slightest.”

“Well shit, man.”

I pick up the weights I set down earlier and go back to doing bicep curls. “I am going to try not to fight with her, though. I mean it would be nice if we could be civilized.”

“And how perfect is it that you both are here in the city of love?”

I roll my eyes at Wilder. “I’m about to go throw my headphones on if you keep saying stupid shit.”

He gives me a shit-eating grin, and I grab my headphones out of my bag.

---

I inhale deeply and exhale three times before I lift my knuckles to the door and knock.

It took me a lot of thinking and a lot of journaling to be able to come to her door tonight. I even thought about bringing it up with my therapist this

morning but decided against talking and just stuck to writing my thoughts down.

I know I've made a lot of mistakes in my life, but losing Riot is the worst of them all.

I wait for her to answer. I know she's here. At least my sources, a.k.a. Saylor, because her damn brother couldn't keep his mouth shut, told me Riot was in her room.

I knock again about ready to turn away thinking that maybe Saylor was wrong when Riot answers the door in a towel, her hair wrapped up in a shower cap.

"What do you want?"

"Do you answer the door for just anyone in a towel?"

She points at the door. "Have you ever heard of a peephole?"

I ignore her answer. "I came to talk to you."

She sighs. "Fine, but let me at least change into some clothes."

She lets go of the door, but I catch it with my hand and push inside. It's not like I've never seen her naked before.

She turns around and glares at me. "I've seen you naked."

"We aren't married anymore, Roan."

"Last I checked that doesn't make your body any different."

"You are the most difficult man I know," she huffs. "Turn around."

I hold my hands up and turn around at least giving her some privacy to change.

"So what did you want to talk about?" she asks me, and I turn back around to find her fully dressed in a Saints & Sinners hoodie and sweatpants.

I take a deep breath before I let the words out. "I came to apologize."

She gives me an incredulous look. "Really?"

I run my hand over my head. "Look, I shouldn't have kissed you. I just got lost in the moment."

She props her hand on her hip. "The moment?"

I hesitate to answer her. Not because I don't want to, but because I'm worried about how she will take my honesty. "I...I felt so happy for the first time in a while. Talking to the girls, sitting with my wif—ex-wife, things just felt normal for once in a long time."

Riot frowns at me, and I think she is going to yell at me for God knows what, but then she takes a few steps toward me and wraps her arms around me. I freeze. Riot has not instigated any touch between the two of us since

that day I nearly ruined everything.

“I didn’t know how much you were hurting, Roan. I had an inkling, but I didn’t realize keeping the girls away from you was devastating you so much.”

I don’t know how she got all of that out of my words, but she’s right. I slowly pull my arms that are glued to my side around Riot, worried about how she will take it, me touching her. But she is touching me now, and I just want to hold her even if it is only as friends.

“Maybe I have been doing this all wrong,” Riot mutters into my chest. “Maybe I shouldn’t have separated you so much from the family.”

I shake my head. “You did what you thought was right at the time. I was fucked up, Ri. I nearly lost our daughter because I was in a mood and only focused on getting high.”

“I should have pushed you into therapy back then instead of just taking everything away from you.”

I bite back the words I was going to say and swallow them down deep. She doesn’t need me going off on her right now about taking everything away and the divorce. I’m surprisingly not as upset about that as I used to be. Maybe because I am so focused on getting her back. Somehow, I will. But maybe I just need to take these baby steps.

“I was a mess back then; I never would have seen a therapist,” I tell her.

“But I could have tried.”

“We could have done a lot of things differently, but we didn’t.” There. That is as much as I will say with regards to our divorce.

“You’re right, we could have.”

I breathe a sigh of relief at her words. They give me hope that maybe we can work this out one day.

Riot pulls her head away from my chest and looks up at me. “I miss this, you know.”

My heart starts to beat faster. “Miss what?”

“This friendship we used to have between us before we decided to get married on a whim.”

And it’s like a bucket of cold water being dumped on my head. Friendship, that’s all she wants. “Yeah,” I don’t even know what else to say after feeling like my heart just had a stampede run across it again.

“Maybe this is what we need, Roan. No more fighting or arguing. Just friendship. When it was so easy for us.”

It was easy for us when we were married too. But I don’t tell her that.

“You want me to start making fun of you again?” I manage to tease her.

“I guess I’ll take it if it means things can go back to how they used to be.”

“How about we just take it slow? Build our friendship back up.”

She looks at me with a smile on her face. “Who are you, and what have you done with the Roan Mathieu from before? The grumpy, broody asshole.”

I let out a laugh. “I’m still in there, but the idea of building back a friendship with you kinda makes him disappear for a while.”

“Then I guess we start as friends again.”

“I guess so.”

She gives me another hug before stepping out of my arms. “So, Mr. Mathieu, if we are to be friends again, where do you suggest we start?”

I give her a one-sided smile, the smile I know she fell for years ago, as I pull a deck of cards out of my back pocket. “Let’s get back to that Go Fish.”

She grabs the cards from me and moves to the table in front of her window overlooking the Paris skyline. “You are going down, mister.”

“I’m still up seven games to three.”

“Well this is where the tables turn.”

I shake my head at her and laugh. “Whatever you say, sweet cheeks.”

She sticks her tongue out at me as I take a seat across from her. This may not be how I wanted our relationship to go. But starting as friends I can do, because we did that before, and it ended up with her marrying me. So maybe, just maybe, I can do it again.

**RIOT**

“Go fish.”

I laugh at Roan as I say it. I’m finally beating him with only six cards in my hand, and he has nearly twenty.

He juggles his cards in one hand as he picks up a card from the pile and curses.

I smile at him as he begrudgingly shoves another card into his hand.

“This isn’t funny,” he mutters.

“Yes, it is.”

“I’m having a bad hand is all. Just wait until the next game, and I whoop your ass.”

I bite hard on my lip to keep from laughing too hard.

“You know we could just play poker, and then I would beat your ass every single time.”

I stick my tongue out at him. He knows I suck at card games. Hence why we started playing Go Fish together so many years ago. It was the only game I could sometimes beat him at.

He finally gets to lay a set of cards down and beams in triumph. I can’t help it that my heart skips a beat when he gets that smile on his face. It reminds me so much of the old Roan. The one who was carefree before the drugs and alcohol took over his life. The Roan I fell in love with all those years ago.

“So how are the girls doing?” His words break my train of thought, and

I'm grateful he said something or else I would spend the silence traveling down memory lane remembering all the good times I had with this man.

"They are loving their time with Janae and Mom. But I miss them."

"You always miss them when you are on tour."

I nod. "Brixley asked for you last night when I talked to them. I kind of wish they called when you were still in here. It's hard telling her you aren't around. She kind of expects it after that first call."

The call when he almost kissed me. I can still feel his breath on my lips, feel that need I didn't want to feel. God, I almost kissed him back that night. And I wanted to. I wanted to so badly, but that is something I will never tell him. Instead, I turned into a bitch and told him it was a mistake. Because we can't go back down that path. It's not healthy for either of us.

"Maybe we can call them tonight?" he asks me.

I chew on the inside of my mouth. "Maybe."

"You're not sure if it's a good idea?" he asks.

I nod. "I just don't want her to..."

"Get her hopes up that her daddy will be back in her life." His words come out rather harsh.

But I can't deny them. I can't let the girls think that their dad will be back in their life like he used to be because that is not how it works, and they just don't understand that. He can be in their lives in some capacity, but reversing the decision in court will be tough. And I'm not sure I want to give him any custodial rights back. He's better now, but it's barely been two weeks.

"Riot, I'm not asking to be there every single day. I'm just asking to be able to see my kids when I want to."

I nod as I try to hold tears back. This is not the conversation I wanted to have tonight. "I know. It's just hard."

"I know it is," he says, laying his cards down and folding his hands on the table. "This isn't easy. But just know I'm not asking for a lot. They are still my kids. And you have to know I am trying my hardest right now to be a better man. Not just for them but for you too."

I look up at him and want to cry at those words. My heart wanting him back in my life, but my brain knows better than to let him in.

"And I don't mean in a relationship," he clarifies. "I need to be a better man so you know that I am going to be good for the kids."

That makes sense. "Maybe we can call them tonight. Brixley has ballet practice, but with the time difference we should be able to call them around



eleven.”

He looks at his watch. “You really want to hang out with my ass for another two hours?”

I give him a small smile. “Gives me time to beat your ass in another game.”

He snorts. “Yeah right. You just got lucky on this one.”

“I’m feeling lucky tonight.”

“Game on, sweet cheeks.”

---

I shut the door behind Roan as he leaves my room. This is the third night in a row he’s been in here playing cards with me since he came and apologized for the kiss.

I am still shocked he did that, actually apologized. That isn’t like Roan at all.

It’s also not like me at all to have him in here every night acting like we were before we even got together the first time.

But even now there is something different about him. He isn’t that same man he was at twenty-three years old. He is harder, darker, but there is a lightness to him I haven’t seen in a long while. He’s different now, maybe it’s all of that time that he spent doing drugs and drinking heavily, and maybe his therapy is helping, and he’s finally reflecting on that. He’s changed—that’s one thing I do know—and maybe he can be the man now that I always wanted him to be.

But I’m not sure that this can ever work out. I don’t even know why I’m thinking these thoughts. There’s never gonna be a Roan and me again, not after everything that happened, not after almost losing our daughter. I can’t risk being with a man who may never be there one hundred percent for me and my family.

I know there will always be some kind of love for him, but is love enough?

---

“I’ve been hanging out with Roan a lot this past week,” I tell Janae as we

FaceTime from a quaint little park I found along the Seine.

“And how has that been going?”

I bite my lip as I try to think of the right answer. Because it’s been going exceptionally well. He hasn’t tried to kiss me again, and it hasn’t been awkward at all. “He seems like the man I used to know, Janae. He isn’t some big rock star with a drinking and drug problem. He’s just Roan.”

Janae just smiles a huge gaping smile into the phone.

“What?”

“He’s just Roan? Girl, do you not remember how you used to act when he was trying to win you over back in the day. You would say the exact same thing.”

“He’s not trying to win me over at all. He’s been a gentleman unlike how he was back in the day, always trying to kiss me. He hasn’t even touched me since that night he tried to kiss me.”

I don’t know why I don’t tell her about the hug we shared a few nights ago. When I truly felt bad for him. I know he was depressed, but I didn’t think I understood just how depressed he was and how everything I’ve been doing is not helping him. I cut him off from the world he was used to. I ended our marriage and severed ties between him and the girls because I didn’t think he should be around them at the time. But as time continued, I didn’t think how much that isolation was hurting him deep down.

And he didn’t have to tell me all that for me to figure it out. I was married to the man for nearly six years, I know how his brain works.

“You look smitten.”

I gape at Janae. “I’m not smitten. I’m just happy to have my friendship with him back.”

Janae rolls her eyes at me. “And how long until he has you naked and underneath him again?”

“That’s not happening,” I swear to her.

“Hmm, okay, whatever you say.”

“Janae, I’m serious. We’re just friends.”

She nods her head. “That’s what they all say.”

I groan in frustration.

“I’m pulling your cards as we speak, and they clearly are showing me something far different than what you speak of.”

“Oh my god, Janae. Stop. You don’t need to read my cards. What is happening between Roan and me is strictly platonic.”

“Okay.”

I raise a brow at her. “That’s all you have to say.”

She purses her lips at me then blows a raspberry. “I’m agreeing with what you are saying.”

“I know that look, though, you don’t agree with me.”

She rests her chin in her palm. “I’m agreeing with you.”

I shake my head at her. “Fine, whatever. Think whatever you want to think.”

She gives me a grin. “Oh, I will.”

“Well I should probably get going. They have their last show in Paris tonight, and I said I would be there.”

“Of course you did.”

I give her a glare. “As their manager.”

“So when are you coming home?” She changes the subject.

I chew on my lip because I have been so caught up in hanging out with Roan, I’ve kind of forgotten that I’m supposed to be at home with the girls and working from New Orleans. I’m just so comfortable being on tour.

“I’m thinking maybe one more week. Roan has made a lot of progress so far, and I am trusting him to remain clean. So I think one more week of me being here will be beneficial. They only have three more weeks of the tour left.”

Janae just smiles at me, and I know she is scheming. “I miss you, Ri. So do the girls, but they are getting enough time with their auntie and their gran, so don’t worry about them. They are doing just fine.”

I give her a weak smile. “I do feel guilty about being out here and not at home with them. I feel like a terrible mother.”

“You aren’t. You had to work.”

“But you know I am not here for work, I’m here for Roan.”

Janae sighs. “Whether you are there as his manager or his ex-wife, you know he is important to you and the girls, so if you need to be away from them to take care of him, then so be it.”

“Why do you always make sense?”

“Because I am your smart friend.” She flicks her hand into the camera like she is shooing me away. “Now go do what you’re supposed to be doing. Go see that sexy man play, and try not to fall in love with him again.”

I gape at Janae and flip her off, and she laughs at me. I hang up without saying goodbye because I am scared that she may be right. Maybe I am

starting to fall for my ex-husband again.

---

**ROAN**

“I think I’m falling for my wife.”

My therapist looks up at me in surprise. Probably because this is the first time I’ve talked to her in the two weeks I’ve been seeing her.

“I thought you were divorced,” she says to me.

I nod. “We are. But I’ve always had feelings for her, and now they are rushing back in full force.”

“And how do you think she feels about you?”

I shrug. “I’m not really sure. We’ve been,” I scratch the back of my head. “I don’t know. We’ve just been hanging out a lot, and it feels like old times, and I just can’t help that my heart wants her the way it used to want her.”

“But you don’t think she feels the same way?”

“I know she doesn’t. She is so set on me never changing. She is always going to see me as the man who cheated on her, the man who almost killed our child.”

I am sure the therapist is shocked I just admitted that out loud. It’s not something I tell anyone. In fact, only me and Riot and the doctors who saved Lyric know.

“Do you want to talk about that?”

I sigh and pick at a nonexistent mark on the table. “Not really.”

“How about you just try? Have you written anything down about it?”

I shake my head.

“Then just talk about as much or as little as you want. Maybe if you can’t

talk about it, it will help you journal about it. Get those thoughts out of your head.”

I sigh as I try to get the words out. How do I even say them? I was drunk and high. I wasn't paying attention to my daughter who was playing in the backyard. She was only four years old and didn't know how to swim. I was the asshole dad who thought he could snort some heroin and be okay. But I got high as fuck from it, and Lyric wandered too close to the pool edge and fell in. The worst part is, I was so high, it took me nearly thirty seconds to even realize what happened. Luckily Riot had just gotten home and came running into the backyard and jumped into the pool when she saw Lyric fighting for her life.

I just stood there completely upset with myself and in disbelief. I was also high as shit and was having trouble discerning reality. I couldn't believe what was happening and froze. What kind of parent does that make me? This is the reason Riot fought for custody of the kids. Because I can't be trusted with them.

“Did I lose you, Roan?”

I glance up and look at my therapist through the computer screen. So many words I could have just told her, but once again kept them locked inside of me.

I shake my head at her. “Maybe I should just write this stuff down.”

“Tell me why you get lost in your head, Roan. You have so many things that I think you want to say, but then you go quiet on me.”

“Sometimes the thoughts in my head scare even me. I don't think that I can say them out loud.”

My therapist looks at me with a kind face. “I'm not here to judge you, Roan. I've heard many people tell me things that scare them, and I don't ever judge. No matter how terrible the things are that we think. It's better to get them out and figure out a way to change the mindset then let those thoughts eat away at us.”

“You promise you won't judge me?”

She shakes her head. “Never.”

For the first time in my life, I let go. I say the words that I keep locked up inside me and tell her everything that happened the day that ruined my entire life. The way Riot reacted, the way I felt, the result of it all. A divorce and no custody of the kids.

I know we are over time on my session by the time I finish spewing out

my words, but she never stops me.

“Do you feel any better?” she asks me when I finish getting it all out.

I think about it for a moment, trying to figure out how I feel and realize that feeling is relief. I feel relief over finally telling someone the thoughts I kept bottled up for too long. “I feel better,” I tell her in response.

“Good. And I wish we had time to discuss this further because I think this was a good breakthrough today. But our time is up. I am hoping that next time we meet we can continue this conversation.”

I nod, not really sure I am going to want to talk to her in two days, but this was some kind of improvement I think I needed.

“If you have any thoughts that come up before we meet again, please make sure to journal them. It helps you a great deal to get them out. I can tell.”

I nod again, not sure what to say before she tells me goodbye, and I shut down the computer.

I feel surprisingly lighter now, like things may actually get better in my life. And it’s no surprise to me the first person I want to tell is Riot.

## RIOT

I watch the show in awe. I've never seen the band perform better than they are tonight. Roan looks and sounds amazing. I don't know what is different about him, but something is definitely different about him tonight. He has this presence to him that is blinding. I can't take my eyes off him.

I don't miss as he stares back at me whenever he can get a second to glance my way. And for a second, it almost feels like it did back when we started dating. The stolen glances, the rapid heartbeats, the endless need. And why the hell am I feeling all of that right now?

I should go back to the greenroom before anyone notices, but my legs won't move. It's like I'm grounded to this spot, watching my ex-husband play with his band.

Those words sting just a little, ex-husband. I'm beginning to feel like I don't want him to be my ex-husband anymore. That I want to try again with him. The love I had for him never went away and now it feels like it used to. Like I don't know what I would do without him in my life.

Maybe Janae was right all along, maybe this was written in the stars for us. Maybe I am really falling for my ex-husband again. It's been so easy with us the last week, nothing like what I experienced with him before. We've both grown older, have more mistakes to carry with us, but for some reason it just has made my feelings for him stronger.

"I don't need to say it," Saylor says to me as she scoots closer to where I stand on the side of the stage.



“What?” I shout over the music.

She just raises her brows and shakes her head. “Oh nothing.”

“You are acting an awful lot like your brother right now.”

She shrugs. “I’m sure he would say the same thing.”

“It’s not what you think.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

I ignore Saylor for the rest of the concert because I know she is just going to say I told you so. I know she can read me better than most, and she can probably see the love I have for Roan written all over my face right now.

When the band gets off stage and takes a break for their encore, I don’t leave. I stick around and watch as Roan walks up toward me and grabs a water bottle, downing the whole thing, and I swear I’ve never seen a man look sexier than he does right now.

*What the hell is wrong with me?*

“Hey, beautiful,” he says to me before grabbing a towel then turning back toward the stage.

He doesn’t say another word to me, but I can’t help but stare at him as his back faces me. Why do I feel this way? Why is my body waking up to this strange feeling of falling for him again?

Before he gets back on stage, he turns to me and winks, and I can’t help but feel that wink all the way in my toes. That was the old Roan. That was the man I fell in love with eight years ago.

I watch them play their encore and swear I am swooning over the man. How am I supposed to face him after this? He must know I was swooning, right? He could see right through me.

I can feel my cheeks turning red. What is coming over me?

When they get off the stage I am ready to beeline it away from Roan, but I’m not quick enough, and his large frame envelopes me in a hug. I’m frozen at his gesture, he may be talking, but the loud drone of the crowd makes it impossible to hear what he is saying. Until he drops down his mouth to my ear and tells me exactly what I don’t need to hear.

“You are all I thought about during that show, Riot. And I think it was the best show I’ve ever played. Thank you for being here. For helping me get through this. I wouldn’t be here without you.”

He presses a kiss to the top of my head and walks away like what he just did and said meant nothing. But they meant everything to me. Because I really think I am falling for Roan all over again.

I take my time getting back to the green room. I am nervous to face Roan. I have no idea why. It's not like he told me he loved me, but god, I feel like that's written all over my face.

How can I be falling for my ex-husband?

I make a beeline for the bar area the second I get into the greenroom, pouring a big glass of tequila.

Saylor gives me a curious look, and I ignore her.

"Riot, get over here," Jackson yells as he waves me down.

The guys are huddled in a circle ready for their post-show drink, and I feel awkward as hell joining them after what Roan said to me. But I find my way over to the circle and join them for their customary toast. I throw back my entire glass of tequila and nearly gag, but hell I needed that drink.

"You coming out tonight, Riot?" Silas asks me.

"Oh I don't know." I can't be around Roan without him knowing I am getting feelings for him again.

"Come on, Ri, you haven't been out with us for a while, and we love when you're here." Wilder adds while looking over at Roan. I can't help but get the feeling Wilder knows something is going on between us. Well as close to there being something going on between us as there can be.

"Yeah, we miss you coming out with us," Lake has to say, and I feel like she is in cahoots with Wilder.

"Alright fine, I'll go out with you all."

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The club isn't nearly as crowded as I thought it would be, and it's actually been nice to hang out with my friends rather than hole myself up in a hotel room avoiding Roan.

Speaking of Roan, the man hasn't taken his eyes off me all night. I'm beginning to wonder if I'm hallucinating him watching me.

"Wanna dance?" Saylor asks me.

There is an excuse to get out of Roan's line of sight for a while. "Sure."

Saylor, Lake, Marley, and I make our way to the dance floor, and I finally feel like I can let loose. Maybe it's the tequila talking, but I feel free dancing with the girls. We laugh and grind against each other to the songs blaring through the speakers.

I can still feel Roan's eyes on me, but it feels less invasive now that he is so far away.

A man comes up behind me and starts dancing with me. And I don't even care. Normally I would push him away, but between the tequila and the music, I feel free.

I dance with him for a song before he becomes too handsy, and I push him away. Saylor pulls me into her, and the man casually walks away. I'm glad I didn't have a clinger there. But I look up toward the VIP area and see Roan glaring at me.

When we make our way back to the VIP section, I'm surprised to find Roan gone.

"What happened to Roan?"

Jackson looks at me. "He left."

"Why?"

He shrugs. "Said he was tired."

I chew on my lip with worry, worried he may do something stupid like drugs. But I shouldn't go there, he's been doing so well, he wouldn't throw it all away over someone dancing with me.

"Maybe I should go check on him."

"Are you worried about him?" Jackson asks.

I nod. "I just...I don't want to feel like he needs a babysitter, but if he left upset—"

"He didn't leave upset."

"He didn't?"

"Not at all. He was saying he was getting tired for a while, and then when you girls went out to the dance floor, he left."

Okay, maybe I really am hallucinating because I swore he saw me dancing with some stranger and was glaring at me like he wanted to punch the stranger in the face.

"Oh. Okay."

"Everything okay with you?"

I space out for a second. "Hmm, what? Yeah, I'm fine."

Jackson looks at me strangely, which I don't blame him, I am acting weird right now.

"Maybe I should head back to the hotel and check on him."

"Do whatever it is you want to do."

I go to leave but Saylor is standing in front of me with a shot of tequila.

“Are you leaving already?”

“I was thinking about it.”

“Stay a little longer, we never get to hang out anymore, you’re always at the hotel.”

“I’ve just been making sure that Roan is alright.”

Saylor hands me the shot glass. “I’m sure he’s fine. Although he must be missing hanging out with you tonight, since it seems like you all hang out together every night.”

I toss the shot back. “Just want to make sure he has company.”

“So is that what they are calling it these days?”

I raise a brow at her. “What do you mean?”

“So you two aren’t hooking up?”

I snort at that. “Are you kidding me right now?”

She shakes her head. “Oh come on, the way you two can’t keep your eyes off the other. The constant hanging out, Wilder and I for sure thought you were hooking up with him.”

“Please don’t tell me you made bets about this.”

She purses her lips and looks around at anything but me.

“Saylor! He’s my ex-husband.”

“Haven’t you ever heard of second chances?”

I fold my arms over my chest and shake my head at her. “That is not happening with me and Roan.”

“Yet.”

“Ever.”

“You are no fun,” she pouts then mumbles something I can’t hear.

I walk away from her before she gets any more crazy ideas and tell the guys I’m headed out. I tell myself it’s because I’m tired and don’t want to stay out late. But part of me wants to check on Roan and see how he’s doing. Because I am not convinced he didn’t leave upset.

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I get back to the hotel and dig through my purse looking for my hotel key when the door across from mine opens, and I am suddenly pulled into the room.

I go to scream but a large, tattooed hand lands on my mouth as I’m lifted

off my feet and pulled into the room.

I know it's Roan. I can tell by his smoke and cedar scent. I claw at his hand trying to pull it off my face. I finally break free of his hold. "What the fuck?" I yell.

He presses me against the wall in his hotel room. "I should be asking you the same thing."

I raise a brow at him. "What are you talking about?"

"Were you really dancing with some stranger?"

"Are you really trying to tell me who I can talk to?"

"It looked like more than talking."

I push against his chest, but he doesn't budge. "You have no control over what I do in my life."

He drops his lips to my neck. "Are you sure?"

"What are you doing, Roan?"

"Remembering what you taste like." His lips graze along my neck before he scrapes his teeth across my collarbone.

"You're drunk. Please get off me."

"Don't you remember what it was like between us?" he asks as he grabs my wrists, pinning them above my head.

I try not to shiver under his touch, but I can't help it. One touch has me remembering everything that happened between us.

"I remember you being an asshole."

"I didn't mean to hurt you," he says to me quietly. "I'll be better."

"Roan," I whisper.

"Do you know how much it hurts to be around you every day knowing that I could still have you if I didn't fuck everything up?"

"Roan..."

"I mean it, Riot. I look at you every day and hate that I am missing out on you. I hate that I miss you even when you are right in front of me."

His words hit deep, my head and my heart battling each other over his words.

"I'm not asking you for forever, Ri. I'm asking you for a chance to prove myself."

I sigh as I take him in. Can I really give him a chance? Give us a chance?

"Please," he begs.

I bite my lip as I look at him. My stupid heart is telling me that this is what I want. And then I nod.

He moves on me so fast I barely have time to catch my breath, his lips are on mine as he lifts me up into his arms, and out of instinct, I wrap my legs around his hips.

Roan is kissing me, and I am letting him. And holy shit, I forgot how this man kisses. His kisses are everything. It's like he can tell you a million things with just one kiss, and this kiss is telling me he's sorry, he never wanted to leave, and he needs me.

I don't have time to even think about how wrong this is and how we shouldn't be doing this because my body wants him. I want this man.

"Roan," I moan as he works his lips down the side of my neck.

"Yeah, baby?"

"What are we doing?"

He pulls his lips away from me and gazes into my eyes. "What we never should have stopped doing."

I don't even get a chance to respond before his lips are back on mine. I should stop this, but god, it feels so good.

I missed this. I missed Roan. My husband. The man I promised forever to and then ran at the first sign of danger.

I never should have done that. I should have tried to make things work but I was scared, and I didn't want to be worried about the girls.

But this right here, the way he is kissing me, reminds me of the man I fell in love with.

I kiss him back with a passion in myself I don't recognize. I don't ever remember feeling this needy, this wanton before, not even with Roan back in the past. But I guess I am a new me, and this is a new Roan, and maybe this is what we were missing before.

"Fuck, baby," he moans against my lips as he grinds his hips against mine.

I shiver at his contact, at his touch, and find myself meeting his hips with my own need.

"Roan," I groan.

His lips caress my collarbone, and I don't want him to stop but I need him to stop. "We shouldn't be doing this."

"Says who?"

"We aren't together anymore."

"We could be."

I grip his face and pull him up to meet my eyes. "This isn't a good idea."

“I think it’s the best idea.”

“So many things could go wrong.”

“Or maybe so many things could go right,” his words hushed as he brushes his lips against mine again.

“I just think we need to take things slow.”

He pulls away and sets me down on the ground. “I can do slow, baby, if it means I get to be back in your life in this capacity.”

I chew on my lip. Am I really agreeing to this? Am I okay with hooking up with my ex-husband?

I guess my answer is yes. “Are you sure we should be doing this?”

He pushes my wild curls out of my face. “Baby, I would do anything to get you back. I’m trying here. I really am. I want to be a better man for you and the girls. Just give me this chance to prove to you that I can be the man you need in your life.”

How can I say no to those words?

“Alright.”

Roan smiles at me with one of those smiles that makes my knees weak. And then his lips are on mine again, and I can’t help but wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him back. This man meant so much to me before, and he still means a lot to me now. Maybe it is time I let him back in.

Eventually Roan pulls his lips away from mine, his forehead resting against mine. “You should probably go.”

“Why’s that?” I ask him, playing with the collar of his shirt.

“Because if you don’t leave now, I don’t think I will be able to control myself. I’m already on the edge of losing control, baby.”

I know he’s right. If I stay, I know exactly where this will lead. So I pat him on the cheek then give him the briefest kiss before heading out of his room and going back to mine.

I shut the door and lean against it. What the hell did I just agree to?

## ROAN

I wake up feeling refreshed. It's the first time in a long time that I've woken up feeling that way. And I know it all has to do with kissing my wife last night.

I know she was cautious about giving us a try again, but I couldn't help myself. I needed her to know how much I needed her. It didn't help that I got pissed off watching her dance with some random guy at the club. It should have been me out there with her.

We've gotten closer over the last week, and I just couldn't not claim her anymore. I needed her so badly. I need her in my life. Not just as the manager of the band but as my partner. Things were always better when we were together.

And I know she is planning on leaving soon. And I couldn't let her leave without telling her how I felt. And it was worth the risk. I half expected her to flee when I tried to kiss her. I was surprised she stayed. And that she let me kiss her and then she kissed me back. God, it felt like having my wife back, and that is a feeling I want to relive every damn day.

I get out of bed and take a quick shower before ordering room service for breakfast. When it arrives, I direct them across the hall to Riot's room and knock on the door.

She is wearing nothing but an oversized T-shirt when she answers the door, and it instantly makes me hard as a rock.

"Roan." Her words come out slightly defeated, and I really hope she isn't



regretting the decision we made last night.

“Morning. I couldn’t cook you breakfast, so I had some delivered.”

She sucks on her lower lip, and I know that look. She is trying not to smile. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“I wanted to.”

She nods then pulls the door open all the way. I gesture for the room service employee to bring the food into her room and tip him generously as he leaves.

We sit down at the small table by the window and dig into the eggs, bacon, pancakes, and fresh fruit I ordered.

It doesn’t take long for Riot to bring up the night before, and just like I anticipated, she has her doubts about it.

“So about last night...”

“What about it?” I ask around a mouthful of pancakes with fresh fruit.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?”

I swallow down the pancakes. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

She gives me an incredulous look. “You really need a reminder as to why you and I could be a bad idea?”

I shrug. “No, I don’t. But I think you need a reminder on how we can be a good idea. We were good, Ri. Back in the day, we were perfect.”

“And you went and screwed it all up.”

I wince, but the truth doesn’t hurt as much as it used to. “I made a lot of mistakes. Losing you was the worst one.”

“Don’t go trying to sweet talk me by saying things like that.”

“I mean it, Riot. Losing you completely wrecked me, and you know it. You saw my downfall.”

She reaches across the table and grips my hand. “I know I did. And I hated every second of it. But I can still worry this won’t work out, Roan. This could be one of those things that sounds like a good idea at the time, but what happens when we get back to reality?”

“You mean when we go home?”

She nods.

“Baby steps. One day at a time. We just need to figure this out.”

She studies me with those intense caramel eyes that I love to get lost in. “Ground rules.”

I raise a brow at her. “What ground rules?”

“We keep this between us for now. I don’t want the band knowing and

getting in between us.”

I nod. “I can agree to that.”

“We don’t tell the girls. I don’t want them getting their hopes up.”

“Fair enough. I am only just getting back into their lives.”

“No PDA.”

“I figured that was a given since we don’t want the band to know.”

“No drugs, no other women, no—”

“Baby,” I cut her off. “Trust me when I say, I am done with all that.”

“Trusting you is hard, Roan.” She doesn’t hold back on her candor.

“I know it is. But I’m changing. I told you I want to be a better man, and I’m taking those steps to get there.”

Riot is quiet as she stares me down. I know her head is racing with thoughts, most of them telling her this is a bad idea. And maybe she is right, maybe this is a terrible idea. But I can’t not try. Not when it comes to my wife.

“Okay.”

I look at her in surprise, thinking she was going to have a million more objections to all this.

“But we have to treat this like a new relationship. We need to take it slow. We can’t just explode like we did when we first started dating.”

I clench my jaw because even though I knew she was going to say that, I don’t want to take things slow. I want my wife back. I want her to be wild and wanton. I want her dripping with need around me. I just want all of her.

But for her, I will do anything. “Fine.”

“Good.”

We both stare at each other, and the sexual tension grows with each second that passes. Because the chemistry between us was never a problem. We always exploded like fireworks.

She clears her throat, her cheeks turning pink with desire, and goes back to the pancakes in front of us. “Well we should probably finish eating. The flight today is at noon so we need to be getting a move on and—”

I don’t take things slow. I cut her off by leaning over the table and kissing her.

God, I missed kissing her. It’s like biting into the most delicate fruit. Her plump lips so soft against my own.

I expect her to push me away after she just said she wanted to take things slow, but her hand grabs my neck and pulls me even closer to her. I coax

open her mouth with my tongue, and she lets me in. And I devour her. I don't take it slow; I feast on her.

I pull her out of her chair without losing the connection between us and walk her over to the bed. I sit down on the corner of it and she straddles me. My hands find their way up under her T-shirt, and I caress the underside of her breasts. The ones I love playing with so much.

"Roan," she moans, and she grinds against my hips. "We are supposed to be taking this slow."

I twist her nipple and she yelps. "Woman, you are grinding on my dick right now. How am I supposed to go slow?"

She tries to get up, but I clasp my hands on her hips and latch my mouth to the sensitive spot below her ear. The spot I know she loves to be kissed on.

"You aren't playing fair." Her words come out breathy.

"I never said I would," I mutter against her neck.

My lips leave a trail of kisses down her neck and across her clavicle before I get reckless and pull her shirt over her head, leaving her in nothing but a pair of silk panties.

"Roan."

"Let me make this worth your while, baby. I missed you. God, I've missed you so much. The way you feel, the way you taste. I need you in my life, Riot, there is no doubt in my mind about that."

She mumbles something that I can't make out but doesn't stop me as I drop my mouth to her dark nipple, sucking it between my teeth and pulling hard on the taut peak.

I let go of one breast and move onto the next until she is squirming in my lap. I lift her up and flip us over onto the bed, and I know she is going to tell me to stop.

But to my surprise, she doesn't as I kiss my way down her stomach to the line of her panties.

My fingers glide over her, feeling her warmth through the softness of the silk, and I know she is wet for me.

I inhale in her scent, recommitting it to memory as I pull her panties over her thighs.

I keep waiting for her to hesitate, to tell me to stop, but she doesn't. She just grabs the sheets while I slowly leave a trail of kisses up her thigh.

When I get to her core, I glide one finger through her slickness causing a deep moan to rumble out of her.

“Stop teasing me, Roan.”

I chuckle against her folds. “I’m just taking my time, baby.”

I hook her thighs over my arms as I drop my head and lick her from her core to her clit. I suck on the bundle of nerves, pulling and teasing her before letting go.

“Roan, please.”

I smirk against her thigh as I take two fingers and glide them into her tight pussy. I work her core until I feel her getting close, her pussy tightening around my fingers before I pull them out and replace them with my mouth.

Riot grabs my head, pulling me closer to her, and I relish in the feeling that she wants this. That she wants me. That maybe this could actually work out, and we can live our lives together.

I don’t want that hope to build up inside of me just to come crashing down later, but I can’t help it as I eat out my wife for the first time in two years.

I find my way back to her clit and suck on it hard as I push my fingers back inside of her, curling them just the way she loves to hit that spot that makes her toes curl.

She screams my name as she comes all over my fingers and my face. I clean her up with my tongue, lapping up the sweet juices flowing out of her.

I look up at her and grin like the devil, and she just smiles back at me.

“Well, that was the best thing I ate this morning.”

She throws her hands over her face and giggles. “You just had to ruin the moment.”

I crawl up her body and kiss her lips, proving to her that I didn’t ruin any moment. She latches on to me, her arms wrapping around my neck as I kiss the hell out of her.

I rest my forehead against hers as I cup her face. “I missed this.”

She chews on her lip, and I see the hesitation in her eyes. “I missed it too.”

“But...”

She shakes her head. “No, but Roan. I’m serious when I say I missed you. But I missed the old you, the one who was a good dad and an amazing husband. I lost you for a while there, but I see the old you in you now, and I don’t want to lose him again.”

I press my lips to hers for the briefest kiss. “I am trying hard to be that man again, baby. I will be him if it means I get to keep you.”

She smiles at me. “You were always a smooth talker.”

“I am when I know what I want.”

She presses her lips back to mine, and I can't help but devour her mouth, tasting everything I missed over the last two years. Memories flood my brain of everything we had, and I am going to try my hardest to be that man again for her and for the kids.

## RIOT

I stare out the window of the plane as we fly to Italy for the next round of shows. I can't help the smile that is on my face either. I never expected Roan to come over this morning with room service. I definitely didn't expect for him to go down on me. Part of me wishes it didn't happen, though. The part with all the doubts that this can't work out. That we can't possibly ever work together again.

But another part of me is thrilled over the idea I might get the man I loved so fiercely back. I really do think he is trying to be a better man. To be the man he once was but without the vices that came with it. It's a long road for him. And me. Because I need to build that trust with him again. And I need to make sure he sticks to his word about there being no other women or drugs.

Maybe I am a fool for giving this a try. People say that people can't change. But what if they can? I've already seen some changes in him in the last couple weeks. He's healthier. And maybe that is really clearing up his mind so he can focus on the changes he needs to make in order for this to work.

Or maybe I'm just a fool.

Here I am extending my trip just a little bit longer so I can spend more time with him. I could say that I'm doing it to make sure he attends his therapy sessions, but that's a lie. I want to be around him. I want to spend time with the man who is becoming more like my husband every single day that passes.

I just don't know how long it will last.

"So you're staying another week?" Saylor plops down in the seat next to me.

I nod. "I just want to make sure Roan is doing okay before I leave."

"You sure it's not because you are falling in love with him again?"

I give her a crazy look like she is losing her mind. "I am one hundred percent sure that is not the reason."

"Damn, I was hoping it was. Imagine how romantic that would be." She flutters her lashes like a Disney princess.

"I am here to make sure he gets better, Say, not to fall in love with him."

"But you two are so perfect together. And you know how he feels about you."

I mask my features as best I can because I do know how he feels about me. He practically attacked me in my bedroom this morning. But I am not telling her that.

"I know that he still has feelings for me," I tell her honestly. "But like I already told you the other day, there is a lot more to a relationship than love."

"So, you do love him too?"

I walked right into that one. "I've always loved Roan, that was never the problem."

"Well I still think you should get back together. The man is miserable without you."

I smile at her and shake my head. "You have a one-track mind."

"I just want to see you happy."

"I am happy."

"But you were happier when you were with Roan."

I frown at that. Because it's true. I was the happiest I'd ever been when I was with Roan. When things were how they should be, when we loved each other and our kids with the fullest of hearts. But as time went on, and our schedules conflicted, so many things began to fall apart.

I rest my hand on Saylor's knee. "How about we talk about something else?"

She purses her lips at me but then nods. "Fine."

"So how is the tattooing coming along?"

She lights up at that. "I am loving it. I can't wait to get a real apprenticeship so I can learn so much more. Will you let me tattoo you?"

I smile at her. "Of course. I am sure I have some space somewhere on my

body you can tattoo.”

“I will start drawing some ideas now. Don’t even tell me what you want!”

I listen to Saylor go on and on about tattooing as my eyes drift over to Roan who is sitting with Jackson near the front of the plane. I can’t get the thoughts out of my head about what he did this morning, and I’m finding myself getting needy just thinking about him. Will he come to my hotel room tonight? Do I show up to his? Will someone figure out what is going on with us?

“By the way, I think Marley is pregnant.”

That gets my thoughts to drop from my head. “What?”

Saylor nods. “Yeah, she has been acting weird lately. Like she is always going to the bathroom, and I don’t think she has been drinking when we go out. She orders soda water but doesn’t want anyone to know.”

Leave it to Saylor to know all the gossip. Although I am sure Wilder would be telling me the same thing since both those two are gossip queens.

“Has she said anything to you?” I ask.

Saylor shakes her head. “Not a word. So you should try to find out. You’ve had two kids.”

“That doesn’t make me an expert in figuring out if someone is pregnant.”

Saylor turns and looks behind her to where Marley and Silas are sitting. “God, they’re sickening,” she teases. “But just see if you notice anything. I want to be so happy for them if they are having another baby again so soon!”

I nod. I would be happy for them too, but I am sure they are both worrying that she might lose the baby again.

“Anyway, Janae was telling me on the phone the other day...”

I only half listen to Saylor as I watch Roan stand up. He makes eye contact with me and offers me one of those smiles I love so much. The secret smile he shares only with me.

He makes his way down the aisle and pauses when he passes me but then keeps walking. I don’t know why my damn stomach got butterflies in it just from that damn smile, but it did. And now I cannot wait for what tonight may bring.

---

I pace my hotel room. I haven’t heard from Roan all night. I know he was



going out to dinner with the guys, but I figured they would be back by now, it's nearly midnight.

Maybe he really is giving me space and taking things slow.

Of course my mind also goes elsewhere. Wondering if he and the guys went out to the club, and he found some groupie to take home. He promised that wouldn't happen, but he also promised that to me before and look where that got us.

After another ten minutes of pacing, I decide I can't take it anymore and finally get the courage to walk down the hall to his room.

I don't even know why I am acting like this. It's not like he is some stranger. I know him better than anyone. And I am not the type of person that gets nervous about talking to someone. I am a strong, independent woman. I take life by the balls. Yet for some reason, going to talk to my ex-husband seems like the scariest thing in the world.

Maybe because I know there won't just be talking involved. And after this morning I don't know if I can hold back from him. The way he knows my body...it's like he never forgot anything that I liked. He knows exactly what I need and what I want.

When I get to his door, I go to knock but then hear his voice down the hall.

"Looking for me, baby?"

I turn and give him a brilliant smile then start to freak out that someone might have heard him. I don't see the other guys with him and breathe a sigh of relief.

He walks up to me but keeps his hands to himself. "I was going to swing up to your room but wanted to stop by mine first. What a surprise finding you here."

"I didn't think you would be out so late, and I just thought I would check to see if you were here." I feel my cheeks flame as I ramble.

Roan pulls out his room key. "You okay, Riot? You're acting weird."

I wring my hands together in front of me. "Just don't want anyone to see..."

Roan chuckles like he can see right through my lie. "The guys are all downstairs drinking. I didn't want to overindulge, so I left."

God, who is this man? This is not the Roan I am used to at all. He has changed so much in the last few weeks.

He opens his hotel room door and holds out a hand gesturing for me to go

in first. I let myself in and spin around when he follows me inside. I go to speak, but I don't even get the opportunity to because Roan has me pushed up against the wall with his lips on mine.

He devours me like he needs me to breathe. And I don't mind it one bit. His kisses are like a jolt to my system, bringing me back to life.

I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him into me until there is no space between our bodies. I don't know what comes over me and why I feel this need to be as close as possible to him. I feel needy and wanton. Like I can't breathe without him around.

Memories come flooding back to me. Of all the times we were like this in the past. When I was head over heels in love with this man. When he was all I wanted and all I needed. The days where I thought everything was going to work out and we would live happily ever after.

Those emotions run through me now as I kiss him back. Needing him to feel everything I am feeling. Because back then I thought this all was a fantasy. But now I know it can be a reality. As long as he keeps his promises to me.

"Fuck, Riot," he murmurs against my lips. "I need you so bad."

He lifts one of my legs up so it wraps around his hip, and he grinds against me, and I can feel his thick cock against my core. His lips move down my neck, and I can't help but moan at the feeling.

"I came here to talk, Roan."

"Good, we can talk after," he mumbles into my ear as his hand slides into my leggings.

"After, oh my god," I hiss as he pumps his fingers into me.

"So wet for me, baby girl," he mutters against my lips.

I grip on to his shoulders to gain any sort of balance because I feel like I have no control over my body. The way this man knows every inch of me should be illegal, but he knows just the way to make me come, every single time.

I grind onto his fingers as he finds my G-spot. My entire body trembling with release as I come all over his hand.

"Such a good girl," he whispers in my ear. He pulls his fingers out of me and then licks them off, and I find the entire thing so erotic.

He grabs my hand and pulls me toward the bed. He sits on the end, and I straddle him. I know I should stop. I shouldn't let this go any further. Especially after we just decided to give this a try again. But for some reason

my brain is not winning over my heart. Something I haven't let happen since I decided to let Roan into my life the first time.

I've always used my head to get ahead in life and in business. But when it comes to Roan, my heart owns me.

His hands glide up under my shirt. "Have I told you how beautiful you are?"

I bite my lip and nod. "You are always telling me that."

"Well you should know I mean it, Ri. You are the most gorgeous woman I've ever met and the only one I want to spend my life with."

I don't want to think about how he speaks like this will be forever. I can't think that far ahead. I can't pretend that things will be good with us forever. But one day at a time. I can do one day at a time.

I run my hands up his chest and over his shoulders. I can't help but lean in and kiss him. And the kiss quickly turns to a whole lot more as I push him back on the bed.

He growls and rolls me over so he has me pinned down. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I don't know, Roan. I'm just trying not to think. I just want to live in this moment with you."

I pull his shirt over his head and toss it to the side. I trace my fingers over his tattooed chest and stomach until I reach the button of his jeans.

"You sure about this, Riot? I thought you wanted to take things slow."

I nod. I can't wait any longer to feel him inside me. I was lying to myself when I said I wanted to take things slow. Because things have never been slow with Roan.

He kicks his jeans off so he is only in his boxer briefs. I pull my shirt over my head and push my leggings down until Roan helps me peel them off my legs.

He captures my chin in his hand and delivers the softest kiss to my lips. I wrap my legs around his hips, and he slowly enters me.

Everything feels right when he's inside me. I never thought I would feel this again. I thought I had lost him for good when I decided to divorce him. But somehow, we are here now, together again, making love.

"I've missed this, Riot," he mumbles against my lips as he thrusts inside of me.

"I've missed this too," I admit.

"Everything about us together is so right."

I nod as his lips make their way to my neck. I groan at the feel of him inside of me. "I need more, Roan."

He growls as he picks up the pace, thrusting harder and faster into me. His hand slides down my body and finds my clit, rubbing it in gentle circles as he pulses into me.

"That's my girl."

I moan at his words as I clench around him. He always was the best sex I ever had.

"Roan." His name a breath on my lips as I feel my orgasm building.

He thrusts three more times into me before he takes my leg and flips me on my side. He thrusts in hard, getting so deep at this angle I scream just as I explode around him.

"Such a good girl, coming all over my dick."

I shudder around him, his words making me ready to come again.

"Can I get one more orgasm out of you, baby?"

I nod my head as he continues to piston his hips into me. He is so deep, and I swear I am beginning to see stars. He twists my nipple and pulls on it hard, and I can feel it all the way to my core.

"Don't stop, Roan, please don't stop."

He picks up the pace and continues to tease my breasts until I am so close to the edge. I grip his arm and tell him I am about to come.

"Come with me, baby, come with me."

I feel him pump into me two more times, and just as I come, he releases inside of me. And I don't even care. I want every part of this man. I always have. I was lying to myself when I got a divorce from him. I never should have done that. Because this man means everything to me.

He leans over me and gives me the briefest kiss on the lips before pulling out. I feel his loss immediately. And I want him back inside of me.

I watch him as he walks to the bathroom and comes back with a washcloth. He is gentle as he cleans me up then tosses the cloth on the floor. His arms wrap around me from behind, and his chin is in the crook of my neck.

"This was always the best part. Feeling you come down from the high."

I turn to look at him. "I thought the best part was the orgasm."

He shrugs. "Okay, so maybe this is the second best part. God, I miss just cuddling with you, baby. You have no idea how much this always helped center me."

I kiss him because what else am I supposed to do when he says something like that to me? I never realized how much I meant to him. How being around me made him feel better. I knew he was always battling demons, but I didn't think I helped him that much with overcoming them. Of course it makes sense that he fell apart when I asked for a divorce. But was it because he needed me that much?

“You keep kissing me like that I am going to be wanting round two, baby.”

I smile against his mouth. “If I remember correctly, you were never fully sated with just one round.”

“Glad you remember.”

“How could I forget?”

He growls just as he attacks my mouth for a short-lived second. “Get on your hands and knees then, baby. It's time for round two.”

**ROAN**

I lay in bed fully satisfied. Riot just snuck out five minutes ago, wanting to get back to her room before anyone from the band woke up and found her in the hallway.

I told her not to worry about it, but she really doesn't want them to know that the two of us are back together. At least I think we are back together. It's hard to tell with her. Not sure if she is just testing the waters or if she really wants to be with me.

Being on tour is completely different than being at home. And while everything is all fine and dandy right now, I worry what will happen when we finally go home. I still don't have a home in New Orleans—just crashing in Wilder's pool house for the time being. You would think after two years of being divorced I would have finally found somewhere to live but I haven't felt like putting the effort in. Maybe I just thought that Riot would take me back, and I could move back into our house. But I was stupid for ever thinking that.

And now I'm worried that this won't last. That our reunion is only going to be short-lived while we are on tour. But I need to take what I can get. We said baby steps and that lasted all of a day before we were ripping each other's clothes off. So maybe things can last longer for us than the duration of this tour. I just need to be sure I am one hundred percent in her good graces. I need to stick to my therapy and stick to not doing drugs.

I admit I have felt better than I have in a long time. I don't even

remember the last time I was clean for this long. Probably back when I was a teenager. Because even throughout our marriage, I never could stay clean for long. There was always the opportunity to put something up my nose. And I always took it. It didn't matter if I had a wife or kids, I was too busy living for myself rather than thinking about those who meant the world to me.

And maybe that is how I've changed the last few weeks. I want to be back in my kids' lives, and I know the only way to do that is if I put them first, not me. I've always put myself first, but I think when you have kids, they need to be number one in your life. And in order for me to be a better dad to them, just like I promised I would be a better man to Riot, I need to learn to cut drugs out of my life for good.

My phone chimes next to the bed. I can only guess it's Knox considering it's six in the morning, and he is probably looking for someone to work out with.

I'm right as I pick up the phone and see a text.

**Knox: Gym? Please tell me I am not the only one awake.**

**Roan: I'll meet you down there.**

When I make it to the gym ten minutes later, it looks like Knox has already been here for an hour, he's covered in sweat.

"What the hell time did you get here, man?"

"Twenty minutes ago. But I am going hard today."

I look him up and down. "I can tell."

He drops the dumbbells in his hands and sits down on a bench and gives me a look.

"What?"

"I wasn't going to say anything, but I am going to. And trust me, I am keeping my mouth closed to everyone else, including Saylor."

I clench my jaw because I know he knows. But how? It's been one freaking day.

"You and Riot?"

"What about us?" I play dumb.

"How the hell do you think I knew you were awake this morning? I was leaving my room just as I saw Riot sneaking down the hall. I put two and two together when she was leaving your room."

I decide to play dumb because I know if she finds out that someone knows she will call the whole thing off. "She fell asleep in my room last night while we were hanging out."

He gives me a look that tells me he sees right through me. “She fell asleep naked?”

I glare at him.

“Look, man, you can pretend all you want that’s not what happened but you have this look about you.”

“You are spending too much time with Saylor.”

“She is my girlfriend.” He flips me off. “And yes, maybe she is rubbing off on me.”

I sigh as I take a seat on one of the benches. I don’t want anyone to know about us, but keeping it a secret is hard. And Knox knows better than any of us since he and Saylor were keeping their relationship hidden from Wilder for weeks.

“It’s new.”

“Obviously.”

“We just decided the other day to give it a try.”

“And you don’t want anyone to know about it.”

I nod. “You know how everyone will get if they find out. And we just want to explore this on our own. See if it’s the right decision.”

“And how are you going to take it if she changes her mind?”

I hadn’t really thought about that. I just expected her to not change her mind. I hadn’t thought about what it would be like to lose her again. Because I can’t think like that. It will take me down a far too dangerous path.

“I don’t want to think about that.”

He nods his head like he understands.

“How did you and Saylor do it for so long?”

“Keep it from her brother, you mean?”

“Yeah, man. I mean, none of us knew.”

He picks his dumbbells up off the floor. “We just had to keep everything behind closed doors. And I’ll tell you it wasn’t easy.”

“I know it’s not going to be easy. Nothing about this whole thing is easy.”

He starts another set of bicep curls. “Especially when it’s you and Riot.”

“Gee thanks.”

“But I’m here for it. I never understood why you all just gave up and got divorced.”

I clench my fists at his choice of words. I never gave up.

“But it’s not my place to say anything. I know you’ve been in love with her this whole time. I know it’s why you’ve been struggling. So I’m happy



for you both if you are giving it another shot. I think you both need it. Cause you never should have gotten divorced. I don't know what happened between y'all so I can't be the best judge of this."

"You promise you will keep this a secret from the rest of the band?"

He nods. "Yeah, man. Because if you are trying to work this out, you don't need the rest of us interfering with you."

"I appreciate it, man. I really do." I walk over to the rack and grab a set of dumbbells. "The last person that needs to find out about this is Saylor."

He laughs. "Trust me. I know."

---

I walk into Riot's room a little after eight o'clock. We had a sound check earlier in the day which she didn't attend since she had work to do. Then I grabbed a quick bite with the guys, so I haven't seen her since she left my room this morning. And it feels like the longest day ever. And I've gone weeks without seeing her before, but something is different now. It feels like I need to spend as much time with her as possible. Or else the magic between us will fade. And that is the last thing I need in my life.

I take her in as she holds the door open for me. Her wild curls, her caramel skin, those honey-colored eyes. She is the most gorgeous woman I've ever laid eyes on, and none of that has changed in the last ten years. From then to now I still think she is drop dead gorgeous, all five feet of her.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asks quietly.

I shake my head with a smile on my lips. "Just thinking."

"About?"

"The first time I met you. And how surprised I was that someone as tiny as you could be as loud and controlling as you are."

"I'm not controlling."

I laugh. "Have you met yourself, Ri?"

She punches me in the arm.

"But I also remember thinking, 'Damn, this woman is gorgeous.'"

Riot rolls her eyes at me. "Are you trying to win brownie points or something?"

I shake my head as I eliminate the space between us. "Just speaking the truth."

“You don’t need to charm me, Roan.”

“What if I want to?” I ask as I wrap my arms around her waist and pull her flush against me. “I like charming my wife.”

“Ex-wife.”

I try not to let that get to me. I hate thinking of her as an ex. “You say to-may-to. I say to-mah-to.”

“Roan,” she whines as I bring my lips to her neck.

“Yeah, baby.”

“You do need to remember we are divorced.”

I drop my hand on her hip to between her thighs, and she moans as I graze my fingers against her core over her jeans. “Yeah.”

“So you can’t keep calling me your wife.”

“I’ll do whatever I want, wife. Besides, would an ex-husband be petting you now through your jeans?”

She tries to pull away from me, but I have her locked in place. “You don’t play fair.”

“I never have with you.”

She chews on her lips as she gazes into my eyes. “It’s hard when you’ve always been a charmer.”

“Only with you.”

She laughs at that. “Roan, you charm every woman who meets you.”

“Good thing none of them matter.”

A soft pink color hits Riot’s cheeks. “You really need to stop. Or else you may make me...”

“Make you what?”

She shakes her head like she doesn’t want to say the words she was about to say.

“Tell me, Riot.”

She sucks her bottom lip into her mouth, and I use my thumb to pull it out.

“Baby...”

Riot lets out a breath before saying the words I never thought she would say. “You may make me fall for you again, Roan Mathieu.”

I don’t waste time pulling her mouth to mine. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would actually hear those words come from Riot’s mouth. I wished for them. I wanted them. But I know how she is, and I needed to be a realist. But hearing these words now. When we just started

trying this thing between us again. I feel like I could scream from the top of my lungs. My wife wants me back.

She moans into my mouth as I pull her bottom lip between my teeth. I walk her backward until her legs hit the bed then I pick her up and toss her on to it.

She giggles as my name slips from her mouth. “What are you doing?”

“Enjoying time with my wife.” I pull her jeans down as I say it.

“I’m not your wi—oh my god.”

I grin up from between her legs as I waste no time feasting on the woman I’ve always loved. I glide my fingers over her core and then slip one inside her as I suck hard on her clit. Riot grips my head, and I wish I didn’t buzz my hair off. I miss her hands pulling on my long hair.

I slide my hand up her body and grab one of her small breasts, pinching her nipple between my fingers.

“Oh my god, Roan.”

“That’s it, baby girl,” I mumble into her core. “Scream my name.”

She lets out a throaty groan that may or may not include my name as I suck hard on the bundle of nerves setting her off.

When she comes down from her high, I crawl up her body. My dick is throbbing to be inside of her, and I waste no time undressing. I kick my jeans off and pull my shirt over my head. She doesn’t even get a second to breathe before I am slipping inside of her and pounding away at her tight cunt.

“This pussy was made for me, woman. This is all mine. Say it.”

“It’s yours, Roan. Fuck, it’s always been yours.”

I growl at her words then flip her over onto her knees. “Grip the headboard.”

She reaches up and white knuckles the headboard as I slam inside of her from behind, getting so deep I feel like I am going to break her in two.

It doesn’t take long for my balls to tighten as I fuck my wife without abandon.

“Oh god, Roan, don’t stop.”

I grip her hips and pulse even harder into her, thrusting as deep as I can, slowing my pace down so I don’t come too soon.

I grab her hair with my fist and pull her head back so my lips can find her neck and that sweet spot she loves so much just below her ear.

She moans, and I swear I feel it all the way in my dick. “Fuck, baby girl, that’s it. Take my dick.”

She meets my thrusts causing intense pleasure to rip through me as her walls constrict around me. I know I won't be able to hold out much longer.

"Come for me, my sweet wife. Come all over my dick."

She screams her release just as I find my own. I pulse into her three more times before I pull her back against me and collapse onto the bed.

"That was..." She trails off, and she nuzzles her head against my neck.

"Yeah, baby." It's all I can say because that was more intense than any of the times I fucked her last night. I swear we were made for each other. There is just something about the way this woman and I connect. We are meant to be, and I won't have it any other way.

"So much for taking it slow."

"Baby, there was never a time where we took things slow. It's just not us."

She laughs into my shoulder. "You're right. It's not."

I run my hand through her curls while she runs her fingers along my chest.

"I missed this, Roan. This time with you. I never realized how much I needed you in my life. But what we are doing right now. It all just feels so right."

I smile at that, knowing she's starting to feel the way I've felt the last two years. "We were made for each other, baby."

"I think you're right."

I pull back and meet her gaze. "Did you just say I was right about something?" I tease.

She slaps me on the chest. "Oh come on, I can't always be right. You need to be every now and then."

I relax into the bed and fold my arms behind my head. "I could get used to you telling me I'm right." I pause as I wait for her reaction, but she just shoots me a glare. "Let's see what else could I be right about."

"Don't push it, Roan."

I chuckle as she curls up into my side. "You actually said it twice."

"Don't make me take it back," she teases.

I lean down and kiss her forehead. We lay in comfortable silence, and I know I could get used to this. I had it before, and I want it again. I need her in my life. There just isn't another option.

## RIOT

“We got to see tigers, Mom. They were so cool.”

I grin into the phone as Lyric goes on and on about her trip to the zoo with Mom. I miss my girls so much, and I need to get back to them. But a part of me feels like I need to be here too. For Roan. I know he is doing better, and he hasn't used, hell he's even cut back on the drinking, but I still worry that the second I leave, he will fall back into his old ways. And for the first time in a while I'm not even thinking about how it will affect the band. I'm worried about Roan and how it will affect him.

He is doing better, but if I leave, I worry that it will all fall apart. That he will fall into his old ways. I hate to think that the only reason he is on his best behavior is because I am here, but I really do believe it. I think if I leave, he will just fall into his old habits again. And I hate myself for thinking that. Maybe because I'm worried that he will find someone else. He promised me there would be no one else, but I still don't trust him completely. He hurt me more than I think he knows. More than I really ever let myself believe. He cheated on me three times when we were married, and I brushed it all off. Because I didn't want to lose him. And I lost him anyway.

I know that some people wouldn't approve of me being with a man who cheated on me, but I truly do believe he's changed. The guilt on his face when he told me he cheated the first time was enough to make me forgive him in a heartbeat. The other times were harder. The drugs played a big role in it all. He never makes good decisions when he is high. But those other two

times he cheated we were growing apart, fighting more. Saints & Sinners was taking off, and I just couldn't be there because my management company was gaining traction. I couldn't be on the sidelines managing them anymore. I needed to take a step back to focus on the other bands I manage. And when I took that step back, it's like I fell out of his life. We went nearly two months without seeing each other at one point. And with a relationship like ours that is so dependent on physical touch, it made us grow apart.

I know a lot of people would think I am just using that as an excuse to get past the cheating, and maybe I am. But that is all in the past, and I know the Roan that I'm falling for again is a different man, a better man.

"Mommy, when are you coming home?"

I shake the thoughts of the rabbit hole I went down and go back to focusing on the FaceTime call with my kids. "Soon, baby."

"How soon? Like tomorrow?" Brixley pouts.

I sigh. Maybe I should go home. "Not tomorrow, pumpkin."

"The day after?"

I shake my head. "Hopefully next week. Your mom just needs to spend some more time with your dad to make sure he is okay."

"Is Daddy feeling better?"

I nod. I told them that their dad was sick when I had to come out here. They've asked every time I talked to them, which is nearly every day, if he is better. But it's not like I can tell my kids this is the type of illness their dad can never recover from. He will always be an addict.

"Daddy is doing just fine. Which is why I think I can come home next week."

Brixley's face lights up with the biggest smile. "Yay! I miss you, Mommy."

"I miss you too, baby."

"Is Daddy there? Does he miss us?"

My heart breaks at that. That they have to ask about their father like that. I blame myself for taking him out of the picture for them, and every day I spend with Roan, I feel guiltier and guiltier.

"Of course he misses you. He is working right now though, but how about you talk to him tomorrow?"

Lyric and Brixley both cheer at that. It makes me happy to see that Lyric wants to talk to her father. I was worried about her anger toward him, but it seems like the few times he's been able to talk to her while I am here has

lifted her spirits toward him a bit.

“I can’t wait to talk to Daddy,” Brixley says. “And I can’t wait for him to come home so I can give him the biggest hug in all the world.”

I smile at that. “I think he would like that very much.”

I spend the next few minutes talking with the girls before I tell them I need to go. Saints & Sinners is playing tonight in Florence, and I promised Roan I would watch the show.

I get dressed, and for the first time in a while, I get dolled up. I don’t know why I feel the need to get dressed up for Roan, but that man is doing something to me, and I just feel like I need to look special for him tonight. Not that we can let anyone know what is going on between us.

Maybe this isn’t such a good idea. I set my eyelash curler down on the bathroom sink and frown. Will everyone know something is going on between us if I get dressed up? I mean, I know the guys are going out after the show so maybe that can be my excuse.

I go back to curling my eyelashes and applying three coats of black mascara. I tell myself no one will think twice about me getting dressed up. Or maybe I should just wear what I normally wear.

I dig through my suitcase and pull out a sequin dress I packed on a whim. I stare it down for at least five minutes before I decide against it and go with one of my usual outfits. Leather leggings, a ripped band tee, and a rhinestone encrusted black denim jacket.

I swipe on a coat of lip gloss and fluff my curls before heading downstairs to meet the girls to head to the arena. The guys had a late sound check today, so they’ve been at the venue all day.

“Hot mama!” Saylor calls out as I make my way to the front entrance of the hotel.

I flip her off. “I look like this all the time.”

She winces at me. “No, I would say you’re glowing right now, though.”

“Glowing? Yeah okay, Say. It’s called highlighter.”

“You sure it’s not because Roan has swept you off your feet?”

I give her a look that tells her to shut her mouth. “Hardly.”

She lets out a groan and pouts. “Ugh, I just wish the two of you would get back together. He needs to be less grumpy, and you need to get laid.”

If only she knew. Thank God she doesn’t.

“I don’t need to get laid, and I feel like Roan has been less grumpy.”

She guffaws. “Maybe when you’re around, but he is still the same mopey

man when you aren't here."

I don't want to ask her what she means because according to Jackson he has been better, but maybe he hasn't, and he is just putting the act up around me.

Of course, when we are together there are never clothes on so maybe that would be why he isn't grumpy around me.

"He's getting better," I tell Saylor. "He just needs more time. But he is getting better."

"Fine. But I still think the two of you belong together."

I shake my head at her. She's young and in love with Knox. She doesn't get that the history between Roan and me is a lot deeper than she knows. There are so many walls we have to break through in order to make our relationship work out. And while I am willing to try, I don't know if we'll ever get through all the walls. Some things are just forever meant to be broken.

I shake my negative thoughts and wait around with Saylor for Marley and Lake to meet us.

My thoughts go back to what Saylor said on the plane on the way here about Marley being pregnant, and I look for signs as she walks toward us.

"You still think she is pregnant?" I ask Saylor.

Saylor nods. "Big time. Watch how she acts tonight, you'll see."

"Do you think Silas knows?"

She shrugs. "I'm thinking no because he wouldn't be able to keep his mouth shut about it."

I laugh. "It's not like it's Wilder. Silas does show some restraint."

"Not when it comes to her."

That's true. Silas is head over heels in love with Marley. I wouldn't be surprised if he proposes to her soon. And if they have another baby on the way, I would imagine it would happen a lot sooner rather than later.

"Hey, Marley, you are looking stunning tonight." Saylor's words come out like butter, and I can't help but laugh.

"Umm, thanks I guess."

Marley is wearing a pair of combat boots with a pair of overalls. She looks comfy as hell, but I also try to look for any sign of a baby bump.

"Are we ready to go see our men?" Lake asks.

I clear my throat.

"Well, besides you. I mean, I guess all the guys are yours."



“If only Charlie was here,” Saylor adds.

“I think she is trying to fly out to be here for the show in Rome. At least that is what she told me the other day,” I tell Saylor.

“What? She is telling you these things and not me?”

“I think she wants to surprise Jackson.” I pause. “So don’t ruin it.”

Saylor pretends to lock her lips shut with a key.

I glance down at my phone and see a text from the driver that he is out front.

“Well the driver is here. Shall we?” I gesture toward the doors.

The venue is chaotic when we arrive. There are thousands of screaming fans everywhere. The girls and I duck out of the SUV and head through the back entrance of the arena.

We make it to the green room and find the guys hanging out. Roan is sipping on a beer as I walk in, and I can’t take my eyes off him. Why does he have to be so damn sexy? I never thought I would love the buzzcut he has, but I do. I may miss the long hair or that time the guys gave him a mohawk, but he is still hot as hell now. The way his black shirt clings to that tattooed chest I know is hiding underneath. I chew on my lip thinking about what it’s like to worship the man and how I want to do nothing but pull him into a closet and drop to my knees to show him just how much I need him.

“Drooling much?” Saylor says as she bumps her shoulder into me.

“What are you talking about?”

She gives me a look like I’m stupid, and I try to play it off, but I’m worried she knows. She walks past me and then sits on Knox’s lap much to a disgruntled Wilder.

“Can you two not make out in front of me?”

“Kissing my boyfriend in greeting is not making out. Besides, you and Lake can’t keep your hands off each other, and I have had to see more than my fair share of the two of you together.”

“Yeah, but he’s my best friend.”

She makes a face at her brother and then goes and kisses Knox so obnoxiously that even he is laughing between their kisses.

At least she pulled the attention away from me.

I can feel Roan’s eyes on me, though, and I wish I could just plop onto his lap like old times. Like we used to do years ago when we first got together. But no, I need to keep our rekindled relationship a secret. At least for now. At least until I know Roan has truly changed.

My heart clenches as I think that. Do I not trust him? Am I still worried about all the things in our past? I guess so. Those thoughts make my heart hurt because I want nothing more than to accept Roan back into my life. But trust is the most important thing to me. And I guess I don't trust him one hundred percent.

"Riot, you going to take a seat and stay a while?" Jackson asks me from where he is perched on the edge of one of the couches.

I didn't realize I was just standing still, staring off into space for so long. "Umm yeah, let me just grab a drink."

I head over to the table that is set up with everything from the guys' rider which includes an array of alcohol. I make a tequila, soda, and lime and head back over to the lounge area, taking a seat on an empty chair.

"I can't believe we only have three weeks left of this tour," Wilder says. "It's been insane."

"You guys deserve a break," I tell them. "You've been on tour for nearly six months now."

"But this is our best tour ever. I never thought we would ever play large arenas, let alone stadiums. That's all on you, Riot." Wilder holds up his beer to me.

"I just helped get your foot in a door, the rest is all you guys," I tell them. "I knew from when I first saw you all those years ago at that dive in New Orleans that you would be huge one day."

"But did you ever think we would be this big?"

I shrug and smile at them. "I don't want to be the one who says I told you so but I did. I told you guys that day I quit my job at the label and said I was going to be your manager. I knew you would get here one day."

"Are we going to get all sentimental?" Silas asks. "Because I could really go for a kumbaya moment."

Saylor smacks Silas upside the head. "Don't be a dick."

"I mean it."

"We wouldn't be where we are without you, Riot. You are as much a part of this band as the rest of us," Jackson raises his glass to me.

"Okay, now we are getting too sentimental." I laugh. "I did my job. I guided you to this, but y'all got here because of your talent. So let's drink to that and then talk about something else."

Everyone raises their glass and cheers to the success that Saints & Sinners has had. Then we all go about talking in our own groups.

“How much longer are you going to be on tour with the band?” Lake asks me.

“Probably just another week or so, I need to get back to the kids. Plus, I need to get to the office and make sure my team is keeping up with everything.”

Roan shoots me a look, and I give him a small apologetic shrug. I haven’t told him yet I was planning on leaving soon. I know he won’t take it well, and I also worry about the effect it will have on him.

“How are the girls?” Lake asks.

“They are doing great. I know they miss me, but between the time with my mom, who spoils them, and Janae, who is the cool aunt, they are doing just fine. Mom took them to the zoo today. Lyric loves the zoo, so she was a pretty happy camper.”

“Did she get to see the tigers?” Roan asks, joining the conversation.

I nod. “Yes, she dragged Mom and Brixley through the zoo to see the tigers first.”

“Let me guess, she made them stop there multiple times.”

I laugh. “Of course she did.”

We are interrupted by the tour manager, Mike, walking into the green room. “Alright, openers just finished. Y’all are on in twenty.”

The guys all stand up except for Roan who is still looking at me. “We need to talk.”

“About?”

He stands and grabs my arm, pulling me away from any lurking ears. “You leaving.”

“You know I wasn’t going to be able to stay the whole time. I’ve already stayed longer than I planned to.”

“I need you here.”

I sigh. “I know you do, Roan, but you also know the girls should be my number one priority. They miss me. And they’ve been without me for the last three weeks.”

“You said they are doing fine with your mom.”

“They are, but they need their mom.”

“What about me?”

I look past him to see if anyone is paying attention to us but luckily everyone is talking among themselves as they get ready to hit the stage. “Roan, I know you need me here too. But you’ve been doing great and—”

“Because you’re here. I’m doing great because I have you back in my life.”

“Just because I’m going home doesn’t mean that you don’t have my support, Roan. You know the girls just need me.”

He nods. “I know. I’m just being selfish. I just don’t want to lose what we have.”

I put my hand on his arm. “You won’t. We’ll be fine.”

He takes a step closer to me, and I can’t help but look up into those dark eyes and want to kiss him right now, to prove to him that everything will be okay once I leave. But I can’t. Because I still have trust issues with him.

“Yo, Roan, you ready to head toward the stage,” Jackson yells.

“You need to go,” I tell him.

He studies me for a few more moments, his eyes pleading with me before he turns away.

“Yeah, man, I’m coming.”

I watch him as he walks away, wishing I could give him more than I am but knowing I can’t.

The guys all leave the green room, and I catch Saylor’s gaze who is looking at me like she knows.

I don’t want to deal with her, so I grab my drink off the table and refill it before following the guys out into the hall.

Marley joins me, looping her arm through mine.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

“But you have to promise not to say a word to anyone.”

I look at her curiously. “Okay.”

“I mean, I love Saylor and all, but I just don’t want her to know yet because then everyone will know.”

I try to hide a smile because I am pretty sure I know exactly what Marley is about to tell me. And Saylor already figured it out.

Marley squeezes my arm and takes a deep breath. “How much easier was your second pregnancy?”

I stop in my tracks and grab her hand. “You’re pregnant?” I squeal, and I am not one to really squeal—I just love babies.

Marley nods excitedly. “But you can’t tell anyone. We don’t want anyone to know yet because we are worried about what happened last time happening again.”

“Oh, Marley, that won’t happen again,” I comfort her.

She squeezes my hand, and my heart aches for her. “But what if it does?”

“It was a rare accident that happened, and I am sure your doctor can tell you more than I can. But if you want to know if my second pregnancy was easier, then yes, it was. But that doesn’t mean it’s the same for everyone.”

She nods. “I know. I guess I more just wanted someone to know, and I know that you will be there to support me. At least I hope so,” she says as she looks down at her feet.

“Hey.” I nudge her with my shoulder. “You know I’ll be here for you. So will Saylor, but I can see why you would want to wait to tell her. But whatever you need, just ask me, okay?”

She gives me a big smile. I wrap my arm around her and give her a hug. “This is so exciting, though!”

Tears crest her eyes. “I am so excited and nervous and scared and happy. God, I am so happy.”

I can feel her happiness emanating off her, and I want that happiness too. I want it for myself. And maybe one day I can have that with Roan.

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“I am beginning to think my suspicions are right.”

I look at Saylor as she screams at me over the music.

“And those would be?”

She gives me a deceptive grin. “Mmm, not going to tell you because you’ll just deny it.”

I shake my head at her and go back to watching the guys own the stage. I can’t help it if my eyes tend to wander over to Roan for most of it.

He just looks so sexy when he is in his element. The way his muscles flex with every strum of the guitar. The way he grins at the crowd after looking over at me, a kind of secret grin that he usually only saves for me.

I suck hard on my lower lip as I think about the last few nights with Roan in his bed or mine. The way he owns my body just like he used to before.

I clench my thighs together thinking of all our memories, and I don’t even notice they’ve finished their set, and it’s time for them to come off stage before their encore.

They are all sweaty and gross but that doesn’t stop any of the girls from

wrapping their arms around their men. A pang of jealousy goes through me that I can't have that with Roan. That I told him we need to keep this a secret.

But why do we?

I know the guys wouldn't judge us. I mean, all of them think the two of us belong together. But I am the one who has constantly been pushing Roan away and denying that what we have is the real thing.

But this past week with him has proven different. Really the past three weeks. We started out as friends, doing things we used to do together, and it led to more.

Dammit, I think I am falling in love with my ex-husband.

Roan grabs a towel from the table next to me and wipes his face off before grabbing a water bottle and chugging the entire thing down.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

I blink a few times, not realizing I was staring at him. "I just..."

He smirks then smacks my ass before walking away and talking to Jackson.

I look around to see if anyone noticed, but no one is even looking over here. But I also don't care anymore. All I want to do is kiss that man.

I can't get the thought out of my head as they make their way back on stage for their encore. And for the three songs they play during it, my eyes are stuck on Roan. My heart is beating out of my chest as I watch him and as I think about what I want to do. How I want to kiss him in front of everyone. Which is not like me at all. I always stepped away from his public affection. I never wanted the attention drawn to us.

But now, as I watch him, I couldn't care less. I want that man, and I don't care who knows about it.

They bow to the audience when they finish their final song before walking off stage, waving to their fans.

My palms are sweaty as I think about what I want to do. What it will mean to everyone if I claim this man in front of them.

But I don't care.

For the first time in my life, I don't care about what anyone else will think at all.

Roan is just a few feet away from me, and I start to second guess myself, but then he winks at me and gives me that smile he saves just for me, and I can't stop myself.

I close the distance between us and grab his hand while standing on my

tippy toes and bring my mouth to his.

I can tell he is just as surprised as I am that I'm doing this in front of all our friends. But I don't let myself think about it. I just act.

And he doesn't stop me.

His rough hands land on my waist, lifting me up so I'm forced to wrap my legs around him, but it makes our mouths even so I can kiss him even deeper.

He doesn't hold back either. He ravages my mouth. His tongue coaxing mine to meet his. His throaty groans sending chills to my core.

If we weren't backstage right now, I would be ripping my clothes off for him.

For this man who has overcome so much. Who's dealt with me ruining everything for him. But he still wants to come back to me. All the damn time. And how can I deny him?

Shit, I really am falling in love with Roan Mathieu all over again.

When he finally pulls his mouth away from mine, I feel my cheeks flame because I sense everyone's eyes on us.

"They're staring, aren't they?" I whisper.

He smiles at me with the goofiest grin, and I know I just made him the happiest man in the world. "Yeah, babe."

I drop my head to his shoulder, and he just pulls me closer to him, his hands locking around my butt.

"Nothing to see here," he says as he starts to walk us toward the hall that leads to the green room.

"I knew it!" Saylor shouts.

I bury my head in his neck as he carries me as quickly as he can. "Where are we going?" I ask.

"Anywhere we can get some privacy because that was the hottest thing you could have done."

"It was just a kiss."

He shakes his head. "No, you just claimed me in front of everyone. And I know they'll have questions, but right now I just want to bury my cock so deep inside you, you never forget what it feels like again."

"I never forgot, Roan."

He grunts at those words, and then he suddenly has me pressed against a wall, his mouth on mine. I never thought I would miss his kisses, but I did. And this man can kiss. He pours every single thing he is feeling into his

kisses. I can feel them all the way down to my toes.

“Roan,” I moan against his mouth.

“Yeah, baby?”

“I am all for making out with you, but maybe we should find somewhere...”

He pulls away from me and looks around. There are tons of people scattered around the hallway. Most are not paying any attention to us. But some who can't seem to pull their eyes away.

Roan sets me down on the ground and grips my hand tight, like he thinks I'll let him go.

He pulls me quickly down the hall and starts checking rooms, looking for one that is empty.

He finally finds one and pulls me inside, slamming the door shut behind us.

We stare at each other for a moment before we crash back together. He lifts me up again and carries me over to a dressing table, a mirror lit up behind us.

I don't waste any time pulling his shirt over his head. My hands running over his muscular tattooed chest.

His hands are on my shirt too, ripping it over my head before his lips land on my neck, sucking on the sensitive spot below my ear.

I reach for his pants, unbuckling his belt then using my feet to help push his pants down.

“Fuck, Riot, I will never be able to get enough of you.”

I grip his cock and squeeze hard, the way he likes it, causing a guttural moan to come out of him.

“You dirty little slut,” he mutters against my neck. “Trying to get me to come all over your hand?”

I shake my head.

“Lift your hips, baby,” he tells me as his hands pull on the waist of my leggings.

I do as he says so he has room to pull my pants off my body. I kick my shoes off just in time for him to remove my leggings and panties.

He spreads my thighs apart and swipes a finger through my folds. “God, you're so fucking gorgeous. This fucking pussy is mine. From now on, it belongs to me.”

“It's only ever been yours.”



He growls at my admittance, because the truth is while I did go on dates with other men in the last two years, I've never let anyone touch me. Maybe I was waiting for the day Roan came back into my life. Maybe I knew that we would eventually get back together. But there was never another man worthy of taking care of me the way Roan does.

I flush as he takes in my pussy, staring at it, like he wants to dive down and have a taste.

And that is just what he does.

He drops to his knees and pulls my hips to the edge of the table so I'm teetering on the edge as his mouth finds my clit.

I scream as he devours me. The way he sucks on my clit and edges his fingers along my core, teasing but never giving me what I want.

"Such a greedy pussy."

"Please, Roan," I moan, needing him to give me more friction.

"I love it when you beg, baby." He inserts the tip of his finger inside of me but quickly removes it. "Now tell me what it is you want."

"I need you."

"And I need a better answer than that."

I flush at his words. This man has always had a way of making me demand what I want. "I want your fingers inside of me. I want to feel you rub against my walls."

"Your wish is my command."

I throw my head back in ecstasy as Roan gives me what I ask for. Two fingers drill their way inside of me, pulsing hard as he rubs against my G-spot while his mouth sucks hard on my clit.

I claw and scratch at his shoulders as he brings me to the edge. "Oh my god, Roan."

"That's right, baby, scream my name," he mumbles against my pussy.

I let go as I feel every nerve fire off, the orgasm taking over my body.

But I barely have time to recover before Roan pulls me off the table and flips me over.

I search for purchase on the table as he knocks my legs apart with his knees. I am barely gripping the table as he thrusts inside of me hard. "Roan," I scream.

He grips the back of my neck and lifts my head so I am forced to look at him in the mirror. "I better be the only man's name whoever comes screaming out of that pretty little mouth of yours."

“Only you,” I manage to get out. Roan is going hard, and I know he’s been holding back up until this point. This is the man I know and love, this sexual beast who takes and takes until we are both falling apart.

“Watch how deep I fuck you, baby girl.”

I moan into the air as he grips my hips harder and slides in even deeper. I don’t think I’ve ever felt him so deep before. I try to grip the table to hold myself up, but it’s impossible. My hips slam into the edge of the table with every thrust, and my body feels like it’s being broken in two.

Roan is practically holding me up as he slams into me over and over again. He controls my head so I am forced to keep eye contact with him the entire time, and it’s so erotic. He whispers the naughtiest things in my ear as he brings me so close to the edge I feel like I am going to explode.

“That’s it, baby girl. I know how close you are.”

“Please, Roan...”

He smirks at me in the mirror. “You can come when I do. I want to feel us coming together. I want to feel you coat my dick in your wetness while I slam into you so hard you see stars.”

I mumble inaudible words as I feel my mind separating from my body. The intensity of this orgasm building is insane, and I know the only man who could ever make me come this hard is Roan.

“Come for me, baby,” he whispers in my ear just as I teeter on the edge. “Come now.”

I explode at his words. I feel lightheaded and dizzy at the same time from one of the most intense orgasms I’ve ever had.

Roan grunts as I feel him release inside of me. I slump forward onto the table when he lets go of my neck. I feel like I can’t move my limbs. I just feel like I’m floating.

Roan slowly pulls out of me, and I moan at the loss of him.

He pulls me up and turns me around, wrapping me in his arms. “Such a good girl.”

I bury my face in his bare chest, inhaling his smoke and cedar scent.

He lifts me up and carries me over to one of the couches in this room, resting me in his lap as he slowly runs his fingers up and down my spine.

We sit in comfortable silence for who knows how long. The two of us perfectly content enjoying the feeling of our bodies against each other.

“I could stay like this all night with you, but we should probably get going,” Roan mutters into my ear.

I find a clock on the wall and realize we've been in here for over an hour. "Do you think everyone is going to know what we did?"

Roan throws his head back and laughs. "Baby girl, you jumped into my arms and made out with me in front of everyone. I think they all know what is going on between us now."

I run my fingers along his chest. "I know that. But...god...I just don't want to face them right now. They know we came in here and had sex."

"It wouldn't be the first time something like this has happened between me and you. And look at the rest of the guys, they can't keep their hands off their women. No one is going to judge us."

"I just got carried away," I tell him honestly.

"I very much like that you got carried away."

I laugh and look into his eyes, and all I see is love. It scares me. We are supposed to be taking this slow, but it's like we just jumped right back into being the couple we were when we were married. I don't want to begin second guessing everything. Not right now, not when everything seems so right at this moment. But I know I will need to have a long talk with myself soon about what this all means.

"We should probably get dressed."

He looks down at me and smiles. "I much prefer you naked."

He pinches my nipple, and I yelp. "You'll just have to get me naked again. We are kind of in a public place. And the rest of the band—"

"Knows to leave us alone."

I purse my lips ready to retort with something sassy, but he just leans down and kisses my lips, and I can't help but melt into him.

He pulls away from me and then places the softest kiss against my forehead. "But you are probably right. We should get out of here."

"You still want to go to the club?" I ask. We had plans to all go out tonight after the show.

He smacks my ass as I stand. "Not particularly, but I did promise the guys I would go out so we should probably show our faces for a minute."

I smile at him as I slip my leggings back on. "Just a minute?"

"Baby girl, I am going to be struggling to not want to drag you back to the hotel the second we get to that club."

I pull my shirt over my head and saunter back up to Roan, still feeling the high he left me on. "Well we will need to make sure it's a short pit stop at the club. Because I, too, want you to drag me back to the hotel."

He wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me in for a toe curling kiss. “Mmm, waiting is going to suck.”

I laugh as I grab my boots and slide them on. “I think facing everyone now is going to suck more.”

“They better just get used to you and me.”

I manage to keep my smile from wavering. I know I want this with Roan, but the idea of it being public still scares me and makes me wonder if we are moving far too fast for this to ever work out.

## ROAN

We got a ton of shit when we finally made it back to the green room. The guys held off on doing our traditional shot until I showed up. And then they gave me and Riot shit for disappearing for so long. Of course, then they all wanted to know how long things had been going on with me and Riot.

I didn't want to share too much since I can tell Riot still has her doubts about this all, but I let them know we were trying to work things out. Silas and Wilder snickered at each other when I said that, no doubt they know that we've been keeping this a secret for over a week.

When we finally are able to make it to the club, we are bombarded with flashing lights as we get out of the vehicles. We are all used to it but still hate when the paps know where we are going to be.

I grab Riot's hand as I try to make my way past the paparazzi when I am literally frozen in place by one of them asking a question I never thought I would hear.

"Roan, how has your recovery been since your overdose?"

Riot squeezes my hand and tries to pull me away, but I'm literally frozen. How did the paps find out about that? Riot assured me that nothing got out, and I trust her and our PR team. It's been three weeks since I overdosed and not a word has been whispered about it among the press.

"Roan," I hear Riot yell at me, but I can't seem to move. I am staring down at the paps in front of me trying to figure out who the hell said it. I want to wring their neck. I want to stop them from saying anything more to

anyone else.

It's Jackson who ends up knocking me out of the haze I'm in. "Come on, man, I see the anger on your face. Let it go."

Riot squeezes my hand again and gives me a slight pull, and I finally keep walking. But I am pissed as hell. Who the fuck let the cat out of the bag?

We make our way inside the club, and by the time we get to the VIP room, I am livid. The one thing I didn't want anyone to know, didn't want our fans to know, and now I fear everyone will know. Including that damn journalist who I swear is out to ruin my life.

I could punch a wall right now, I am so furious.

"Roan," Riot says my name with a strain in her voice, and I know she knows how I am feeling right now.

"I'm fine," I tell her.

"You're clearly not. I'm going to make some phone calls. Please sit down and try to relax. I'll handle this."

I look down at her and see sincerity in her eyes. And I know her and know she would do anything for this band. I can see when she switches over into manager mode. I nod, and she stands on her tiptoes to kiss me on the cheek.

I watch her as she walks away, her phone already glued to her ear.

"You okay, man?" Jackson puts a hand on my arm.

I shake him off and shake my head.

"Let me grab you a drink."

I shake my head again. I don't want a drink. I want this shit to go away. I clench my fists, the urge to use so deeply ingrained in my veins. But I know I can't. I will lose Riot if I ever touch a drug again. And I know I will lose a lot more than just her.

Knox comes up to me and shoves a whiskey in my hand. "I know it's not what you want, but you look like you're about to lose it man, and you need to cool down."

"I'm fine."

He scoffs. "I know you aren't. Just take a drink and wait for Riot to get back."

I scowl at him but listen and take a seat in the leather booth. I throw back the drink in my hand and take a long, deep breath. I can handle this, I can get through this. But I am less worried about the damn paps making up some shit and more worried about how Steven Rouse will spin this. I know he will do

whatever he can to take me down, to take the band down. I wish I only knew why.

I get another urge to make a call that I know will get me the answers I need. But I also know it will end up with the band owing him more favors. After what happened with the notes being left behind during our summer tour, the role Lake played in all of it, and whatever Wilder and Knox did to get Carter West off our back and from owing him any more favors, I just shouldn't risk it.

But he is the only one who can get Steven Rouse silenced for good. Too bad I know that will come with a price. And I am not sure I am willing to pay that price right now. Not when I just got Riot back, when I am so much closer to getting my girls back. I can't do something that will make me lose them all for good.

Despite the ten years Riot has known us, she never has known about our relationship with Carter West. Hell, I don't even think that name would mean a thing to her. She's too good. She was never a part of the dark side of New Orleans, she didn't grow up the way we did. She grew up in the bayou, was close with her mom and her community, but always wanted something bigger so she moved to New Orleans to chase a dream. She worked hard to get where she is now. But she didn't do the things we did to get where we are. She didn't sell drugs and commit petty crimes. She didn't get tied up with the kingpin of New Orleans. Something we have never been able to break away from.

"You got that look, man," Knox says to me.

"What look?"

"Like you want to punch a wall." He pauses. "Or kill someone."

"That shit was never supposed to get out. It's been three weeks, and nothing has happened, yet suddenly the paps know, meaning someone at the hospital opened their mouth. I am pretty sure Riot had my medical team and anyone who was around my care sign an NDA."

Knox curls his fingers around his glass. "Riot will handle this, she always does."

"I don't want it getting out, man."

"I know. Trust her like I know you do."

He pours me another drink, and I throw it back quickly. I can't get high to make my problems go away, but I can get drunk. I know I shouldn't. I haven't drank enough to get wasted since before my overdose, but I can't

stop myself. I just need something to drown out the urges I'm feeling.

By the time Riot gets back into the club, I'm halfway to wasted. Knox has been keeping my drink full but also been keeping an eye on me. He hasn't said as much, but I can tell by the fact he hasn't left my side. He even followed me to the bathroom to piss not that long ago.

"Baby," I slur when I see Riot.

"Are you drunk?"

I shrug.

"Roan, we have a crisis on our hands, and you decided to get wasted."

I stand up and pull her into me, my lips finding the top of her head. "I just needed to take the edge off."

"You're shit-faced."

"That's my fault," Knox answers for me.

Riot pulls out of my arms and turns to Knox. "And why did you think this was a good idea?"

"He had that look, Ri. I didn't want him to use."

She frowns. "Well he shouldn't be using alcohol as a coping mechanism either."

"He also looked like he wanted to murder someone. He needed to calm down," Knox adds.

Riot takes a deep breath and rubs her temples. "Ugh, fine. I get it. But I need to get him out of this club looking somewhat sober before even more rumors spread."

"Baby, I'm fine." I tell her.

She gives me one look, and I know she thinks I'm far from fine. And maybe I have had one too many drinks. But I don't feel like I want to punch anyone in the face anymore.

"I'll be back."

I grab her hand and pull her into me. Suddenly needing her close. "Where are you going, baby?"

"To talk to the owner of this club and get you out the back door."

I lean down and smell her hair, the strawberry scent of her going straight to my dick. "I need you."

She glares at me. "What you need is a glass of water."

Knox grabs a hold of me and pushes me back down onto the couch. "I'll make sure he doesn't wander off."

"Thank you. I'll be back. And please don't feed him anymore alcohol."



Knox salutes Riot, and she walks away, and I have the urge to follow her, but Knox's hand is on my chest. "Don't think so, buddy. I'm already in enough trouble with her as it is."

I frown but do as he says because I am suddenly feeling very drunk.

Saylor comes prancing up to Knox and wrapping her arms around him. "What happened to him?" she asks, referring to me.

"I might have let him drink a little too much so that he would keep his cool."

Saylor nods then looks over at me. "You okay?"

"I just want my wife to get her sweet little ass back here."

Saylor laughs and turns to Knox, whispering something I can't hear.

I lean my head against the back of the couch and start to nod off when I hear Riot's voice.

"Alright, big guy, time to go."

I open one eye and look at her, well two of her. Damn, did I really drink that much?

She grabs my arm and helps me up. I stumble as I stand, and she wraps her arms around me.

"Want me to help get him to the back entrance?" I hear Knox say.

Riot nods. "Please. I might be strong, but I'm not that strong."

"We can leave too. That way we can make sure he gets back to his room in one piece."

"I don't want to ruin your night. I'm sure the drive will sober him up a little."

"No, it's fine. I'm the one who kept feeding him booze to calm down."

Riot smiles at Knox. "Okay, thank you."

I don't even bother saying anything because I know once Riot makes a decision it's final.

Knox wraps an arm around my shoulders. "Alright man, let's get you out of here."

I try to shove him off me. "I can walk."

He lets go of me. "Okay."

Riot leads the way, and I reach for her hand, but she shrugs it off. I feel like I fucked something up. We just showed the band tonight that we were together, and now she won't even touch me.

We meet a bouncer by a side door in the VIP area who directs us through a back hallway that winds around until we get to another door that leads to an

alleyway in the back of the club.

I hear Riot say something to him before he heads back inside.

“The driver should be here soon.” Riot’s voice is standoffish, and I wonder what I did wrong.

I look over at Saylor who wraps her arms around Knox, trying to keep warm in the cold. I lean against the brick building, the cool stone centering me a bit.

I look over at Riot, and she is watching me. I beckon her over with my hand, and she comes over to me.

“I’m sorry,” I tell her.

She frowns and doesn’t say anything, but she grabs my hand and squeezes. I pull her into me and wrap my arms around her. I can feel her apprehension of us being wrapped up like this. I think she is still a little worried about the fact that everyone knows we are back together.

Headlights light up the alleyway as they come around the corner, and she pulls away from me. When the SUV stops in front of us, she pulls the door open, directing us inside. Knox and Saylor climb into the back seat while I grab one of the captain’s chairs in the middle. Riot sits next to me and shuts the door.

There is an awkward silence for a few minutes as we pull away, and I just know Saylor is about to open her mouth.

“Sooooo,” Saylor says.

Riot shoots her a glare.

“Oh don’t think I am going to keep my mouth shut. You two were practically humping each other backstage before he whisked you off to fuck you. So you can’t pretend like we didn’t see anything. Not like I didn’t already know. I could tell something was brewing between you two. I didn’t even need to do a reading to prove it.”

I snort at that. Saylor loves reading everyone’s tarot spreads.

“We got caught up in the moment,” Riot mumbles.

“That was an awfully long moment.”

“We just...it’s...” It’s not often Riot is at a loss for words.

I reach over and grab her hand. “It’s new, Say. So please don’t make a big deal out of it.”

Riot glances up at me and mouths a thank you. I know this is a lot for her. I’m still not entirely sure what made her decide to kiss me in front of everyone earlier. Since it is totally unlike her. But she did it. And now we

need to deal with everyone asking about us.

“I’m not mad about it. In fact, I’ve been saying forever that you two would end up back together. I’m happy about it. Ecstatic. This is the best thing ever.”

Riot rolls her eyes at Saylor. “Let’s not get too excited over this.”

Knox laughs from his seat. I look over at him, and he gives me a look like good luck, buddy.

I squeeze Riot’s hand before letting go and settling back into my seat, resting my head against the back of it as we make our way to the hotel. I know Riot is going to have words for me when we get back, and I just want peace and quiet right now.

---

I manage to make it back to my hotel room without stumbling. Riot hasn’t said a word to me since we got out of the car, and I hesitate as she follows me into my room.

“You don’t need to be here,” I tell her. “I’m fine.”

“You’re wasted.”

“I didn’t mean to get this drunk.” I pause then say quietly. “I didn’t want to. I just... I was angry, and I needed something to take the edge off.”

“I know. I’m not mad.”

“Just disappointed?”

She sighs. “Let’s talk about this tomorrow when you’re sober.”

I’m surprised she isn’t yelling at me. Usually, my behavior is what led us to fight in the past, and I was ready for the boxing gloves to come on, but she’s surprising me by letting this go for now.

She grabs a bottle of water for me out of the refrigerator then heads into the bathroom. I strip my shirt and jeans off and sit on the bed in my boxer briefs, my elbows resting on my knees.

She walks out of the bathroom and hands me the water along with two Advil. “Take this. I’ll check on you in the morning.”

My heart aches at her leaving. We had a good night. Hell, she made it known that we were trying again, but then the paps had to ruin everything. It always seems like something gets in our way. Our whole relationship has been like that. Always struggling to overcome the next hurdle in our lives.

She starts to walk away, but I don't want her to leave.

"Stay," I whisper.

She stops in her tracks and turns to look at me. "Roan, you know it's best if I leave. You need to sleep, you're drunk."

"I know, but I sleep better when you're here."

She sighs and props her hands on her hips. "I shouldn't. You know it's a bad idea."

"I'm not going to fuck you, Riot. I just want you here with me."

I watch her face and see a plethora of emotions going through her. But she finally acquiesces. I can tell by the way she chews on her lip that she is going to stay.

"Fine. But we're just sleeping."

"Baby, I am way too drunk to fuck you right now."

She laughs, and I see the tension in her shoulders disappear. "What am I going to do with you?"

I want to tell her to love me like she used to. That's all I want. But I know that's a ways away. Too much has happened between us for me to earn her love like that.

I crawl under the blankets as I watch her strip her clothes off. She digs into my suitcase and grabs one of my T-shirts and slips it on. I can't help but smile at that. I love seeing her in my clothes.

She crawls into bed next to me, and I hold out my arm, gesturing for her to come cuddle with me. She turns off the light and then scoots in close to me.

Within minutes, I'm drifting off. Content that Riot is curled up at my side.

## RIOT

I wake up feeling blissed out of my mind. I don't even know why. I should be mad. I mean, I am mad at Roan, but know I shouldn't be. We got hit with a big publicity blow last night. I know he needed to work through his demons. And I should be glad it was alcohol and not drugs.

I really should go check on him, I think as I crack open my eyes. Then suddenly I remembered I stayed in his room last night.

And the reason I am feeling so blissed is because of him and his head which is between my thighs right now.

"Roan," I chastise and moan at the same time.

"Morning," he mutters against my core.

I try to push him away not because I am not enjoying myself, but because we need to talk and him eating me out is the furthest thing from talking.

He doesn't let me, though, instead grabbing my wrists and pinning them down to the bed.

He pops his head up from between my thighs. "I'm trying to enjoy breakfast in bed."

"But...we should really...oh my god," I moan, at a loss for words as he sucks my clit hard into his mouth sending pleasure firing off in every nerve of my body.

He growls as he lets go of my wrists, gripping my knees and pushing them further up the bed and spreading them further apart.

His fingers soon join his mouth as he runs them up along my slit before

sliding two of them inside of me.

“Oh my god, don’t stop,” I tell him as he hits a spot deep inside me causing my toes to curl.

He chuckles against my core before his tongue delves between my folds, licking and sucking until I am on the edge of an orgasm.

My hands grip his shoulders as he makes me fall over the edge, my entire body shaking in pleasure.

He crawls up my body, and his lips are on mine. I can taste myself all over his tongue, and I relish in the taste. I’ve always liked when I can taste his claim on me, call it some weird fetish, but I’ve always enjoyed it.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbles against my lips. “I was an asshole last night.”

I run my hands over his buzzed head, forgiveness sitting on my tongue.

“I shouldn’t have gotten so angry. And I realize that’s something I need to work on with my therapist. If I hadn’t been so angry, I wouldn’t have gotten shit-faced and caused a scene.”

“You didn’t cause a scene,” I tell him. “If anything, I did because I was upset with you.”

“I’m sorry, baby.”

I shake my head and look into his dark-brown eyes. “No, I’m the one who should be apologizing. I wasn’t fair to you last night. And I’m sorry for that.”

He runs his nose along the column of my throat. “We were both at fault then. But just know I am sorry. I never want to do anything to ruin what we have. No matter how new this is. I need this to work, Riot. I need you in my life.”

I lay my hand on his cheek and pull him up so he is looking at me in the eyes again. “I want this to work. I really do. I just...I worry so much that it’s going to end in heartbreak all over again.”

He cups my face with both his hands. “I don’t ever want to break your heart like I did before. And not just yours but the girls. I need all of you in my life.”

I lean into his lips and kiss him. Those are words I needed to hear. I didn’t just need to hear how much he needs me, but I need to know he needs our kids as well.

Our kiss quickly becomes heated as he coaxes his tongue into my mouth. I wrap my arms around him, my legs too, needing to be as close to him as possible.

“You keep grinding into me like that, and I won’t be able to keep my

hands off you.”

“Maybe I don’t want you to keep your hands off me,” I tell him honestly.

He growls against my throat then grabs my hands and drags them over my head. “I warned you.”

“And I told you the truth.”

He grinds into my core, and I feel the thickness of his cock rub against me through his briefs.

“I’m going to fuck you hard, Riot.”

“I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

He groans as he lets my hands go and shoves off his briefs. He grips my left knee and lifts it up the side of my body while he guides his cock inside of me. This angle is deep and intense, causing me to throw my head back and arch my back off the bed.

He moves in slow, agonizing thrusts at a snail’s pace. I can feel every inch of him glide in and out of me. It’s driving me wild.

“More, Roan, I need more.”

He quickens his pace, slamming into me hard with each roll of his hips. I close my eyes in ecstasy as he works my body into a frenzy.

“That’s it, baby, feel how deep I am inside of you.”

I clasp onto his forearms as his pace gets quicker and deeper. The beginning of another orgasm making its way to the edges of my mind.

But then he suddenly releases me and flips me over. “Hands and knees, baby.”

I do as he says, needing to feel him deeper.

He holds on to my hips and thrusts hard and deep causing me to scream out in pleasure.

“That’s it. I want to hear your screams as I fuck you.”

I don’t hold back as he brings me so close to the edge. Just when I feel like I can’t take it anymore, hovering on the precipice, he wraps his arm around me and runs two fingers along my clit before pinching hard.

“Roan,” I scream as I come all over his cock.

“That’s what I needed. I needed to feel you all over me, baby girl. Now I am going to fuck you so hard you won’t be able to come down from your high.”

He doesn’t lie. He finds an intense and deep rhythm, fucking me into oblivion.

I collapse onto the bed unable to hold myself up as he pounds into me and

owns my body.

He groans loudly as he comes inside of me then collapses on the bed next to me.

I have no energy to roll over and curl into him, but he does it for me. Picking me up with one arm and bringing me into his side.

“I love you, Riot. I hope you know that. And I will do anything to prove that to you.”

“I think you just did,” I mutter into his chest.

“I’m sorry about last night.”

“I know you are.”

“And I do love you.”

I look up at him. “I know that too.” Because I do. I don’t think this man ever stopped loving me even after everything I put him through. The silent treatments, keeping the girls away from him, the divorce, the custody battles. I put him through hell, and he never stopped loving me.

I hold back tears because I start to hate myself. I hate that I put him through all this. So much pain and torture for a man who didn’t deserve it.

There are so many things I want to say to him, so many things I need to apologize for, but I just don’t even know where to start.

Roan changes the subject before I can even start to say anything.

“What happened with the paps last night?” he asks me as he runs his finger underneath his T-shirt I’m still wearing from last night.

“I was able to make some calls and shut down whatever story they were trying to spin. Luckily, the PR company already was prepared for something like this to happen. I think it’s going to be okay.”

I look over at Roan, and he has a look of concern on his face.

“What’s wrong?”

He clenches his jaw then turns his head and stares at the ceiling. “I’m worried about Steven Rouse getting his scrawny little hands on this.”

“You don’t need to worry about him.”

“Are you sure?”

I nod. “There is no way he got information from the Italian paparazzi. I questioned everyone out there last night, and they were all Italian. There were no Americans.”

“Doesn’t mean he still won’t find out.”

“He wouldn’t post rumors, Roan. You know that. He would only post something he could call truthful.”



“But it is the truth,” he says as he lets go of me and rubs his face with his hands.

“Is that why you were so upset last night?” I ask him, even though I am pretty sure I already know the answer.

“Fuck, Riot. He could ruin everything if he found out the truth.”

“And I would shut it down so quickly. NDAs were signed. There is no way that information is getting out of that German hospital.”

“It already has, Ri.”

I kneel on the bed and look over at him. “And you know I will do everything I can to get it shut down. Just like I always do.” I grab his hand and squeeze. “It’s going to be okay.”

---

I’m on the phone with one of my managers at my company when I hear a squeal come from Saylor. I turn around and see Charlie walking into the hotel lobby. I almost forgot she was going to be joining us in Rome. Then spending the final three weeks of the tour with the band.

I finish my business on the phone and then head over to greet Charlie.

“We need to all go out tonight!” Saylor screeches.

Marley agrees. “Yeah, all the girls are back together. It’s been so long.”

Lake nods her head.

“You all know I can’t turn down a night out!” Charlie says with a smile.

They all look over at me, and I shrug. “Sorry, but I have a date.”

“A date?” Charlie looks at me curiously.

I forgot she doesn’t know about me and Roan. Actually, I’m surprised Saylor hasn’t told her already.

I am not one to blush, but I can feel my cheeks getting warmer.

Charlie looks over at me and then back at the girls. “What am I missing?”

I purse my lips and look around waiting for someone to just say it for me, but everyone is silent including Saylor, which is a surprise.

“Roan and I are trying again.”

Her eyes bug out just as a huge smile takes over her face. “Shut up.”

“Is this not the best news ever?!” Saylor shouts. “I told you I had to tell you something, but I thought it best if you heard from Riot directly.”

Charlie looks back at me. “So how new is this?”

“Very. Like it’s only been a week. So I don’t want to make a huge deal out of this because I don’t even know what it is yet.” That is only partially true, but it’s not like I am going to tell them that yesterday morning Roan told me he loved me.

Charlie gives me a hug. “Well regardless of what it is, I’m happy for you and Roan. I know it’s a lot to think about and to deal with. I can’t imagine what it is like getting back together with someone you divorced, but I know a little bit about getting back together with someone from your past, if you ever want to talk about it.”

“Thanks, Charlie.”

She gives me a sweet smile, and Saylor starts going on about planning a girls’ night when we are interrupted by Jackson. He literally sweeps Charlie off her feet and walks away with her. We are all laughing as she waves goodbye at us.

“Well I should be getting back to work,” I tell the girls.

“What about girls’ night?”

“Plan it for tomorrow if you want, but Roan did promise to take me out to dinner tonight.”

“Ugh, to be young and in love,” Saylor swoons.

Marley rolls her eyes at Saylor. “You do know you are much younger than her and much worse around Knox than those two are together.”

“She has a point,” Lake says as I begin to walk away.

I shake my head and head up to my hotel room to get some work done before my date night.

---

I run my hands over the satin material of my dress. I had to run to a shop an hour ago when I realized I had nothing appropriate to wear. I brought a few dresses to go out to the clubs in and the rest is all denim and leggings. Nothing suitable for a fancy dinner.

I don’t even know where Roan is taking me. He just told me to wear something for a nice restaurant and that he would stop by my room at seven.

I look in the mirror and wonder if what I did was too much. This dress is a gorgeous champagne color that hugs every curve of my body. It was miraculous I found something that fit my five-foot frame that didn’t need to

be hemmed. With the proper shoe, it just hits the floor.

I gave myself a sultry look with my makeup and finished it off with a nude gloss. I even took the time to straighten my hair. I don't even know why I wanted to do it. I know Roan loves my natural curls, but he always said I was drop dead gorgeous when I straightened my hair and put a natural wave into it.

I am touching up my lip gloss when there is a knock at my door. I take a deep breath hoping that I didn't overdo it, that this is exactly what Roan wanted.

When I open the door, his eyes devour me, and I know I made the right choice.

He pushes me inside and kicks the door shut behind him. "When I told you to dress in something nice, I didn't think you would look this good, baby."

I spin in a circle. "You like it?"

He growls as he grabs my waist and pulls me into him. "If I wasn't set on taking you out and treating you like the princess you are, I would be ripping this dress off you right now."

I chew on my lower lip. He uses his thumb to pull my lip out of my mouth and then his lips are on mine.

His kiss is ravenous. I can feel it from the top of my head to the tips of my toes. I want nothing more than for him to push me up against the wall and have his way with me, but he pulls away before I can even try to urge him to do it.

"If we don't leave here in the next two minutes, we won't be making it to dinner."

"Is that a bad thing?" I ask, feeling desperately wanton.

Roan pushes me up against the wall with his hand around my throat. "You got all dressed up for me, baby. I am taking you out."

I pout, and he bends down and sucks my lower lip into his mouth.

"But when we get back here, you better believe I won't be holding back."

I let out a moan as his tongue slides into my mouth for the briefest second. He pulls back and rests his forehead against mine. "You look too beautiful to not take out. I want to show off my wife."

I give him a soft smile and don't correct his words. I am beginning to like it too much when he calls me his wife. Something I should have no business in liking.

I step away from Roan and grab my leather jacket off the back of the desk chair. “Shall we go then?”

He runs his thumb along his bottom lip as if he is contemplating just staying in the hotel room all night but eventually he nods and holds out his hand to me. I take it and follow him out the door.

He takes me to a classic Italian restaurant that is super upscale, and I am glad I bought the dress I did. Even though I know he would have got us in regardless of what we are wearing. This restaurant caters to the rich and famous. And although I may be dressed up to the nines, Roan is still wearing black jeans. But he has on a dress shirt and tie, and for some reason he can pull the whole look off. Maybe it’s the combat boots and the leather jacket. But he looks just like the rock star he is.

The waiter directs us to a table in a hidden alcove of the restaurant. Roan pulls my chair out for me after helping me out of my coat. The waiter leaves us alone, and I can’t help but grab Roan’s hand.

“This is romantic,” I tell him. “What’s gotten into you?”

He gives me that smile he saves just for me. “I never took you anywhere nice before, and I thought you deserved it. We always just went on dates to dives, and I guess I never thought that maybe you wanted to be wined and dined.”

I squeeze his hand. “I never needed this. I liked our dates. I like how we used to go to dives. But this is something different and new and maybe can be something we do from now on.”

“I like when you talk about the future with us, Riot. Because I want a future with you.”

“I know you do, Roan, but we still have a lot of things to work out.”

He leans forward and cups my face with his hand. “And I will do whatever it takes to make sure we work out all those things. I mean it, Riot. I am different this time. The therapy is making me see things in a different light.”

I want to ask him about his therapy, not that I have a right to know anything he talks about, but we are interrupted by our waiter.

“Can I start you out with anything to drink? We have a fabulous wine list.”

I look over at Roan as he shakes his head at the waiter. “I’ll just have water.” He looks over at me. “Babe, do you want some wine?”

I like this side of Roan, the one where he is trying so hard to be a better

man. “Water is fine with me.”

The waiter nods and walks away. I pick up the menu and peruse it over. “What are you thinking of having?”

Roan smirks at me. “I would like to have you for dinner.”

I roll my eyes at him then say, “I’m pretty sure I gave you that option earlier, and you decided you still wanted to take me out for dinner.”

“Yeah, and I am beginning to regret that decision. Because you look good enough to eat, baby girl.”

“Always the charmer,” I snort.

He gives me a grin and then looks down at his menu. “What about the mussels, shall we start with those?”

I agree with him. And I decide to get shrimp fra diavolo as my main course. When the waiter returns, Roan orders for both of us. Once the waiter walks away, I’m surprised that Roan starts talking about his therapy without me asking.

“So I’ve been working hard, babe. I’m working on myself to be a better man for you and the kids. And I just wanted you to know that.”

“I know you are. I can see it every day. You become more of the man that I remember. The one who would do anything for me.”

He clears his throat. “I hate that I became anything less than what you deserve. I lost myself. I went down a path, and I couldn’t tear myself away from it. I hate what I did to you. I hate that I cheated on you. I hate that I let the drugs get the better of me. I hate what I did to Lyric.”

“Roan,” I cut him off. “What happened with Lyric was an accident.”

“It may have been an accident, but it was my fault. If I hadn’t been so fucking blitzed out of my mind, I wouldn’t have let her near that pool.” He clenches his jaw while the hand that sits on the table curls into a fist. “What if you hadn’t come home, Ri?”

“We shouldn’t think about what-ifs.”

“I don’t care what we should or shouldn’t do. Just think about if you hadn’t come home.”

I bite back tears thinking what could have happened if I hadn’t been there that day. If I hadn’t jumped in that pool to save our daughter. “I was there, though, Roan.”

“It still eats me alive. Even though I’ve talked to my therapist about it. I hate myself for what I did.”

“It’s going to take time to work out those demons.”

He shakes his head. "What if, though? What if?"

I grasp his hand and squeeze it. "You would have saved her. I know you would have. I don't know if you remember, but that day when I came outside you were already standing when she started to flail in the pool. You were ready to save her. I was just faster."

"No, I wasn't."

I grip his hand harder, needing him to understand the truth he has forgotten. "Yes, you were, Roan. You would have done what I did if I hadn't been there. You love her. God, I remember when she was born, she was your whole world."

"She still is. They both are. But you took them away." Anger laces his words. And I know this is not the right place to have this conversation, but we need to have it.

"I did what I thought was right at the time."

"Do you still think it was right?"

I shake my head. "I hate myself every day for taking the kids away from you. We both have demons we battle."

He takes in my words and slowly starts to nod his head. "Do you think we can really make this work?"

His words surprise me because I thought he was dead set on this working. But now I see he is showing me his vulnerability. He wants me to see every aspect of his life. And I need to accept them all in order for this to work. I'm just not sure I'm there yet.

"I think we can try," I tell him truthfully.

He gives me a weak smile. I go to say more, but we are interrupted by our food coming out.

"Let's eat and enjoy ourselves," I tell him. "We can talk about this later."

We are able to turn the conversation into something far less heavy and emotional while we eat. Roan talks about the tour and the upcoming plans to record a new album next year, while I talk about my business and how much it's thriving. We reminisce on the old days of us both struggling to make it and laugh. We laugh a lot. And with each memory I begin to see more of the Roan I fell in love with. I see him in a different light, not the one that's been bogged down by pain, mistakes, and regrets.

For so long, it's been like he's been stuck in the dark, a fraction of the man I once knew, but now I am beginning to see tidbits of that man again. Maybe the best thing to happen to him was overdosing, perhaps it opened his

eyes and made him realize there is so much more he has to live for. I just need to give him the chance.

Because I blame myself for a lot about the way he felt the last two years. The dark path he fell down was because of the decisions I made. I turned him to the darkness by shutting him out. And I realize now I never should have done that.

I fight back tears as I listen to him talk, wondering if I had never made the decisions I did, if we would still be sitting here now but in a totally different way. If the girls would be with us. If I would still have that diamond ring on my finger, the one he gave me in front of the Bellagio fountains in Vegas when I suggested we elope, and he had planned to propose the whole time.

I excuse myself to the ladies' room, unable to hold the tears back any longer.

I stand in front of the mirror in the bathroom and wipe my tears away while trying not to mess up my makeup. I don't know why I am getting so emotional. I've talked through all my feelings with Janae hundreds of times over the choices I made with divorcing Roan and fighting for custody of the kids. But for some reason, it now seems like it was all the biggest mistake of my life. Like I never should have left him. Especially when he was so vulnerable.

The bathroom door opens, and I wipe away my tears so whatever woman comes in doesn't ask questions. But then I hear the click of the bathroom lock and turn to see Roan standing at the door.

"What's wrong, baby girl?"

I want to tell him everything. For the first time in years, I want to share everything with him.

I run to him and wrap my arms around him, burying my face in his shirt. "I'm so sorry. God, I'm sorry for everything."

He doesn't say a word. Just shhs me and runs his hands down my back, holding me tight to him.

I don't know how long we stand like that, but the sound of someone trying to pull open the bathroom door, moves us apart.

"How about we get out of here?"

I nod and wipe away a fresh set of tears.

Roan unlocks the bathroom door and apologizes to the confused woman on the other side. He grabs my hand and leads me through the restaurant, stopping at our table to pay the bill and grab our coats.

We leave the restaurant, and I think we are going to head back to the hotel, but Roan has other plans.

“I heard of this place that makes the best hot chocolate in Rome. Shall we get some and walk around the city?”

“That sounds like fun,” I tell him.

We walk hand in hand to a small café and order two hot chocolates. Roan holds my hand as we walk around the city center. We don't really talk, we just enjoy the sights and sounds of the bustling Italian city.

There are so many things I want to say to him, and I just don't know how. I also know I need to tell him I have to leave soon. I plan to leave after their two concerts are over here, which is just three days away. But I don't want to ruin what we have right now. I only brought it up briefly the other day, and he got mad, and I know it will ruin our night if I bring it up again. Not to mention I've already been an emotional mess tonight and that will just make it worse.

We end up in front of the Trevi fountain. Even at this time of night there are still a lot of tourists here. I only hope no one recognizes Roan since I like this time we are spending together. No one has stopped us tonight, and I want to keep living in this small little bubble we are in.

“You know, they say if you throw three coins into the fountain with someone you love that you will end up marrying them.”

I look up at Roan and see the smile on his face, and I can't help but match it. “What is it about us and fountains?”

He laughs. “Maybe this is just our place. In front of fountains all over the world.”

I lean up and kiss him on the cheek. Despite me not wanting to feed into the myth of the three coins, there is something special about this moment and being here with him.

“Well, I don't know if I buy into your three-coin theory, but I do know this fountain is perfect for making wishes.”

Roan digs in his pocket and pulls out a handful of coins. “Shall we make a wish?”

I grab a coin from his hand and hold it against my chest. I don't know what I want to wish for. I guess I just want Roan in this capacity. The Roan who is healthy and happy. The one I am falling for again. But most importantly I wish this can last. That he won't fall down that path again. I want this. I want him. I want to fall in love with him all over again. Because I



loved falling in love with him the first time.

I throw my coin into the fountain then look over at Roan. His hand is wrapped tight around his own coin as he makes a silent wish in his head. I don't miss it when he opens his hand and tosses three coins into the fountain. But I don't say anything.

He pulls me into him, and I'm not prepared for the kiss he gives me. He pours all of his feelings into it, his love, his need for me. I don't hold back and kiss him back with the same ferocity. Because this man is doing something to me. And maybe I really am falling in love with him. Or maybe I've already fallen.

## ROAN

The crowd is wild and crazy as we play the last song of our set. I stand on one of the monitors and scream into the audience, pepping them up for the final riff I'm about to play. I haven't felt this excited to be on stage in years, and I know it all has to do with Riot.

When we finish the song, I head off stage in search of the woman who is making me a better man. Our date last night solidified things for me. Even though our conversation got deep, we were able to talk through it all. And I feel like something changed in Riot. Like she opened her heart to me just a little bit more. I could feel the walls coming down that she built around her after our divorce. Now I just need to knock the rest down so she can finally admit that she loves me just as much as she used to.

I find Riot backstage smiling at me as I grab a towel off the table to wipe the sweat from my face. I toss the towel to the side and grab her, wrapping my hand around her waist and pulling her lips to mine. Everything just feels right when we're like this. Together. The way we should have always been.

She pulls away from me and grabs my hand, dragging me back to the green room before the rest of the guys and girls can get there. I wish I could drag her into an empty room again and fuck her brains out like I did the other night.

She climbs up my body, all five short feet of her, and I back her into a wall for support, my lips never leaving hers. She grinds against me, and it does nothing to help my already rock-hard cock.

“You know everyone else could walk in here any second.”

“I know,” she murmurs against my lips. “But I really just needed to be close to you again.”

“We have all the time in the world, baby girl.”

She pulls away from me at that comment with a frown on her face. “What’s wrong?”

She chews on her bottom lip, and I know that look. I know I am not going to like what she has to say. “We need to talk.”

“About?”

“I don’t really want to do it here. Not with everyone else around.”

I raise a brow at her, worried that this conversation she wants to have is not going to be a good one. “What’s this about?”

She sighs and unwraps her legs from me, sliding down my body. “We need to talk about me going back home.”

“There are still three weeks left on the tour.”

“And I can’t stay the entire time. I need to get back to the kids.”

I want to argue with her, but I know this isn’t the time or place. “When do you—”

“Please tell me you have your pants on,” Saylor cuts off my conversation as she walks into the green room.

“We’re just talking,” Riot answers.

“Okay, good because I really did not want to see any ass.”

“We’ll finish this conversation tonight,” Riot tells me. “I promise.”

Her hand is on my arm, and I take hold of it, squeezing it. “Okay, baby girl.”

She leans up on her toes and presses a kiss to my cheek before she pulls away from me and heads toward the couches.

I make my way over to the bar and grab a beer, not my drink of choice, but I need something to take the edge off. I’m worried about what Riot is going to tell me. I’m worried she is going to leave me alone on tour. I only think I am doing okay right now because she is here grounding me. If she leaves, I worry I’ll fall back into my old ways.

Jackson knocks me out of my thoughts by wrapping an arm around my shoulders. “You killed it tonight, man. I think that’s the best you’ve ever played.”

I give him a smile. “Thanks.”

“I think Riot is bringing our boy back,” he teases.

I give him a slight nod. Because of course she is, but with what she just told me, I am beginning to think this new version of myself is going to be short-lived.

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I pace my hotel room as I wait for Riot to get here. She said she had to make some calls before she came and talked to me. Now all I can think of is the worst. She is going to leave me, and she is going to forget the magic we shared here. And everything that we built back up together will disappear.

There is a knock on my door, and I quit my pacing to answer it. Riot stands there looking as beautiful as ever. Her hair in her wild curls, no makeup, an oversized shirt hanging off her shoulder, and a pair of leggings. I waste no time pulling her into the room and kissing her.

She doesn't have the same passion I have or anything like she's had recently, and I know whatever she has to say I'm not going to like. Then I hear a squeal and giggling.

"The girls wanted to talk to you," she tells me in a soft tone.

I look down and see her phone in her hand on FaceTime.

"Don't worry they didn't see that."

I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding. It's one thing to be back together with Riot, it's a whole other thing for the kids to find out.

"You could have warned me," I tell her.

"You opened the door and pulled me into the room and attacked me."

"You liked it."

She smirks. "Maybe just a little."

I laugh at that and pull her onto the bed with me. She brings the phone up in front of us and taps the screen so her video is being shared with the girls.

"Daddyyyyyyyyy!"

"Hi Brix, how are you?"

"I miss you, Daddy. When are you going to come see us?"

"Just a little bit longer," I tell her. I look over at Riot, and she nods like she understands the question I am asking her. Can I see the kids when I get back?

"Hi, Daddy." Lyric pops into view, pulling the phone away from her sister.

“Hi, princess. How are you? How’s school?”

She sighs into the phone. “I miss seeing my friends all the time. I wish we didn’t have to be homeschooled.”

“Your mom did what she thought was best for you.”

“But it’s not fair. We’ve been here the whole time,” she whines.

“Yeah, but your mom may need to take you to LA soon.”

“I don’t like it there.”

I frown. She used to always love coming to LA. She loved the house there because it was near the beach, and she loved playing in the sand. But I guess it’s different now that I kept the house in LA. Riot got a condo downtown, and it’s nowhere near the beach.

“How about next time you go to LA, I go with you, and we can spend our time at the beach.”

“Really?” she asks, her face perking up.

“As long as your mom says it’s fine.”

I look over at Riot, and she has tears in her eyes again. She makes sure she wipes them away before getting in view of the camera.

“Of course, honey. I think it would be great for you to spend time with your dad there.”

“What about here?” Brixley cuts in. “When is Daddy coming home?”

“I’ll be home in a few weeks, and I’ll make sure the first stop I make is to come see you girls.”

Brixley’s smile takes up her face as I say it. I look at Riot at the small picture of us on the bottom of the screen, and she is nodding her head in agreement.

“But you never let Dad come over,” Lyric retorts.

Riot sighs and chews on her bottom lip. “Well I’ve been talking with your dad, and I think it’s best that he sees you more than before. Would you guys like that?”

I’m surprised by Riot’s words. We haven’t talked much about me seeing the kids more, I’ve just hinted at it. But maybe this new blossoming romance between us is changing her heart a bit. It’s one of the things we need to talk about. My relationship with the kids when we get back from tour.

The girls are both excited over their mom telling them I’ll get to see them more. I’m happy that Lyric is excited since Riot told me she’s been more standoffish lately when it comes to me.

We continue to talk to them for ten more minutes, and I hear all about

their lives. Brixley shows me her dolls, and Lyric rolls her eyes at her. I miss my girls. I miss them so much. It's been one of the hardest things to deal with these last two years, not seeing them as much as I should have. But I know the blame is on me. I stepped away before the divorce even happened because I was worried about causing more harm to the kids than I already had. When Riot told me she wanted a divorce, I didn't think she would take the kids away from me. Yes, I still got to see them a few times a month, but it wasn't the same as being woken up by one of them jumping on our bed begging for pancakes.

By the time we get off the phone with them, I know I need to talk to Riot about seeing them more. I know she has custody, but if we are going to make this work, I need to be in the kids' lives as well.

"Sorry to have just sprung that call on you like that, but they were begging to talk to you."

"Don't apologize for that. I will talk to the girls whenever I get the chance."

"I'm sorry I took them away from you."

"I know you are. But this is part of what we need to work on."

Riot nods. "I didn't tell them about us. I'm not really sure how to. They are too young to understand. Brixley doesn't really know what it's like to have you living with us, she was too young when it all happened. Lyric knows, but she is too young to understand the difference between us being married and divorced and dating again so it is just going to confuse her."

"We will figure it out," I tell her as I wrap my arm around her shoulder. I lean in to kiss her, but she pulls away.

"We need to talk."

"I know, but can it wait until after I get you naked?"

"Roan," she gripes. "I'm serious."

"I'm being serious too," I tell her as I trail a path of kisses up her neck.

"I'm leaving in two days."

I freeze at her words. "What?" I bark.

"I booked a flight back home. I need to get back to the girls and back to work."

"You can work from anywhere."

"But I can't parent from anywhere."

"Then bring them here."

"I am not flying them across the world to bring them on tour with a rock

band.”

I get up off the bed and go back to pacing the room. “Why not? They were on tour this summer for a few weeks.”

“And they hated it.”

“No, they didn’t.”

Riot sighs. “You were too high or drunk to notice.”

My chest aches at those words because I know they are true. I was fucked up this summer during the tour. I barely spent any time with the kids while they were there. Riot did all the parenting.

“I’ve changed though.”

“I know you’ve changed, but that doesn’t mean the girls have changed their mind about touring. They don’t even like going to LA for a few weeks at a time.”

“So you are just going to leave, and things will go back to how they were before.”

Riot gets off the bed and stands in front of me. “What do you mean?”

“You’ll go back to living your life, and everything that we worked on between us will just go up in flames.”

“No, it won’t.”

“What about me, though? How am I supposed to get through the next three weeks without you here? You made this all so much easier.”

“You’re strong, Roan. You can do this on your own.”

I run my hands over my head. “I don’t think I can.”

“Just make sure you continue to see your therapist, and everything will be fine.”

“It wasn’t just her that made this work. It was you, Riot.”

She lays a palm on my chest. “No, it wasn’t. You did this all on your own. You became a better man because you wanted to.”

“I did it for you.”

“Then keep doing it for me. I’ll be waiting for you when you get back.”

“Will you, though?”

She wraps her arms around me. “Don’t doubt us. We can make this work, I know we can.”

I pull her in close to me and rest my head against the top of hers. “I love you, Riot, and I’m just not sure what I’m going to do without you here.”

“You’ll keep on being this man. A good man.”

“I’m not sure I can do it without you.”

Her hands gently run up and down my back. “You have changed a lot in the last three weeks. You remind more and more every day of the man you used to be. The man I fell in love with. And I know you will continue to be that man. You just need to believe in yourself that you can be him.”

“What happens when I come back home?” I ask her because I am worried that things will be different between us. Three weeks of her not being here every day with me.

“What do you mean?” She looks up into my eyes.

“Will you still feel this way about me?”

She studies my face, looking back and forth between my eyes. “Why wouldn’t I?”

I run my hands through her hair and cup her face. “I worry that all this time we got back with each other, these moments we shared, will be forgotten, and when I come home, everything will just go back to how it used to be.”

“Just because I am going home doesn’t mean we can’t talk. If you need me, I’ll be there for you.”

“You mean it?”

She nods, and I see it in her eyes, love. She may not want to say it out loud, or maybe she doesn’t even recognize it. But I can see it, the way she is looking at me now is the way she used to look at me years ago.

“I love you, Riot. I never stopped loving you.” Tears crest her eyes, and I wipe them away with my thumbs. “I never want to push you away. I never want to hurt the girls or hurt you. I was an idiot. A bad man. I ruined everything we had. But I won’t let them happen again. You are the air I need to breathe.”

“Roan,” Riot exhales.

I don’t waste any time bringing my lips to hers, relishing in the feeling of her lips on mine. The old me would be angry about her leaving, hell I felt anger when she first said those words to me. But the new me knows I need to accept this for what it is. I understand why she has to leave, but that doesn’t mean it’s the end of us. We can still be together even if we are apart.

I kiss her deeply, pouring all my feelings into the kiss. She opens up to me, her lips telling me she wants this as much as I do. She may not be able to say the words yet, but I can tell by this kiss she loves me too.

Her hands glide up under my shirt, and I pull away from her lips briefly so she can pull my T-shirt over my head.



I walk her backward until her legs hit the edge of the bed then lay her down, hovering over her as I leave a trail of kisses along her jawline.

“I need you. I need you so much, and I failed to let you know that. I can’t live without you.”

She grips the back of my neck, and when I pull my head up to look into her eyes, I see so much love it makes my chest ache. This woman was always meant to be mine.

“I love you, Roan. God, it’s so scary saying those words, but I need you to know I do love you. I don’t think I ever stopped loving you. But I was too scared to admit I needed you. I made some of the worst decisions I have ever made two years ago when I decided to end all of this. I never should have. I should have worked harder at making things right between us. I shouldn’t have pushed you away. And now I feel like I’ve ruined everything.”

“Baby.” My words come out in a whisper. “You didn’t ruin anything.”

“You became like a stranger, and if I had just—”

“You didn’t do this. I did. And I am going to prove to you every day until the end of our lives that I am worthy of you.”

“You are worthy of me. You always have been.”

I descend onto her lips, pouring every ounce of love I have for this woman into my kiss. I need her to know that I am never letting her go again.

I pull her shirt over her head and leave a trail of kisses across her clavicle and between her breasts. I can’t get enough of her, I never have been able to. She has always been my kryptonite.

I pull her leggings off her and toss them behind me as I settle in between her thighs. I press soft kisses against her core, inhaling her sweet scent that I am addicted to.

She lets out soft mewls as I tease her, her hands gripping the blankets beneath us.

I grip her panties and rip them apart before diving between her thighs. I lick her gently, causing her to squirm beneath me, but I need this. I need her to feel every ounce of love I have for her.

I glide my fingers through her folds, teasing her core as I flick the bundle of sensitive nerves with my tongue.

“More,” she moans.

I smile against her core and give her only a taste of what she asks for. I suck gently on her clit but release it the second I feel her start to tense up beneath me.

“Roan,” she moans. “Stop teasing me.”

I chuckle against her core and then dive in, giving her exactly what she wants. I suck hard on her clit as I drive to fingers inside of her tight pussy. Her hips lift from the bed as she tightens her legs around my face. I press her thighs apart, holding her in place while I devour her.

Within seconds she is coming all over my fingers. I slowly pull them out of her as I sit up on the bed and suck them into my mouth. “You taste like heaven, baby girl.”

She lays panting on the bed, and I know she wants more. She wants all of me. I can see the need in her eyes.

I kick my sweatpants off, and within seconds I am sliding home, deep inside of her. She wraps her arms around me as she whimpers from my intrusion. Her hot, tight pussy sucking me in as I thrust inside of her. I don't waste time as I pick up the pace, needing to feel every inch of my wife.

She wraps her legs around my hips, and I lift her up to get a better angle.

She feels like home, she always has. And I was an idiot for ever thinking there would be someone better than her. I never want to be that man again. The one who takes his wife for granted. Because there is nothing better than her, and there never will be.

Nothing will ever compare to making love to my wife.

“Roan, I need more.”

I lean over and kiss her swollen lips, showing her how much I love her before I pick up the pace. Pounding into her as deep as I can get.

I feel her clench around my dick, and I know she is about to come. I sit back on my haunches and pull her onto my lap, getting even deeper than I was before. She wraps her arms around my shoulders and kisses me with so much fiery passion I almost explode before I want to.

I thrust hard into her, and she comes. I follow behind her, my lips never leaving hers.

I pump into her two more times as I release everything I have inside her.

She slumps down, her head resting against my shoulder, her fingers tracking lazy circles on my back.

“I love you,” she murmurs into my ear. “I love you more than I ever thought I could love someone.”

“I love you too.”

“I wish I didn't have to leave. I want you to know that. If I could stay with you the next three weeks I would. But I really do need to get home to

the kids.”

I want her to stay, but that is the selfish part of me. I know she needs to get back to the kids. And as long as she keeps her promise and is waiting for me when I get back, I know I’ll be okay. Because my wife just told me she loves me, and I don’t think there is a better feeling in the world than that.

**RIOT**

I'm leaving today. And I don't want to. I never thought that I would feel this pull to Roan again. That I would fall so deeply in love with him again. But I did.

We spent the last two days together wrapped in each other's arms whenever he wasn't needed to be at the arena for work. I fell more in love with him every second that we spent together.

And now I'm packing my suitcase, ready to leave for the airport without him.

A knock on my door has a sad smile breaking across my face. Because I know it's him. I know he is here to say goodbye. He can't even go to the airport with me since he has press interviews they need to do before heading to Spain.

I answer the door, and he looks just as miserable as I feel.

"Hey."

He pulls me into him, wrapping his arms so tight around me, I can barely breathe. "I wish you didn't have to leave."

"I know."

"But I also know we need to be able to handle things like this if we are going to work out."

I nod against his chest. I am so proud of him and the progress he has made over the last few weeks. He really has changed so much for the better.

"It won't be that long. You'll be so busy with the band that it will seem

like no time has passed.”

“You know that is not at all how this is going to feel. It’s going to be the three longest weeks of my life.”

“You’ll make it through it. I know you will.”

He pulls away from me and looks down into my eyes. “You promise that you will call me every day?”

I nod. I told him yesterday after an intense bedroom session that I would call him every day if it made him feel more secure in all of this.

“I’m sure the girls will be happy to talk to you more.”

“I can’t wait until I get home, and I can see them.”

I try not to cry because I am not a crier, but for some reason over the last few weeks, I have cried more than I ever thought I would. Maybe it’s been the change in Roan or even the change in myself to accept him back into my life. I just know that I am not sure I can live without him again.

“How much time do we have?”

I look over at the clock on the nightstand. “My car will be here in thirty minutes.”

“I hate that I can’t take you to the airport.”

“It would just make it harder.”

He presses his lips to my forehead. “I know.”

He lets me go, and I get back to packing. He sits on the edge of the bed, his eyes never leaving mine.

We don’t talk while I pack. There is not much to say and maybe too much to say all at the same time. Instead, there is just a comfortable silence between us.

I know I am going to worry about him for the next few weeks. But I made him promise me that he will continue to see his therapist and continue to work on himself.

He told me that nothing will change. I want to believe him. But I am also scared that so much could change between us.

When I finish packing, I sit next to him on the bed, and he wraps his arm around me. “So this is it?”

I flinch at the words. They were the exact same thing he said to me the day I made him pack his stuff and move out of our house two years ago.

“What did I say?” he asks.

I shake my head, not wanting him to go back down that dark path.

“Riot?”

I take a deep breath and let the words out. “You asked me that same question when you moved out of the house.”

He frowns but then cups my cheek and looks deep into my eyes. “I was a different man back then. And I promise you I will not fall down that dark path in the next few weeks while we’re apart. I know I am stronger than I was before. Besides, I have something to look forward to.”

“And what’s that?”

“Every day that passes will be one day closer before I can bury my face in that sweet pussy of yours again.”

I push his shoulder and roll my eyes. “God, I thought you were going to say something romantic.”

He chuckles as he buries his face in my neck. “I’m going to miss you, wife.”

“You know I’m not your wife.”

“Not yet, but you will be again.”

Butterflies dance in my stomach at those words. I hadn’t let myself think that yet. I didn’t want to get ahead of my own feelings. But I do want that. I want to call him my husband. I want everything that we had before. I just hope that we can have that and that something won’t tear us apart before then.

The phone in the room rings, and I know that means my car is here.

I wipe away the tears that have fallen down my cheeks and stand so I can answer the phone. I let them know I will be done in a few minutes.

Roan wraps his arms around me and breathes in deeply. “I already miss you.”

I can’t hold back the tears any longer as they flow freely down my cheeks.

Roan wipes them away then kisses me with so much passion and love I worry that I am making a mistake by leaving.

I don’t want him to stop kissing me. I want this kiss to last forever so we never have to part. But the time finally comes when we know I have to leave.

He steps away from me and grabs my suitcase, walking it toward the door. I grab my carry-on and follow him out of the room.

We walk hand in hand toward the elevator and then across the lobby of the hotel. My chest is aching with each step closer to the front door. Roan’s grip on my hand gets tighter, and I know he is struggling with this as much as I am.

“Ms. Arceneaux?” the bellhop asks, and I nod. “Let me grab your bags and load them into the car for you.”

Roan pulls me into him one final time. “I love you, Riot. And I am never going to stop loving you.”

I grip his shirt, not wanting to let him go but knowing I need to.

Eventually we pull away from each other. Roan places a chaste kiss against my forehead before I walk outside.

And I worry that when we are finally reunited again things won't be the same.

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I collapse onto my couch with the biggest margarita I could pour.

I got home from Italy yesterday, and my heart felt like it was broken. I miss Roan. It's like a part of me is missing. I didn't feel this way when I asked him for a divorce. I was hurting too much back then. But now I feel like I can't breathe without him. How did three weeks together do this to us? It was like a whirlwind being back together with him. And even though it was such a short time, I am convinced that maybe we never should have parted ways at all.

I can't even finish stewing on that thought when my doorbell rings.

Brixley comes running down the stairs screaming and runs to the door. Despite spending a lot of time with Janae these past few weeks, the girls are not sick of her. And they knew she was coming over tonight.

“Auntie, auntie!” Brixley shouts as she opens the door for Janae.

“You know you should teach your kids about stranger danger.”

I roll my eyes at my best friend. “And if they didn't come running to the front door for you, you would have complained you lost your touch.”

“I can't help it if they love me more than you,” she says, picking up Brixley and swinging her around before setting her back on her feet.

“Ouch.”

Lyric comes skipping down the stairs with a handful of friendship bracelets in her hands. “I made us bracelets!”

“I thought we were going to make them together.” Janae squats down in front of Lyric as Lyric slides the bracelets over her wrist.

“We can always make more!”

“Sounds like a plan.” She high fives my daughter before walking into the living room to join me. “Please tell me you made one of those for me.”

I nod toward the kitchen. “There is a pitcher in the fridge.”

“You’re the best.”

I manage to wrangle the girls together and get them back upstairs to their playroom while Janae pours a drink.

Tonight is girls’ night for me and Janae. I needed it after all the thoughts that have been spiraling through my head since I got home yesterday.

Once I make sure the girls are good to go in their playroom, I head back down the stairs and join Janae in the living room.

“So,” she says, staring at me intently, waiting for me to tell her everything.

“So what?”

“Oh come on.” She takes a large sip of her margarita. “Spill the beans. What the heck happened between you and Roan the last three weeks?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” I play coy.

“I don’t need to pull your cards to know something happened between the two of you. You were way too vague about shit over the phone. And the girls said they saw a lot of their daddy over the last few weeks.”

“I thought it would help him with his recovery if he was able to talk with Brix and Lyric.”

“And did stripping your clothes off for him also help with his recovery?”

“Janae!” I shout.

She just stares at me with raised brows.

“Oh my god. Fine, yes. I slept with Roan. Are you happy?”

She grins at me with her huge smile. “Ecstatic. So are you two in love again?”

Why did she have to go there? I do want someone to talk to about all of this, but I worry that she is just going to say we are moving too fast.

“Roan has never stopped loving me.”

She snorts. “Understatement of the century.”

I ignore her statement.

“Come on we both know that man loved you the day you kicked him out of the house, the day he signed those divorce papers, even the day he signed the custody papers. He has never stopped loving you for a second. Why do you think he was pining after you for two years?”

“He wasn’t pining after me.”



Janae looks at me like I've grown a third head. "Um yes, he was. He was miserable and mopey for two years because he just wanted you back in his life the way that you used to be."

Okay so maybe Janae has a point, but I hate admitting that's the truth because it makes me feel worse that I didn't recognize it for what it was.

"I don't mean to make you feel guilty," she says, reading my thoughts.

"I just hate knowing that I was breaking his heart every single day."

"He managed his way through it."

I give her a serious look. "With drugs and alcohol. God, if I hadn't been so daft then maybe he wouldn't have overdosed."

She shrugs. "I hate to say this because I hate that everything led to that, but without that happening, then you two might not have rekindled your relationship."

"I didn't say we did."

Janae actually laughs at that. "Oh my god, I'm not stupid. You slept with the man, you look like you are missing someone dearly, and Saylor told me that the two of you were spending an awful lot of time together."

"Of course Saylor said something."

"She came to me like two weeks ago wanting to know if I knew anything. Of course, I didn't know shit since my best friend was keeping secrets from me."

"I wasn't keeping it a secret. I just had to work out what it was that we were doing."

"And so what is it that you're doing?"

I take a large sip of my margarita, but I don't answer her right away because I am not sure how to answer her.

"Are you in love with him?"

My chest aches at those words because I am head over heels in love with my ex-husband again.

"You are, aren't you?"

I look up at Janae and nod. "I am."

She squeals in delight, and I swear to God she and Saylor spend way too much time together.

"I don't even know how it happened. Maybe I never stopped loving him, and I just buried those feelings so far deep inside of me I didn't allow myself to feel them. But spending all that time with him, getting to know him again like it was the first time. I couldn't not do it. I couldn't not fall in love with

him.”

Janae looks so happy right now you think she was the one who fell in love. “So what is going to happen when he gets back here?”

I frown. “We never really talked about it. I mean, we’ll be together.”

“Is he moving back in?”

I purse my lips. “I don’t know. I mean, I know he doesn’t really have anywhere to live. And I think it would be weird if I went over to Wilder’s pool house to see him.”

“I think you need to have that talk with him sooner rather than later. What about the girls?”

“I told him he could see them whenever he wanted.” I pause and think about how crazy this all is. “Am I losing my mind by getting back together with him?”

“I don’t think so. You know I never thought you should get a divorce.”

“I know, but now I think about all the logistics of us being back together, and it’s too much.”

Janae reaches over and grabs my hand. “One day at a time, Riot. Take things slow. And if he moves in after a week, then big deal. You two will be able to figure it all out.”

I nod and try to let the panic settle.

“Now how was the sex?”

I take a throw pillow and toss it at her, but then spill all the details of what it’s like being back together with my ex-husband.

**ROAN**

It's been two weeks since Riot left. Which means it's only one more week until I get to see her again. The past two weeks have been hell without her here. Although I have survived by talking to her every day. It has made me fall more in love with her. I wish she was here so I could touch her and hold her, but just being able to speak with her at least settled my nerves a bit.

I've also kept up with my therapy like she asked me to. And it's been helping too. I just wish she was here. I need to hold her.

I sip on a beer as we sit in a green room before one of our last shows of the tour. We are in Dublin now and then fly off in two days to England for our final three shows.

I send off a text to Riot then look up to see Saylor studying me. "What?"

"I didn't say anything."

"You're staring me down."

"Are you texting Riot?"

"Why does it matter?"

She shrugs. "Just making sure you are staying loyal to her."

Wilder walks over just as she says it and smacks his sister on the head. "Stop being such a creep. Let Roan do whatever the hell he wants. We all know he is head over heels in love with Riot. He isn't going to do anything to fuck that up."

Saylor sticks her tongue out at her brother then walks away, and I breathe a sigh of relief.

“She is something else,” he mutters as he takes a seat next to me.

“She just wants to make sure I don’t cheat on Riot again.”

“Why would you?”

I nod at him. “I won’t. I never should have done it before and sure as hell won’t do it again. I can’t deal with losing her again. It nearly destroyed me.”

“I’m glad to see you doing well, though, man. Even through these two weeks without her here. You’ve been like the old Roan. Not to say I didn’t like you the last two years, but I just like the old one better.”

“I know what you mean.”

“So are you moving in with her when we get back?”

I shrug. “Not sure. We haven’t talked about it.” I grip the back of my neck. “It’s a lot. We need to do what’s right for the kids, and I worry that moving in right away is going to confuse them.”

“Well, you are welcome to stay at the pool house as long as you like. Just please don’t fuck her in the pool.”

“Trust me, after walking in on you and Lake in the pool multiple times that one day, I won’t be going anywhere near that pool again.”

He punches me in the arm. “You were swimming in it the week after.”

“Yeah because I called the pool company to come douse the pool with chlorine.”

“No you didn’t.”

I laugh. “Yeah, man, I did. You weren’t there, but I sure as hell didn’t want to swim in some jizz pool. Y’all were going at it for hours.”

“What can I say, I love the woman and her fine ass pussy.”

“I heard that!” Lake yells from across the room.

Wilder blows her a kiss, and she blushes.

“Well anyway, I am proud of you, man. You really do seem like the old Roan, and we all missed him.”

I don’t want to get choked up on his words, so I swallow down the ball in my throat. “Thanks, man. It feels good to not feel so shitty all the time.”

“You guys ready?” Jackson asks as he walks over to us. “We need to head out to the stage.”

I slam down the rest of my beer and toss the bottle in the trash, then follow my band out to the stage.

---

I roll over and grab my ringing phone off the nightstand, the daylight just peeking in through the curtains. Riot is calling me, and I start to freak out because it's got to be one in the morning back home.

"What's up, baby?" I yawn into the phone.

"Sorry did I wake you up? I thought you had an early flight today."

"Nah, I woke up right before you called. What's wrong?"

I hear giggling in the background and the sound of Janae's voice. "I miss you."

And that's when I realize Riot is drunk dialing me. "I miss you too, baby. You have a few margaritas with Janae tonight?"

She hiccups. "How did you know?"

"I just do. Besides you told me last night you were having a girls' night out with her since the girls were staying at your mom's."

"Oh shit, I forgot I told you that."

I chuckle into the phone. "God, I wish you were here with me. I like drunk Riot."

"Drunk Riot is not around very often."

"That's because you are always working and parenting and looking out for everyone," I tell her. "You never take time for yourself."

"I make time for you."

"You do."

"I wish I was there with you now."

"Do you, baby?"

My phone beeps, and I realize she is FaceTiming me. I sit up in bed and flip it over to video. I smile when I see her flushed face on the camera and her lying in bed.

"What happened to Janae?"

"She left."

That's when I notice Riot is wearing nothing but a very thin T-shirt that does nothing to hide her perky breasts.

"Did she now?"

She nods. "She was leaving the house when I called you."

"What did you do tonight?"

She chews on her lip. "Just went out for some cocktails then came back here and got trashed."

"And my baby wanted to call me when she was drunk?"

She nods excitedly. "I want you to be here next to me."

I smirk at her. “And what exactly would I be doing if I were there next to you?”

She gives me a sexy smile. “You have a vivid imagination.”

“Nope.” I shake my head at her. “I need you to tell me. What would I be doing?”

“Whatever you want.”

Riot is never really shy when it comes to her needs in the bedroom, but phone sex is an entirely different thing. We only had it a few times when we first started dating, but after we got married and were apart more, we never did it. Maybe this was one of the things missing in our relationship.

“If I were there, what would you want me to be doing?” I ask her, not letting her get away with beating around the bush.

She goes back to chewing on that lip that I wish I was chewing on, and I am immediately rock hard. “I wish that you were touching me.”

“Where?”

Riot moans and holds her phone out giving me a view of her body and the lack of clothing she is wearing. “Right here.” Her hand slides down her body and in between her thighs.

“You want my fingers on that hot, wet pussy, baby?”

She nods.

“Just how wet are you right now?”

“I’m soaked, Roan. All I’ve been thinking about is you for the last three hours and how I wish you were home already.”

I get a funny feeling in my chest when she talks about me being home because I know she means she wants me home at her house at the home that used to be ours.

“How about you slide two pretty little fingers between your folds and show me how wet you are?”

She does as I say, groaning as she slides her fingers inside of her. Then pulling them out and holding them in front of the camera.

I grip my dick tight in my hand at the sight of her wetness coating her fingers. “Fuck, baby, you are soaked, aren’t you? Put those fingers in your mouth, tell me how you taste.”

She opens her mouth and sucks her fingers in hard, and I wish it was my dick between her lips. I stroke my cock as I watch her lick herself clean.

“Such a good girl. Now put those fingers back inside of you and pretend they’re mine.”

“Roan,” she moans as she slides her fingers inside her pussy. “God, you feel so good.”

“What else do you want me doing?”

“I want your tongue on my clit. I want you to make me scream.”

Fuck, this woman is killing me. I grip my dick harder, stroking it. “Run your thumb along your clit, flick it back and forth, and pretend it’s my tongue on you.”

She falls back into the bed, and I watch her face as she works herself up. Goddamn, I wish I was there tasting her, doing this to her, working her into a frenzy with my own fingers.

“How close are you, baby?”

“So close.”

“Good girl. Keep going, remember those are my fingers on you. Inside of you. Fuck yourself until you come.” I squeeze my cock wanting to feel that tight pussy wrapped around me, but my hand is all I have. It’s all I’ve had for the last two weeks, and I cannot wait until I can be inside of her for real.

“Roan,” she moans. “I’m coming.”

“Fuck yeah, baby,” I say as I pump my dick a few more times and come right along with her.

I look into the phone and see her rolled onto her side, cuddling a pillow that I so greatly wish was me. “I miss you.”

I like when she says she misses me because it makes me know this is real. That this isn’t some dream I’ve concocted in my head. Riot really wants me back in her life.

“One more week, baby. Then I’ll be there with you.”

She yawns into the camera. “I can’t wait.”

“You should go to sleep.”

“I wish you were next to me. I haven’t slept all that well since I left.”

Again she is getting me right in the chest with her words. I love this goddamn woman. “I wish I was there with you too, baby girl.”

She yawns again. “Well, good night, Roan. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

I watch as her eyes flutter close for a second and then she hangs up the phone. I set my phone down and stretch. That was the best way to wake up this morning. And I know for a fact that nothing could ruin my day.

---

We landed in London a few hours ago. We don't have a show for two more days, and then it's three in a row to sold-out crowds. We all decide to head out for a nice dinner since it's rare we ever get to with our schedule.

I am enjoying a nice steak when my cell phone starts ringing incessantly. I look down and wonder why Riot is calling me. I have three missed calls from her.

"I should take this," I tell the guys.

"Is it Riot?" Jackson asks me.

"Yeah, why?"

He picks his phone up off the table. "She just called me too."

"Shit, something must be wrong."

My phone starts ringing again at the same time Jackson's does. "Who is it?" I ask him, seeing Riot's name on my screen.

"Fuck, it's our publicist."

Fear grips me. There is only one reason Riot would be calling me and our publicist calling Jackson. I rush to a quiet area of the restaurant and call Riot back.

"What's going on?"

"Roan, I need you to stay calm while I tell you this. Where are you?"

Panic constricts in my chest. "I'm at dinner. What the hell is going on, Riot?"

I hear her take a deep breath into the phone before she speaks. "Please do not overreact."

"Just tell me what the hell is going on before I do overreact."

She sighs into the phone. "It's Steven Rouse. He released a new article. And I just want to tell you it's complete gossip, and there is no way any of this can be proven without NDAs being broken. So I have no idea where he got this information."

"Fuck," I scream causing heads to turn and look at me from the tables that are near me. "He knows, doesn't he?"

"I have no idea how he found out, Roan. And I am working with the PR company to try and get this shut down. But it's Steven Rouse. This isn't just some gossip rag."

"Where was it published?"

"He posted it on his own website. But he contacted hundreds of magazines to run the story. I am making sure this does not happen, his article is trash. This is so unlike him, and I have no idea why he is taking out



whatever pent-up anger he has against Saints & Sinners out on you.”

I clench my fists, trying as hard as I can not to punch a wall or the glass door in front of me. “What the hell does the article say?”

“He found out about the overdose. He is calling you out on it and saying that you will be the reason such a promising band will fall apart.”

“Goddammit!” I scream causing more people to turn their heads toward me.

“Can you get it shut down?”

“I am trying my hardest to do what I can. But it’s going viral, Roan. More sites are publishing the article.”

“That fucking asshole. I don’t know why he has a bone to pick with me. But he needs to learn his place quickly before I come after him.”

“Don’t do anything stupid, Roan.”

“I can’t because this asshole decided to publish the article when I’m on the other side of the pond from him. But you better believe I am not letting this go down without a fight when I get back to the States.”

“Let me handle this.”

I clench my jaw. I know it’s Riot’s job to handle this, but I don’t want her to. I want to handle this by the form of a bullet between that fucker’s eyes. I am so sick of whatever vendetta he has against me. And I am determined to figure out what the hell it is.

“Roan,” Riot says with a sternness in her voice. “I’m serious. You just need to get through these last few shows and then you can come home, and we can deal with it together. But for now, you need to let me handle this.”

I grunt into the phone because I don’t really have words to say. This is my life that dick is trying to destroy, and I won’t let it happen. I’m just glad the kids are young enough that they won’t know what any of this means. The last thing I need is for someone to get in the way of me and my family and the life I am trying to put back together.

“Roan,” Riot pleads into the phone again.

“I’m here,” I tell her.

“Please don’t do anything stupid.”

“I won’t.”

“Please tell me you are actually listening to me and not thinking of a million things you could do to get back at Steven Rouse.”

I sigh and rub my fingers between my eyes. “There is only one thing I want to do to Steven Rouse.”

“And I don’t think I want to know what it is you are thinking. Please just let this go for now.”

“It’s hard to just let this go, Riot.”

“Do it for me. Please, Roan. I am working on this as best I can.”

I know she is. She has always put my band at the forefront of her career, and I know she will do anything to make this right. Just not to the lengths I would go. “Alright,” I agree reluctantly.

“Thank you.” She breathes a sigh of relief into the phone. “Now go back to dinner. Enjoy yourself, and don’t let this get to you.”

“That’s a lot easier said than done.”

“I know but please for once just listen to me.”

“I always listen to you, baby.”

She scoffs into the phone. “Hardly.”

“Most of the time.”

“That’s a better answer.” She pauses. “I love you. Please take care of yourself.”

“I love you too.”

She says goodbye to me and hangs up the phone. I pace the corner I’m in for a good five minutes. I really do want to murder the man who has some ploy to destroy my life. I have no idea what I did to him that makes me deserve this treatment from him.

Even worse, I don’t want our fanbase to know about what happened to me. I don’t want the sympathy, and I don’t want any negative repercussions on the band. I just want my personal life to stay personal.

I eventually walk back over to the table where the guys are all waiting for me. I know they must know what’s going on since they all have that look on their face.

“You okay, man?” Silas asks me.

“Not really.”

“I talked to our publicist. I found out what’s going on,” Jackson tells me.

“What the fuck is that man’s problem?” Wilder asks.

I shrug. “Hell if I know. But he has some crusade against me. First the article before the tour and now this one. The man has a death wish.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“If I could beat the man to a pulp, I fucking would. But Riot told me to not do or say anything. She’s working on it from her end.”

Jackson pats me on the shoulder. “We’ll get through this, man. We

always do.”

I nod at him because we have gotten through the shit that has been thrown at us many times. But for some reason this all just seems different.

**ROAN**

I should have gone back to the hotel after dinner. But with everything that came to fruition in the last hour, I decided going out to a pub was the better idea. I just need to get this shit off my mind, and since I can't do drugs to do that, I might as well drink.

"Another shot?" the bartender asks me.

I look at Silas who joined me, and he nods. "Why not?"

We both throw back shots of whiskey, and the buzz I was feeling earlier is starting to turn into drunkenness. But I don't really care. I just want to not think about that damn article. I haven't even had the heart to read it. I'm sure there is nothing in there that I don't already know. I just really don't feel like reading about how he spins my life into some desperate plea for attention.

We grab our beers and head back to the table where the rest of the guys are. The girls all decided to come out and join us so our small group is turning into a crowd.

"I think we should go to a club!" Saylor shouts.

Lake agrees with her. "Absolutely. I want to dance."

Wilder grabs her hips and drags her onto his lap. "You can dance right here, baby girl."

"Please no," Marley says.

I laugh at that as Silas slips his arm around his girl. "You don't want to watch them?"

She gives him a look, and then they start whispering to each other. And

from the look on her face, it's probably not something I even want to hear.

My heart longs for Riot right now. I know she is doing everything she can to quell this article, but I really wish she was here with me. But I am also just drunk and horny so that could be the reason why.

Jackson turns toward me. "Want to head to that one club we always go to when we're here?"

I much prefer the vibe of this dive, but it seems like everyone really wants to go to the club, so I reluctantly agree.

We take two private cars there and get in immediately. There are paps at the door trying to take our pictures, but we brush them aside as we make our way inside.

"God, I am sick of these damn paparazzi everywhere lately," Jackson mutters as we walk through the club.

"Probably all my fault," I slur. "They want more juicy gossip from that damn story."

"Nah, man. Don't blame yourself."

"Blame that fucker who put the article out," Knox says as he steps between us. "I have no problem punching that fucker in the face."

"If anyone is going to punch him in the face, it's going to be me," I tell Knox.

"How about there is no face punching of anyone," Charlie chimes in as she slips her arm around Jackson. "You all need fewer things to show the press, not more."

I scoff. She has a point, but I really just want to punch that fucker in the face. I make my way to the private bar in the VIP section we are in and order a double shot of whiskey neat. I need to take this edge off more than I already have. What I really want is something stronger, but I silently tell myself that drugs are not what I need. I can't do that to myself or to Riot. I would lose her.

I head to the section we are sitting in, and the girls are already getting up to go dance on the dance floor. Silas joins them, but the rest of the guys stay behind. We end up laughing and drinking way more than we should, but it's nice to let all the shit that happened today fade away. I'd rather not think about that damn article or else I may be tempted to actually read the shit.

I am halfway to wasted but behaving myself by sitting in the corner of the VIP section. I'm tempted to text Riot, but I know she is busy and doesn't want to deal with my drunk ass. I should go back to the hotel, but I might as

well wait for some of the others to leave.

I'm vaguely aware of a group of girls walking into the enclosed area. At first, I think they are just servers, but it doesn't take long for me to realize they are groupies. All the guys have wandered off to be with their girls on the dance floor, so I have no one here to help me get them to go away.

"Oh my god, it is Roan Mathieu. Can we get a picture with you?"

I should tell them no, but I decide a picture won't hurt. "Sure."

"We love your band," a leggy brunette says to me.

"Thanks."

The three girls make their way around me, and I'm so drunk I barely notice them touching me. One of them snaps a picture, and I expect them to move, but they don't.

"I always wondered what it would be like to make out with the lead guitar player of a band," one of the blondes says to me.

"Well it's not going to be with me."

"Oh come on, Roan." Her hands are on my chest, and I nicely pull them away.

"I think it's best if you all leave."

"You don't want to play with us?" the brunette asks.

The other blonde sits on my knee, and I don't have the energy to push her away. "You can have all of us at the same time."

"Yeah, I don't think so."

"Oh come on, it will be fun," one of the blondes says to me.

"I'm sure it would be, but I'm—"

"What is going on here?" I am relieved when I hear Jackson's authoritative voice take over the space.

"Oh my god, it's Jax Knight!"

Jackson ignores them and just yells, "Get the hell out of here."

Charlie walks up behind him and shoots me a look with a raised brow.

The brunette saunters over to Jackson, completely ignoring Charlie holding his hand. "We just wanted to have a little fun."

"Well, you aren't having fun with my man," Charlie snaps. "Or Roan, who is also taken. So get out of here before we call security."

The girls look over at Charlie and then look at me. I manage to get the one off my lap, and the other girl glued to my side follows her friend. "You are no fun."

Charlie walks away and within seconds is back with security, who kick

the girls out.

I lean over, placing my elbows on my knees and grabbing my drink from the table. “What is going on today?”

“You know you could file harassment charges,” Charlie tells me.

I shake my head. “No, I’ve had more than enough drama for one day. I think I just want to leave.”

“We are right there with you, man,” Jackson says before throwing back the rest of his drink. “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

## RIOT

Roan is coming home today, and I could not be more excited. Although I am trying to maintain that excitement so I don't look like a crazed woman.

"Mommy," Brixley says as she pulls on the hem of my shirt. "I want chicken nuggies."

"Okay, baby. Let me make you some."

"Why do you keep looking at the time, Mom?" Lyric asks me.

I haven't told the girls yet that their father is coming home. I wanted to surprise them.

"Just seeing what time it is."

Lyric gives me a look like I'm crazy then goes back to working on her homework.

I get to making some chicken nuggets for the girls while I pull out a salad for myself. I should really be making them a real meal for dinner, but I am too excited about Roan coming home to even think about cooking.

Of course, him coming here is going to lead to a million questions from the girls. But I don't really care. I just want my man back in my arms. And they are too young to question if their father sleeps over tonight, right?

I am pulling the chicken nuggets out of the oven when I hear a knock at the door. I set the pan on the counter and wipe my hands on my sweats. I head to the front door and open it. Roan is standing there with a bouquet of flowers and a pizza in his hand.



“Hey, babe,” he says to me with that sexy smirk.

“Hi.”

“I thought I would bring something to eat. I know how much the girls like pizza.”

“Trying to win them over?” I tease.

He winks at me as I open the door wider for him.

“Girls, someone is here to see you.”

Lyric and Brixley both start to walk down the hall to the foyer. When Brixley sees her father, her eyes light up.

“Daddy!”

I take the food and flowers out of Roan’s hands just in time for her to wrap her arms around his legs, nearly mowing him over.

“Hi, princess,” Roan says as he squats down in front of Brixley.

She wraps her arms around his neck and starts crying. “I missed you so much, Daddy.”

“I missed you too, sweetheart.”

Lyric walks up to her dad, and I hesitate for her reaction since she has been so standoffish with him recently, but she just throws her arms around his neck and nearly knocks him over.

I try not to cry as I watch the three of them reunited. I feel like a terrible mom and a bad person for not letting Roan come see his kids as often as I should have. I never should have taken full custody rights. I should have found a way for us to share our time with the girls. But I was just so bitter and heartbroken when I divorced the man, I wasn’t thinking right.

But seeing them together again makes my heart beat hard in my chest. Because I want this now. The four of us together. The family we should have always been.

When Roan finally stands up, Brixley takes his hand and leads him toward the stairs, no doubt to go to the playroom so she can show him all her dolls.

Lyric follows them upstairs, and I bring the pizza into the kitchen. I grab a vase and set the flowers inside of them then contemplate if I should go upstairs and see what they are doing or wait for them to come down.

I have no idea what to do. I feel so lost in this situation. Maybe because I am hurting more than anything. Mad at myself for all the decisions I made in the past that I shouldn’t have. I never should have shut Roan out from this family. And I maybe never should have divorced him.

I'm about ready to go upstairs when I hear the clunk of Roan's boots on the stairs. Lyric and Brixley are giving him their undivided attention as they come down the stairs. Roan is telling some story from the tour, and the girls are completely enamored with their father.

I open the extra-large cheese pizza that Roan brought and grab some plates out of the cabinet then bring everything into the dining room. I hear the scuttle of feet following the smell into the dining room, and soon I see Lyric's head pop around the corner.

"Did Daddy bring cheese?" she asks me. The girl is the pickiest of eaters, and of course her dad remembered she will only eat cheese.

"Of course he did. He knows what you like."

"Yay!" she screams as she takes a seat at the table.

Brixley and Roan are close behind Lyric. I grab drinks for everyone and then sit down to join them.

We eat dinner like a real family, and it makes me feel things I haven't felt in a long time. Roan fills the table with conversation as he tells the girls stories about being on tour. Lyric and Brixley tell him about school and dance classes.

I sit and listen during it all. I'm just thrilled that the girls are so happy their dad is here, and I am happy to have Roan sitting here at this table. It feels right. Like he should be here. And I hate myself for pushing him away like I did.

After we finish dinner, the girls turn on *Frozen*. I watch from the kitchen as they cuddle up with their dad and watch the movie. I wipe the tears from my eyes as I clean the dishes. I join them on the couch for the rest of the movie but hardly watch it. I am too enthralled by Roan with his arms around our kids.

Roan tucks them into bed and reads Brixley a bedtime story. I busy myself downstairs cleaning up whatever I can as I wait for him to come down. We haven't had a moment to ourselves since he got here, and I can't wait to wrap my arms around him and kiss him.

When he makes his way downstairs, I am just finishing folding some laundry.

"The girls are asleep," he tells me.

"Thank you for that."

He shrugs. "Just doing my job as their father."

"They adore you, and they were so happy you were here tonight."

He smiles at me. “I was so happy to be around them. I love our girls, babe. And I want to be a part of their lives.”

“I know.”

He walks closer to me and pulls me into him. “I want to be in your life too, baby. Like right now.”

He doesn’t waste a second meeting his lips with mine. And I can’t help but moan at the first taste of his lips in three weeks. I don’t know how I ever survived two years without his lips on mine.

He backs me up until my ass hits the edge of the couch. Then he is lifting me up and setting me on top of it.

“I missed you,” he mutters against my lips.

“I missed you too.”

“Our flight felt like it lasted forever when all I wanted was to get back here and claim you.”

“Claim me?” I laugh.

He growls against my lips. “You better believe I am going to claim you, baby.”

He wraps my legs around his waist and thrusts his hips against my core so I can feel how hard he is for me. I press my hips into his, and he bites down on my neck.

“As much as I want to bend you over this couch and fuck the shit out of you, I suggest we move this to the bedroom in case the girls wake up.”

“Probably a good idea,” my words come out breathy as he licks the sensitive spot below my ear.

I go to jump down off the back of the couch, but Roan surprises me by picking me and carrying me to my bedroom. The one that used to be ours. And how badly I want to call it ours again.

Roan kicks the door shut behind him and then tosses me on the bed.

Before I can even move, his hands are on my sweats, pulling them off my legs and then his head is between my thighs.

He inhales deeply against my core. “God, I’ve missed this pussy.” Then his mouth is on my clit, sucking hard into his mouth.

I clasp a hand over my mouth so I don’t wake up the girls as Roan eats me out like he’s been a starved man.

He licks and sucks so intensely I have to bite down on my hand to keep from screaming. Then his fingers are at my entrance, and I swear I’m going to die.

He pumps two fingers into me, and I can feel the beginning of an orgasm creeping up. Roan must know I'm so close to the edge because he hooks his fingers inside of me hitting the sensitive spot that makes my toes curl.

I come apart on his face, but he doesn't stop his movements. His tongue flicks at my clit while his fingers continue their assault on my pussy. Another orgasm starts to build, and I whine into my hand. Roan looks up at me from between my thighs and smirks right before sucking my clit hard into his mouth. I bend off the bed in pleasure as every nerve in my body feels like it's on fire.

Roan crawls up my body and kisses me hard. I kiss him back with so much need. Because I need him right now. I need every inch of him. I need to feel him hugging my body to his. I need to feel him inside of me.

I reach for his jeans and try to peel them off, but I struggle.

"So needy." He chuckles against my lips.

"I need you inside of me now."

He kicks his pants off. "I'm happy to fulfill your wishes."

He wastes no time sliding inside of me. He feels like home and having him this close to me, this intimate with me, is everything I was missing the last three weeks.

"God, I missed this," he tells me as he fucks me hard. "Every single inch of you."

He doesn't let up as he pounds into me while peppering kisses all over my body. I grip the sheets as he sucks my nipples into his mouth.

"Roan," I mutter against my hand, needing to keep covering up the noises I'm making.

"I wish I could hear you scream, baby. But I know you can't. Reminds me of how it used to be with us. How it should always be with us."

"Yes," I moan into the room. Because I do want this. I want him here with me all the time. In my bed, in my life. I want him here with the kids being their dad.

The thought of Roan being a permanent fixture in our lives is enough to make me come. He pumps into me three more times and follows then collapses on top of me.

I wrap my arms around him because him being here is all I want.

"You okay?" he murmurs into my neck.

I nod. "Yeah, I just really needed you."

"I needed you too, baby."

He rolls to the side and pulls me with him so I am resting on his chest.

“I missed this,” I tell him.

“I know you did.”

I shake my head as I trace the tattoos on his chest. “No, I missed you being here, in this house. It’s not the same without you, Roan.”

He wraps his arms tight around me. “I didn’t think I would ever hear you say that.”

“It’s true. After everything...the divorce. I thought that things would get better. I thought that it was what I needed, what the girls needed, but God, I was so wrong. They need you here as much as I do.”

He presses a kiss to my forehead. “I’ll never leave you again.”

“I’ll never push you away again.”

We lay in comfortable silence for over an hour before Roan pulls away from me.

“I should get going.”

I sit up and look at him. “Why?”

“The girls, babe. I don’t think they would understand if they found me in here with you.”

“I’ll talk to them.”

“And when you do then I’ll stay.”

I crawl across the bed until I am sitting on the edge in front of him and grab his hand, threading our fingers together. “I meant I’ll talk to them in the morning.”

“You want me to stay tonight?”

I nod and smile at him. “I want you to stay forever.”

He sighs and runs a hand over his head. “Riot, I...shit, I never thought you would say those words to me.”

“Am I moving too fast?”

He smiles down at me then walks closer to me until he is standing between my legs. “We were never the type to take things slow.”

“Will you stay then?”

He presses a kiss to my lips. “Always, baby.”

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**ROAN**

“I need to do something about Steven Rouse,” I tell Wilder as we sit at Talisman, Charlie’s bar in the Marigny. I let him know that I was moving back in with Riot. And we decided to head to Talisman for old times’ sake.

“What do you mean?”

“He is out to ruin my life, man.”

Wilder takes a sip of his drink and looks at me like I am losing my mind. “I don’t think he is trying to ruin your life, man. I think he’s just an asshole.”

“Why would he come after me like that, though? And how the hell did he find out?”

Wilder shrugs. “I don’t know. It is strange.”

“Riot worked her ass off to try and get that article removed, but it was too late. That shit was shared everywhere, and now our fans are looking at me like I’m the problem.”

“No, they aren’t, man. If anything, they are more worried about you than anything. I think Rouse’s plan backfired.”

I snort. “Tell that to the paps.”

“They just want to catch a story about something. They are probably hoping you have some relapse or something so they are the first to catch it. But we all know that isn’t going to happen. You’ve been doing good, man.”

“It’s barely been a month. Shit could still happen.”

Wilder looks at me like I’m crazy. “I don’t think so. You wouldn’t risk

everything you have with Riot over drugs. I know you aren't going to touch them again."

I'm glad he has faith in me because I don't really have faith in myself. Not after this shit with the stupid article. I wanted to use so bad the night that it came out, and instead I just got shit-faced which probably was a bad idea. I shouldn't even be sitting at this bar right now drinking. Luckily, despite our fame, we tend to be left alone when we are in New Orleans.

"I just feel like I need to do something," I tell him.

"What? Like call Carter West?" he jokes but stops laughing when he sees my face. "Roan, you can't be serious."

"He's the only one who can put a stop to him."

"Are you forgetting that we finally got out of his clutches a few months ago?"

"I think that's all an illusion. You know we can never be out of that man's grasp."

Wilder contemplates my words then sips his drink. "Fair enough. But this is a bad idea. You know West."

I nod my head. "I just don't know what else to do."

"I think you need to talk to Riot."

"I don't want her to know about West."

"Good. She doesn't need to. Because you aren't going to him." He must be able to read the look on my face because he keeps going. "Listen, man, I know you want to just end Rouse because it's the easy way out, but you need to know the consequences. And with what happened with nearly losing Lake and the repercussions all that shit had on her...no man, you can't go to West."

I understand where he is coming from, but I just don't know what else to do.

"Just sit on it for now. I know you hate that, and you want to take action, but I think the best thing you can do is wait it out. See what Rouse's next move is. Because right now I think he is losing his career above all else. The man doesn't write gossip, and that article was nothing but gossip. He may end his own career before he ends yours."

I hate that Wilder is right. I just want this all to be over with.

"Hey boys, didn't know you were coming in tonight," Charlie says as she walks behind the bar. "Jackson didn't say anything about stopping by tonight."

Wilder wraps his arm around me. “We are out celebrating this fool.”

Charlie raises a brow at us. “Celebrating?”

“I’m moving in with Riot.”

Her jaw drops open.

“And I’m celebrating that I get my pool house back,” Wilder adds.

I punch him in the arm. “You liked having me around until you got back together with Lake.”

“And now I just want my house to myself.”

Charlie looks between the two of us and laughs. “The second you move out, he’s going to be asking you to come over because he misses you.”

I smile at her. “I know.”

Wilder looks between the two of us. “I’m not that desperate.”

I pinch his cheek. “You are going to be so lonely without me.”

“Fuck off,” he says as he pushes me away.

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I unload the last of my boxes from the back of my truck. It’s crazy to me that I am moving back into the house I bought with Riot. We bought this not long after we won our first Grammy, when things were really picking up for the band. It was a huge splurge, buying a multi-million dollar house near Audubon Park, but we loved every inch of this house. It was a reminder that we finally made it, not just the band but Riot, too, with her management company. We thought it was too big that first day we moved in when we had no furniture except a bed. We had no idea what we were going to do with a six-bedroom house, but then a few weeks later we found out Riot was pregnant, and everything changed.

Back when I was just some punk from Baton Rouge turning drugs to make a dime, I never thought I would have kids. It just didn’t seem in the cards for me. But then Riot was pregnant, and all I wanted was to be the best dad I could be for our baby.

And I was for a while. I loved Lyric so much, I would risk my life for her. Then Brixley came along, and I was the dad to two adorable little humans. I never thought that would be my life, and I loved every single day with those girls.

Then the band got even bigger. And we were pulled in so many



directions. And I got lost in it all. I drank too much, did too many drugs. I lost myself. I cheated on my wife. I lost the man who I became and turned into the man I thought I would be as a teenager.

But I can't be that man anymore.

I don't want to be that man anymore.

I want to be the one with the wife and the kids and the damn picket fence. Because I missed all of this more than I ever thought I would.

We haven't told the girls yet that I am moving back in. We are telling them today. Janae took them to the zoo so I could have the time to get my stuff moved in before we broke the news. I know that Brixley will be beyond ecstatic. I'm worried that Lyric will be more standoffish. She was happy to talk to me on the phone and to see me when I got back, but I know deep down she is going to think I will leave her again. And I don't want her to feel that way. I want her to have faith in her dad that he will stay. I just hope to God things work out with Riot the way I want them to. I want to put a ring back on her finger one day soon.

I walk into the bedroom with the last box, setting it down in the doorway with the others. Riot greets me from the closet.

"Making room?"

She chews on her lip and shakes her head.

"Do I need to find another closet in this house?"

She grabs my hand and pulls me toward her. "I never reorganized the closet after you left. There was always a space for your things here." Tears crest her eyes, and I pull her into me. "I never had the heart to take over the whole thing. I guess it was a reminder of everything I lost."

"Baby," I whisper.

"I feel like I made the biggest mistake of my life when I signed those divorce papers, Roan. You know I never stopped loving you. But I thought that was normal. I thought when people get divorced, they just always have this empty space in their heart. Like they know there will never be another person who will fill the hole that was left behind. I thought it was normal, and maybe it is, maybe every divorced person out there is just sitting with that big empty hole, not knowing how to fill it. But I have you back now, and everything just feels right. My heart is full again. It doesn't feel like it's teetering on the edge of something."

I know exactly how she feels. Because I've had a huge gaping hole in my chest ever since we got divorced.

“So you never took up my side of the closet?” I ask her.

She shakes her head. “I guess it was me just leaving a physical hole somewhere.” She sighs. “God, that sounds so stupid. But I just couldn’t fill it. So many times, I thought about reorganizing everything, but then I would randomly find something of yours, and I just couldn’t. I—”

I cut her off with my lips. Because I need to kiss her right now. It’s hard for Riot to show her emotions even with me. She is so locked down in her life. And it hurts me to think she was going through all of this the last two years. That she was hurting as much as I was. I’m just glad I took the risk that day a few weeks ago and kissed her. Because if I didn’t, who knows where we would be. Maybe just two people hiding their misery from each other.

Her arms wrap around my neck, and her tits press into my chest, my dick going instantly hard. I want this woman all the time. That is something that has never changed. She is my Riot, my love.

But we are pulled apart by the sound of the front door opening and two screaming kids running into the house.

“Later,” I tell her as I drag her hands away from my neck.

She smirks at me. “If you’re lucky.”

I pull her back into me and kiss the hell out of her then murmur against her lips. “I am the luckiest man in the world right now, baby. You better believe I am getting lucky tonight.”

I smack her ass as she walks around me.

We both walk out of the bedroom and into the living room. Janae is sitting on the couch with the girls giving us both a look like she thinks we were just banging in the closet.

“Daddy!” Brixley yells when she sees me behind Riot. She jumps off the couch and comes running for me. I scoop her up and hold her against me, breathing in her scent.

I walk over to the couch and sit her on my lap while she clings to me.

“Well this is my cue to leave,” Janae says. “Although I would love to be a fly on the wall—”

“Goodbye, Janae,” Riot tells her.

She frowns but then stands and waves goodbye to the girls before heading out the front door.

Riot looks at our kids before her honey eyes meet mine, and I nod.

“We need to tell you something, girls.”

Lyric looks at her mom. “Is it about Dad?”

“What about Daddy?” Brixley asks, pulling on my arm like I am keeping a secret from her.

“I know the last time we had this talk you were two years younger, Lyric, and you didn’t quite understand, but you’re six now, and I think you get it more than before.”

“Get what?” Brixley asks.

Lyric looks at her sister. “It’s obvious that Mom and Dad are in love with each other again.”

I try to hold in my laughter. I didn’t think me and Riot were so obvious.

“Didn’t Daddy always love Mommy?”

“No, you dummy—”

“Lyric, do not call your sister a dummy,” Riot scolds her.

“Oh my gosh, it’s so obvious that you and Dad are back together,” Lyric says. “Dad’s been here every night over the last week and sneaks out in the morning.”

I look over at Riot, and her cheeks are turning a shade of pink. No doubt she is worried that the girls may have heard us having sex, not that they would know what that means. Shit, maybe I am worried too.

“Lyric!” Riot shouts at her. “How do you know?”

“Well I thought it was weird that Dad was here every night for dinner. So I snuck out of my room in the middle of the night and saw his truck here.”

“We weren’t really that good at keeping it a secret,” I say.

“Not to mention the way you guys look at each other. It’s gross.”

I throw my head back in laughter at that.

“This isn’t funny, Roan.”

“It kinda is.”

“Is Daddy going to stay here?” Brixley asks, confused by the conversation between us and her sister.

I nod. “Yeah, princess. I am going to stay here.”

“You’re moving back in?” Lyric asks.

I reach over and squeeze her hand. “Yeah, princess.”

She looks between the two of us and then gets up and runs up the stairs.

“Lyric!” Riot shouts after her.

I pick Brixley up off my lap and set her on the couch. “I’ll go talk to her.”

“No, I should. I did this all wrong.”

I shake my head at Riot. “No, you didn’t. She is upset with me more than anything. I need to be the one to talk to her.”

“Okay. You sure you don’t want me to come along?”

“No. I think she needs to know I’m not going to leave again.”

Riot nods her head. “Okay.”

Brixley grabs my hand. “Don’t leave, Daddy.”

“I’m not leaving, sweet pea. I am just going to talk to your sister.”

I head up the stairs and find Lyric sitting on her bed, pouting.

“Hey.”

She looks up at me then grunts and turns around so her back is to me.

I walk over to the bed and sit on the edge. “Talk to me Lyric. What’s wrong?”

“You’re just going to leave again.”

I reach out to her, and she flinches away from me. “I’m not going to.”

“Then why did you leave in the first place?”

This girl has grown up far beyond her six short years. “Your mom and I thought it was best at the time.”

“You left us.”

“I never wanted to hurt you.”

“Well you did, Dad. It hurt when you left and then you never came to see us. How do I know you just won’t leave again?”

I sigh. “Adults make bad decisions sometimes. And your mom and I thought that we didn’t love each other anymore.”

“I know that’s what you said when you left.”

“But I never stopped loving your mom. And I had a lot to prove to her. It just took a while for me to do that.”

“So you and Mom love each other again?”

I nod. “Very much so.”

“And you’re moving back in?”

“And I don’t intend to leave you ever again.”

Lyric looks over at me with tears in her eyes, and it breaks my heart. “How do I know you aren’t lying?”

“You just have to believe in me.”

“That’s not easy, Dad.”

I grab her little hand and squeeze it. “You know I never wanted to leave you girls. But when things weren’t working out for your mom and I, I didn’t have a choice. I couldn’t stay here, and I am sorry I hurt you so much when I left. I never wanted to.”

“If you leave again, I’ll never forgive you.”

Those words hit deep, and I know they are true. But that also means that she forgives me now. “I know, Lyric. But I am not going to leave. I promise you that.”

She looks over at me. “Pinkie swear?”

I hold out my pinkie, and she grips it with her own. “Pinkie swear.”

A smile breaks across her face. “You can’t break a pinkie swear.”

“I know. They last forever.”

She crawls over to me and wraps her arms around my neck. “I missed you so much, Daddy. I don’t want you to ever leave again.”

I hold on tight to my daughter. “I won’t. I’m never leaving this family again.”

**ROAN**

I crack my knuckles before getting out of my truck and meeting with the man I promised Wilder I wouldn't. But I have no idea what else to do. I just want this shit with Steven Rouse to be done and over with.

Riot has been working hard to get the rumors shut down, but nothing is working. Rouse just keeps writing gossip articles about me, and it's gone too far. His latest article hitting home with gossip about mine and Riot's relationship and our divorce.

I can't take it anymore, and I don't want it to affect our newly built life and the girls' lives.

Carter West agreed to meet with me at one of his bars he runs in the quarter.

I walk into the swanky cigar bar and make my way to the back hall where I know West's office is. The bodyguard at the door nods his head at me and lets me in.

"Mr. Mathieu, what brings you into my world again?" West says as I stand next to the door.

The man is intimidating as fuck. I don't know how a younger me ever felt comfortable around this man. He screams power in his well-fitted suit.

"I have a favor to ask you."

He folds his hands on the desk in front of him. "You boys are always asking for favors."

I ignore his comment. "I need you to find out what you can on Steven

Rouse.”

“Steven Rouse?”

I nod.

“Who is he?”

I swallow down the guilt that is building up inside of me. I know I shouldn't have come here, but I did anyway. “He's a journalist. And he has his mind set on ruining my life.”

“And how is your life going, Roan? I heard you got back together with your wife. Such a pretty woman.”

I clench my fist at his comment but ignore him. I know he is trying to push my buttons. “Steven Rouse. Can you find anything out for me?”

West leans back in his chair and smiles at me in that way that would make most people cringe. “I'm sure I can find out something. But what do you want to do with this information?”

I shrug. “I'm not sure yet.”

“So you just want me to look into someone for you? That's it?”

I nod.

“Doesn't seem like something you would normally ask for.”

“Just get me the information.”

He drums his fingers along the desk. “And what do I get out of this?”

“Whatever you need from me.”

He grins at me. “You have yourself a deal.”

I take that as my dismissal and turn around to walk back out the door.

“Mr. Mathieu, do the others know you are here?”

I rest my hand against the door and sigh. “No.”

“Would you like me to keep it that way?”

“Yes,” I tell him.

When he doesn't say anything, I take it as my cue to leave. I head out of the bar and get back into my truck and rest my head against the steering wheel wondering if I just made a huge mistake.

---

When I get back to the house, I find Riot standing in the dim light of the kitchen.

“Where were you?” she asks me.

“I just had something I needed to take care of.”

She gives me a concerned look. “Like what? It’s two in the morning.”

I hate that I snuck out of the house to go meet with Carter West, but it was the only time he was available for a meeting.

“Just some business.”

“You’ve been living here for a week, and you’re already sneaking out of the house. This doesn’t look good nor sit well with me.”

I want to be honest with her and tell her the truth, but I know she will hate me even more for it.

She opens the laptop that I didn’t notice on the kitchen counter and turns it toward me.

I want to throw up when I see the latest article thrown across the tabloids. Pictures of me with a group of girls in a club, and I know exactly when it was from. When I was shit-faced that night in London.

“Riot...”

“Don’t Riot me. Where the fuck were you, Roan? Because I thought we worked this out. I thought you were ready to be a family man again, and a family man doesn’t go sneaking out of the house in the middle of the night unless he is up to something. Was it women? Drugs? What were you doing, Roan?”

I look at the screen then up at my wife and decide maybe it’s time to tell her the full truth. To let her know that Saints & Sinners is in deep with the kingpin of New Orleans.

“Please tell me you were doing something other than what I think you were.”

I point to the article on the screen. “I know you don’t believe any of that crap.”

“I usually don’t, but you just left in the middle of the night, and I know how the old Roan was and how he would do the same thing.”

I sigh and run my hands over my buzzed head. “I was meeting with a man to end the shit going on with Steven Rouse.”

“Meeting with a man?” she asks me, confused, and I’m pretty sure she doesn’t believe a word I’m saying.

I point at the screen. “That picture was taken when I was drunk at a club in London after the article from Rouse came out. It was bad judgment on my part, but I didn’t do anything. I didn’t cheat on you.”

She shuts the laptop with such force that I almost jump. “I know exactly



when it was taken because Wilder told me when I called him an hour ago.”

“You called Wilder?”

She nods. “And he told me that the only thing you would be doing in the middle of the night is something he told you not to do.”

“So you believe me that I wasn’t with other women or doing drugs?”

She pinches the top of her nose and lets out a long breath. “I know you wouldn’t cheat on me again. But I want to know everything about Carter West.”

My eyes meet hers, and I am flabbergasted that she knows that name. “How do you know that man?”

“I don’t know him. But Wilder told me that if you were out in the middle of the night you were probably meeting with him.”

I clench my jaw and take a step toward her. “Let’s talk somewhere where we won’t wake the girls.”

“Are you going to tell me the truth?”

“If you promise you won’t kick me out.”

She walks toward me and grabs my hand with such gentleness it surprises me. “I want to know everything, Roan. Wilder told me I wouldn’t like it but he wouldn’t give me any more information. So I think it’s time you start talking.”

I nod and squeeze her hand before pulling her into me. “I love you, Riot. I love you so much I would kill for you. You need to understand that. You need to know that my past is a lot darker than I ever told you.”

“I’m not blind, Roan. I know that you and the guys were involved in some shady shit back in the day. I just want to know if you ever got out of it.”

I cup her cheek. “I would never do anything that would harm you or the girls.”

“I know. But please tell me the truth. I need to know. This will never work out between us if you aren’t honest with me.”

I press my lips to her forehead, then nod and pull her outside into the backyard.

I sit us down on the couch and hold her hand in my lap before I tell her everything there is to tell her about my involvement with Carter West. Including the years in Baton Rouge when Silas, Jackson, and I used to run drugs to make money to buy instruments so we could start a band. I tell her about how we got tied up with him when we moved to New Orleans, how we worked for him in order to afford being musicians, how he has been so tied

up in our lives for nearly the last fifteen years, and how we've never been able to shake him. I tell her about Lake and the notes and how it all tied to him and how Wilder and Knox got us out of his clutches over the summer.

"So why did you go back to him?"

"He's the only person I know who can destroy someone."

"You mean kill someone."

I run my thumb along the back of her knuckles. "Yes."

"So you went to him to ask him to kill Rouse?"

"Yes and no."

"Roan, you can't just decide to kill someone who is making your life miserable."

"You are taking this a lot better than I thought you would," I tell her.

"Don't change the subject. And I am trying to maintain my composure so I don't kick you out of this house again."

"I shouldn't have gone," I tell her honestly. "I know that it was a mistake. Wilder told me not to go. He told me to talk to you, that you would be able to figure out a way to get Rouse to shut his mouth."

"But it's too late."

I shake my head. "I can call West right now and tell him to stop looking into Rouse."

"Do it."

"Okay." I eye her cautiously as I pull my phone out of my back pocket and dial West. I step away from her, and I wait for him to pick up the phone.

"Calling me so soon?"

"Don't do it."

"Don't kill the man who has it out for you? But it sounded like so much fun."

"I made a mistake."

He snorts into the phone which is very unlike him. "Let me guess, you talked to your wife."

"Leave her out of this."

"Mr. Mathieu, I think I found your weakness."

"West, I mean it."

"You know you boys have been at my beck and call for so long. I hated losing you after what happened this summer. I finally got you back."

"I made a mistake."

"You will still owe me for this. You wasted my time."

“It’s been an hour, you haven’t done shit,” I tell him.

“I will still collect on my debt you owe me for wasting my time earlier.”

“Fine,” I growl.

“Good luck with everything, Roan. I will be in contact with you soon.”

I hang up the phone, not sure if West is actually going to listen to me or not.

Riot walks up behind me, and I jump when I feel her hands on my back.

“Is it over?”

I nod. “He said he won’t do it.”

“We will figure this out, Roan. You don’t need to go to such depths to get rid of a problem. You have me, and we will figure it out together. Besides, I think I have an idea.”

“You do?” I ask her as I turn around.

“You might not like it, but I think I know the best way to beat Rouse at his own game.”

I look down at my wife, and I wrap my arms around her. “If it means I won’t lose you.”

She stands on her toes and presses a kiss to my cheek. “You won’t lose me, Roan. As long as we do this my way.”

## ROAN

I shake my leg as I sit wired up with a microphone, ready to speak in front of a journalist with one of the biggest music magazines in the world. Even bigger than *Encore*. And this journalist is one of Rouse's rivals. Or at least that's what Riot told me yesterday when she set this whole thing up.

I'm sitting inside of a recording studio in New Orleans ready to speak my truth. This was Riot's big idea. If I can't shake Rouse from trying to destroy my life through gossip and rumors, then I may as well tell my story to the entire world.

"Roan Mathieu, it's a pleasure meeting you. I can't believe in all my years of interviewing bands I've never done anything on Saints & Sinners."

I hold out my hand and shake the man's hand. Garret McCarthy, one of the biggest music journalists in the world.

"It's nice to meet you, too, Garret."

He directs me toward a chair, and I sit down. "I do these interviews often with a lot of musicians who want to tell their story. It can get pretty raw, I do want to warn you. But I think that you deserve to let the world see your story through your eyes."

"I know this is going to be tough, but I want our fans to know the truth. I am sick of the rumors."

"It takes a lot of courage to do what you're doing, and I commend you for it."

"Thank you."

He takes a seat across from me, and I study the cameras between us. Not only is he interviewing me to write an article, parts of the interview will be published live onto their website for all the world to watch.

“Part of this process is not holding anything back. If I ask you a question, and you are uncomfortable, I won’t move on until you give me an answer.”

I nod. I knew this was going to be intense. Riot told me as much yesterday. Then gave me one hell of a blow job this morning to help me relax. But the nerves are starting to hit again.

I try not to let my fears and my anxiety take over as Garret introduces me on camera.

“I am sitting down with one of the greatest rock guitarists in the world today. Roan Mathieu from Saints & Sinners. Good to have you here, Roan.”

“It’s good to be here,” I lie because I am not sure this is where I want to be at all.

“So this was not something I planned on doing, but a week ago I got a call from Riot Arceneaux of Start a Riot Management. She manages some of the biggest acts in the music industry today, and it all started with Saints & Sinners. Not only is she your manager, but she is also your ex-wife.”

I nod at the camera. “She was my ex-wife, yes. But if I have any say in it, she will be my wife again.” I can’t believe I just said that out loud for the world to hear. I look behind the cameras, and Riot gives me a smile. I’m sure she will have something to say about that when this is all over.

“Is there love in the air?”

“I was a shitty person a few years ago. I made a lot of mistakes and that led me to lose the one person who meant more to me than anyone in the entire world. That woman was Riot. We got divorced, and I lost custody of my children. It nearly ruined me. Hell, I am lucky to be sitting here now. If it wasn’t for her, there is a good chance I would be dead. She saved me from making terrible decisions.”

“Does this have to do with the rumors that are being spread around about a possible overdose you had?”

I take a deep breath. I haven’t admitted that I OD’d to anyone outside of the band, Riot, and my therapist. The publicity team for the band did a good job shutting down rumors, calling them just that, rumors. But now is my chance to come clean with my fans. To be the man I should have been years ago.

“The rumors are true. I did overdose when the band was on our European

tour in Germany.”

“What happened?” he asks me.

“I was falling down a path I should never have gone down. The last two years of my life I drank too much, did too many drugs. I guess I thought I was invincible, but most rock stars feel that way, and we all do stupid shit. Well one night I did far too much heroin and coke. I was riding a wave of uppers and downers, fighting demons in my head that wouldn’t leave. I didn’t even know what happened. I woke up in a hospital two days later.”

Garret gives me a look of sympathy before continuing on. “Wow, man, that is hard. And I’m sure recovery wasn’t easy.”

I shake my head. “I think we never want to admit when we have problems. I sure as hell didn’t. Right now, I can sit here and one hundred percent say I have a problem with drugs and alcohol. But even two months ago when I overdosed, I couldn’t admit that. I had court-mandated therapy I needed to go through in order to keep myself out of a hospital for recovery. I fought tooth and nail against going into recovery because I didn’t want to admit I had a problem. I was living my life. But the truth was I wasn’t at all. I was a miserable fuck. I was so focused on all the negative that happened in my life that I didn’t see what I was missing out on. I hate to say therapy made a difference; hell, my band knows how against it I was in the beginning. But it’s crazy what talking about your problems can do for you. I learned I did indeed have a problem with drugs and alcohol. And I am proud to say I have been clean from drugs for the last two months. Alcohol is still something I am fighting with. I still feel the urge to drink at times to forget my problems. But every day is an uphill battle, and one day I will be able to recover completely.”

“That is a lot you just admitted. Any particular reason why you want to share your story with the world?”

I look over at Riot, and she is holding her hand to her chest, against her heart, and I know she is doing it for me. She owns my heart, body, and soul, and for this woman I will do anything.

“There have been people in this world who have tried to tear me down. Belittle me and make people think less of me. It probably led to me being more of an addict than I already was. But I am tired of beating myself up over what others are saying. I need to stand on my own two feet. And I need to show the world who I am. I need them to see that it’s okay if you are struggling. It’s okay to have problems. But you need to take the time for

yourself and heal. I've been slowly healing these last two months, and I feel like a better man than I've ever been. I need to thank my doctors and therapists for that. And I need to thank that woman who is my ex-wife and hopefully soon be my wife again."

"You sound like you are in love."

I smile at the camera. "I am in love. And she knows that I wouldn't be here today without her."

Garret follows my eyes over to Riot, and I watch her as tears leak from the corners of her eyes.

"Well I didn't bring you here today to discuss the love you have for a woman. I came here today to hear what you had to say about the choices you made in your life. And about the future of Saints & Sinners. So tell me, what's next?"

The interview continues on for another fifteen minutes as I talk more about the band and less about me. When the interview finally comes to a close, I breathe a sigh of relief not for it being over but for feeling free. Riot was right. This was the best thing I could have done.

An assistant walks over to me and helps unhook my microphone from my shirt.

Garret shakes my hand. "I have to say, man, that was some powerful stuff you said. And the fact you didn't bring up Steven Rouse's name was very classy of you."

"I'm not here to throw him under the bus. I just wanted my story told the way I wanted it told."

"You are a good man, Roan. Not many people would take that same high ground you just did."

I thank him again and head over to Riot who throws her arms around my neck. I lift her up off the ground and kiss the hell out of her.

"I'm so proud of you," she mutters against my lips. "You are a good man, Roan. And a good father to our kids. I know one day when they are old enough, they will watch this interview and be proud of you too."

That causes an ache in my chest and threatens tears in my eyes. All I want is to make my kids proud.

"Shall we get out of here?" I ask her.

She nods. "Where did you want to go?"

"I just want to go home and be with my family."

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## RIOT

I fall back onto the bed after Roan just made me sit on his face. I am so content right now I feel like I am floating on a cloud.

“Are you alive?” he asks me as he leans over me.

“Barely,” I mumble.

“I wanted to thank you for making me do that interview today.”

I look over at Roan whose face is inches from mine. “I knew it was the best thing to get back at Rouse. He is going to be pissed that you did an exclusive with Garret McCarthy. He is going to wish he got that story.”

“He shouldn’t have fucked up then. And started gossiping about me.”

“I’m just glad it’s over, and you can move on, and we can work on us.”

He pulls me into him. “What about us? I think we are doing an excellent job.”

“You just told the world that we were dating.”

“I just want them to know how amazing you are.”

I roll my eyes at him and try to pull away, but he keeps me wrapped in his arms. “I mean it, Riot. And I meant what I said earlier. I wouldn’t be here today without you. You saved my life.”

“I didn’t save your life.”

“If I woke up in that hospital room, and you weren’t there, I don’t think I would be the man that I am today. I would be just as fucked up as I was before I ended up in the hospital.”

I press my hand over his heart. “The man in here has always been a good



man. You just lost him for a little bit.”

“We can agree to disagree. But it was all you, Riot. And you don’t know how happy I am that we are back together like this.”

“You told the world, Roan! I am pretty sure I know.”

He presses his lips gently against mine. “I love you. And I do want to spend my life with you.”

“Baby steps,” I tell him.

“I think we both know we aren’t very good with baby steps.”

He has a point. We were supposed to take this whole thing slow, and yet we moved at the speed of light. Hell, I am the one who asked him to move in after not seeing him for three weeks. It was the first day he was back in town, and I wanted him here with me all the time. I never thought I would feel this way about Roan again. But for some reason, it’s different and the same. I feel closer to him than I ever felt before. But he is still the man I fell in love with all those years ago. The man who wouldn’t take no for an answer and eventually stole my heart just like he did all over again.

“You really want to marry me?” I ask him.

“I never stopped wanting you to be my wife.”

I should have known he would say that. He has called me his wife this whole time.

“We were in bed the last time we made this decision,” I tell him.

“And you were the one who told me you wanted to elope. I want to do things differently this time.”

“What do you mean?”

He cups my face. “I want to marry you, Riot Arceneaux.”

“I think we made that clear.”

“But this time I want a real wedding.”

I bite my lip and smile at him. Because if we are going to do this all over again, I want a wedding too. I want the girls to see how in love we are with each other. “Are you going to propose?”

He gives me that smile he saves only for me. “Oh I will.”

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Because this time it won’t be on our way to getting eloped. This time you are going to have to wait for the big surprise.”

“Knowing you, I won’t have to wait long.”

He shrugs. “We’ll see.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Baby steps, baby. Baby steps.”

---

It's been nearly two months since Roan told me he wanted to propose, and I am still waiting for him to do it. I don't want to say I am being impatient, but I am getting very impatient. I thought for sure he wouldn't even last a week. And now it seems like this game we are playing. Well, a game he is playing, and I haven't been invited to. To be honest, he is driving me crazy waiting for him to propose. I just want to marry the man again.

Despite the wait, the last two months have been incredible with him. It's like how things used to be between us but somehow better.

And he is fucking sexy when he teaches the girls. He wasn't too happy about homeschooling, but he has turned into their teacher while I've been busy with work. And I just love watching him teach.

He's been like a whole new man lately. He hasn't even been drinking, and it's done wonders for his recovery. He grows more and more as a person every day. And I fall more deeply in love with him every day.

I just wish he would propose already so we can get married and I can call him my husband again.

I mean, I guess I could call him that since every day he calls me his wife. But I want the real thing. I want him to be my husband on paper.

Carnival season is in full swing right now, and he took the girls to go see the Barkus parade today. I wish I could have gone with them, but work has been super busy lately. But he promised to bring home a king cake so I at least feel somewhat in the festive mood.

I'm in the middle of reviewing a contract for a new artist when they walk in the front door.

“Mommy!” Brixley yells as she comes running into my office.

I close my laptop and spin around in my chair. “Hi, Brix. How was the parade?”

“It was so cool. There were so many dogs in costume, and then some were painted purple and green and some had glitter.”

“I'm glad you had fun.”

“Daddy said we could get a dog so we could dress him up for the parade!”

“Did he now?”

Brixley nods her head excitedly.

“Well, we will have to talk about that.”

“Please say yes, Momma, please say yes.”

“I will talk with your father about it,” I tell her. I can’t believe he told her we could get a dog. We both travel far too much to have one.

Brixley skips out of the room making up some song about having a dog as I follow her out and down the stairs to the kitchen where Roan is slicing up a king cake.

“You are my hero. I was craving one of these so bad.”

Roan looks up at me as he hands a slice to Lyric.

“What?”

“You’ve been having a lot of cravings lately.”

“What are you getting...I’m not pregnant,” I tell him. I mean I don’t think I am. I am on birth control.

He shrugs and then hands me a piece of cake. “I wouldn’t be mad if you were.”

“Oh please, you really think we could handle another baby?”

“I think we need another one. Maybe a boy so he can grow up to be like his daddy.”

I snatch the cake out of his hands. “I really don’t think I could handle one of our kids being a rock star. You are enough to handle.”

He just grins at me then takes a bite of his cake.

“Watch out for the baby.”

“I told you I’m not—”

He points at the cake, cutting me off. “I meant in the cake.”

Duh. Oh my god, I have been kind of out of it lately. No, there is no way I’m pregnant.

I look up at Roan who is just looking at me with a goofy grin on his face. “What?”

He shrugs. “Nothing.”

I scrunch my brow at him, but he just grunts then walks away to the living room with a plate.

He is acting weird, but I try to ignore it. I grab the plate he handed me and take a big bite of the scrumptious cinnamon cake. I go to grab another bite, and my fork hits something hard. Damn him, did he know the baby was in this piece?

I go to grab the plastic doll out of my slice but then drop my fork when I see it's not a baby at all but a diamond ring. And not just any diamond ring, but the one I kept hidden in the back of a drawer, the one he proposed with years ago.

“Roan.”

“Yeah, babe.”

I jump when I hear him behind me. I turn around and find him smiling down at me.

“Find something good in the cake?”

“Is this your idea of a proposal?”

He shakes his head and then calls the girls over. “No, this is.”

He gets down on one knee, Lyric and Brixley following his lead. “Will you marry me, Riot?”

“Will you marry Daddy again?” Lyric asks, Brixley nodding her head along.

I drop to my knees in front of him and kiss the hell out of him not caring about the girls on either side of us.

He pulls his head back a few inches. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

“Of course I’ll marry you, Roan. I thought you were never going to ask me again.”

“I just wanted to wait for the right time.”

“And this was it?”

He kisses me briefly. “I would have asked you months ago, but I liked keeping you on your toes.”

I punch him in the shoulder. “Ass.”

“Mommy, that’s a bad word.”

I apologize to Brixley.

“So what do you say, Ri? You ready to be my wife again?”

“Without a doubt.”

He kisses me again, and the girls groan and run away. But I am too focused on the man in front of me and how I finally will get to call him my husband again.

# EPILOGUE

ROAN

## Six Months Later

I stand at the end of an aisle on the beach in Malibu waiting impatiently for my wife to walk down the damn aisle so I can call her my wife for real.

It's always been real to me, though. It's been nearly ten months since I overdosed in that club in Germany. Ten months of being back with Riot, and every day I called her my wife even when she wasn't. But it always felt real. The difference now is that it gets to be real.

She spent the last six months planning this wedding. She let the girls help of course which is why we are getting married on the beach. I know Riot didn't care where we got married, she just wanted a real wedding this time. But Lyric was adamant it happened on the beach.

No one was surprised when I proposed either. In fact, everyone in the band was surprised it took me so long to do it. But I wanted to surprise Riot. We talked about getting married and wanted to do it, but I never really gave her a surprise the first time we got married, and I wanted her to feel special this time. I thought it was rather clever of me to hide a ring in a king cake.

And now I am standing here with Wilder as my best man and the rest of

the guys sitting in front of me. We didn't want to have anything too big so we both just decided to have one person stand on each side with us. I look over at Janae who is smiling widely as she waits for Riot to walk down the aisle.

A violinist is set up at the back of the chairs on the beach and starts to play a song. I watch as Brixley and Lyric walk down the aisle tossing flowers as they go. We couldn't choose between just one of the girls being the flower girl, and they fought over it so we settled on them both playing the part.

They skip and twirl down the aisle throwing red rose petals on the ground as they go. Brixley comes running up to me when she gets to the end of the aisle and wraps her arms around my leg.

"Brix," Lyric whisper yells at her sister. "Over here."

I pat Brixley on the head, and she blows me a kiss before running to her sister seated in the front row next to their grandma.

The song changes, and then I see Riot walking across the beach toward the small ceremony we have. She is a vision in white, her caramel skin playing well against the lace gown she has on. Her arm is wrapped around her father who was more than happy to be able to give his daughter away for real this time. He was always a little bitter we had eloped.

I can't take my eyes off my wife as she walks down the aisle. Her eyes are locked on mine, and she smiles at me with so much love in her eyes, I feel a tear hit my cheek.

I dreamed about this day for two years. That one day I would get to marry my wife again, and now the day is finally here. I just want to grab her and kiss the hell out of her, but I promised we would have a real ceremony.

Her dad hands her off to me, and I wrap my hand around hers, and we stand in front of an old friend, Rowan, who is ordained.

*I love you*, I mouth to her. She returns the sentiment and wipes a tear from her eyes.

When it's finally time to say our vows, I pull a piece of paper out of my suit jacket. "Riot, my wife—"

"Not yet, buddy," Wilder says to me.

Everyone in the audience laughs, but I ignore it and start over. "Riot, my wife... I don't care that it's not official yet. To me you have always been my wife. Ever since that first time I tried to pursue you when you weren't even managing the band, I always knew that one day you would be my wife. And I was lucky for six years I got to call you that. But then things fell apart. I was a shitty husband and a terrible man. I thought I lost you. I thought I would

never get to have you again. But things changed, and now here we stand.

“I love you with my whole heart. I never stopped loving you even in those two years we were apart. You have been and always will be my wife. And I will love you more and more every day to prove to you that I am worthy of your love. I vow to never break these vows like I broke them before. I will cherish you and love you until my last dying breath, and even after that, who’s not to say I won’t love you in the next life. You are the woman of my dreams and the mother to my children. You are the best thing that ever happened to me, and I will treasure you in all of our days to come. I love you, Riot. And I can’t wait to call you my wife, officially.”

Riot wipes a tear from her eye as Janae hands her a piece of paper. She runs her hand over her growing belly then looks into my eyes with so much love it takes my breath away.

“Roan, I never thought this day would come. I never thought that I would get to marry you again. I thought I lost you forever. And every day that you were not in my life felt like I died a thousand deaths. I never knew how much I needed you until you were gone. And then I was too scared to reach out to you, to let you know how I truly felt. Then fate stepped in, and I found myself with you every single day. And that hardened heart of mine started to melt as I let you back in. As I found the man who I fell in love with so long ago.

“You are truly the man of my dreams. And I love that I get to call you my husband again. I vow to never shut you out like I did before, and I vow to be a better wife. I vow to love you every single day. And like you said, I am sure I will love you into my next life.”

Rowan looks between the two of us. “Now that you have said your vows, I am proud to announce you as officially husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

I pull Riot into me so quickly everyone laughs, but I just kiss her. I don’t care that people know I am head over heels in love with my wife. Because this is the best day ever. And I cannot wait to spend the rest of my years with this woman in front of me and our two girls and the baby boy on the way.

I never thought I would have a happy ending, never thought I deserved it until I met Riot. And now she is officially my wife. Again.

I pull away from her and hold up our hands in front of our family and friends. The guys all cheer as we make our way down the aisle and back to the house we rented for our reception.

“I haven’t been able to tell you this yet, but you look beautiful, wife.”

Riot squeezes my hand. “You don’t look so bad yourself.”

“You look good enough to eat.” I know she doesn’t miss the innuendo in my tone.

“You have a one-track mind.”

“I just want to make sure my wife knows how much I love her and appreciate her.”

We push through the back doors of the house, and Riot drags me to the room that she got ready in. “How many times are you going to call me your wife tonight?”

“Like I have any intention of ever stopping.”

She laughs and rolls her eyes. “You are crazy, you know that?”

“Crazy for you.”

She shuts the door behind us and wraps her arms around my neck. “I love you, *husband*.”

I pick her up and set her on a dresser in the room. “So are you ready for me to show you how delectable you look?”

She shakes her head at me. “There are people literally filing into the room across from us as we speak Roan, you are not going to—”

I shut her up as I drag my fingers under her dress and between her folds. “You were saying?”

“Roan,” she moans. “We can’t do this.”

“Yes we can. It’s our wedding day, we can do whatever the fuck we want. You want me to tell everyone the party is canceled so I can make love to my wife all night? I will walk out there right now and say it.”

“Please don’t.”

“Then you better keep quiet because nothing is stopping me from eating out my wife on our wedding day.”

“You are incorrigible.”

“I am just a man who knows what he wants,” I tell her as I push her dress up her thighs. “And right now I want to taste my wife.”

I waste no time dropping to my knees and finding that sweet spot she loves on her inner thigh.

Her hands go into my hair that I’ve been growing out, and she yanks hard. “You are going to have to be faster than that and stop teasing me, or else everyone will know what we are doing.”

I chuckle against her core. Pretty sure that everyone already knows, but I



don't tell her that.

I push her thighs farther apart, then lick from her core to her clit. She is soaking for me, and I wonder how long she's been like this.

"You're so wet for me, wife."

"I'm always wet for you, husband. Now get to it so I can get to the party."

"So demanding," I mutter against her folds before I suck hard on her clit. Her hands tighten in my hair, and I can tell from her muted moans that she is trying like hell not to make any noise while I feast on her.

I press two fingers inside of her and bite down on her clit. One of her hands flies out of my hair, and I look up to see her biting onto her hand as she comes apart from my touch.

I stand up and press her thighs back together and pull her dress down. "Now that was exactly what I wanted on my wedding day. My wife tastes better than any cake."

Her cheeks are a soft pink color. "You have no shame."

"I think you know that about me, wife."

I help her off the dresser, and she adjusts her dress while I shift my very hard cock in my pants.

"You sure you don't need me to take care of that, husband?"

I look at my wife. "As much as I want you to, the second you put those lips on my dick I won't be wanting to go anywhere but the bedroom, so you are just going to have to wait, you little minx."

Riot stands on her toes and gives me a kiss on the cheek. "I love you. I don't think I'll ever be able to say it enough. But I love you with my whole heart, Roan. You are everything I could have ever asked for in a husband. Even if it took us a bit of time to get there."

I wrap my arm around her shoulder and walk her to the door so we can greet our friends. "It was worth it. Every second of this was worth it, no matter how much it hurt those years. To have you as my wife again was well worth the pain."

"I love you," she tells me again.

"I love you too."

Then I grab her hand and walk out to celebrate our future together.

The End

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**(Every brother's story can be read as a standalone)**

[The Ghost of You](#) (Noah's story part 1)

[The Fate of Us](#) (Noah's story part 2)

[Fall From Grace](#) (Carson's story)

## **The White Creek Series**

[Missing Pieces](#)

[Broken Pieces](#)

[Forgotten Pieces](#)

## **Standalones**

[Desolation: A Salvation Society Novel](#)

# 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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